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Bypassing the Silence in the Technical and Professional Writing Classroom: Encouraging Agency through Discourse Analysis

In 2004, the National Commission on Writing (NCW) published *Writing: A Ticket to Work…Or a Ticket Out*, a survey of 120 American business leaders about writing in the workplace. In the first sentence of the report, the NCW announced, "[T]oday's workplace writing is a 'threshold skill' for hiring and promotion among the salaried" (3), a fact that is not surprising to writing instructors. Perhaps most shocking was the revelation that American corporations spend as much as 3.1 billion dollars annually upgrading their salaried employees' writing skills (4). Wrote one survey respondent: "We're likely to send out 200-300 people annually for skills-upgrade courses like 'business writing' or 'technical writing'" (4). In particular, respondents emphasized the importance of clarity and concision in written communication, noting that writing should be "in a tight, logical manner" because "good writing is a sign of good thinking," as two survey respondents wrote (8). Supervisors, it seems, intend/hope that their employees will learn how to write more effectively and efficiently—everything that encompasses what they define as "good writing."

As writing instructors, we know that "good writing" includes rhetorical awareness, an understanding of genre choices, audience analysis, and authorial intent. Applying writing skills effectively is an issue of know-how and agency. If writers, whether in first-year writing courses or corporate America, are unaware of their agency—that every written word, formatting choice, and design decision, for example, is a choice that they can exercise—they will not be able to effectively adapt their writing skills to the multiplicity of situations in which they are required to be successful. Preparing students for the kind of writing skills expected of them beyond their college career necessarily begins in the classroom. For students enrolled in a business or technical writing course, often the only career-related writing class they will ever take, learning to seize their discursive agency is an invaluable skill.

For writing instructors who teach peripheral students populations, such as first-generation and working-class students, there is an increased challenge to teaching their students about the agency they have in communication situations. These students are often unaware that they are agents, or they lack the know-how to seize such agency. This gap exists, in part, because

DOI: 10.37514/OPW-J.2015.9.1.04

peripheral students lack confidence in their own voices, and/or they are not prepared to assume a position of authority. Carolyn R. Boiarsky, with Julie Hagemann and Judith Burdan, write that peripheral student populations are "novice learners" who often live in "an authoritative environment, with little control over decisions related to their lives" (12-13). This lack of decision-making directly affects students' perceptions of their agency. Raised in an environment with little choice or autonomy, they often enter the classroom as passive participants, and this passivity also affects their discursive choices.

The peripheral students at my former university, a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) with a large population of working-class, first-generation, heritage, and Native American students, encounter an additional challenge: the disconnection between their home communities and the academic community. Joseph Heathcott writes, "The weight of obligations to families back home coupled with the tension and ambivalence working-class and first-generation college students experience on campus, in the classroom, and in their new living spaces puts enormous pressure on them to succeed and to excel" (106-107). The pressure for students to remain connected to their communities while bringing financial and social success to their families will affect students' transition from academic outsiders to insiders as they struggle to remain "true" to their families and cultures while adopting new literacies and discourses.

This is a particular problem at HSIs. According to Rafael Vásquez, HSI student populations need "to feel at home in college. The issue of familioso or family interdependence [is] salient along with creating classroom supportive environments while readying students for employment in less supportive environments" (84). Students' feelings that their home and academic lives are discordant, or feelings that the academic community is not a safe space, will affect how they engage with their fellow classmates and instructors. "Too often, working-class and first-generation see or are made to see their backgrounds as liabilities, as their student status a break from the past," Heathcott writes (113). Peripheral students need to feel supported and believe that their home communities and discourses are valued. This does not mean that students do not need to learn to transition into the academic discourse community. But it does mean that peripheral students are wary and may believe that the academic discourse community intends to drive a wedge between them and their home communities. This affects classroom dynamics in a multiplicity of ways. But in my own classroom, I have noticed that students tend to be more introverted, hesitating to share their thoughts with the class, which can be perceived by instructors as an unwillingness to adapt to the academic community.

In my commitment to meeting my students' needs, I have discovered that discourse analysis, defined as "the study of language-in-use" by sociolinguist James Paul Gee, is a promising framework for teaching students how to adapt to new discourse communities and teaching students that they are agents in all communication situations (*An Introduction* 8). Within the Technical and Professional Writing classroom, discourse analysis can teach students to apply their discursive awareness to professional communication situations. Discourse analysis is a vital skill

for all students, yet for those specifically focused on obtaining salaried positions after graduation, writing skills "could be [their] ticket in." Conversely, a lack of these crucial skills "could be [their] ticket out" (National Commission 8).

Moreover, discourse analysis is an especially useful framework for writing instructors teaching in minority-serving institutions. Discourse analysis can be used to teach peripheral student populations that adapting to new communication situations does not mean their home communities' discourse(s) are less respected or valuable. Instead, discourse analysis can show students how to successfully transition to the academic community without feeling that they are betraying their families and cultures. This transition requires that students feel safe in the classroom to explore unfamiliar discourses, as well as opportunities to critically analyze and reflect upon unfamiliar language practices. Furthermore, discourse analysts' emphasis on language as personal, ideological, and cultural may help students bridge the cultural and linguistic gap commonly found in institutions with a large number of monolingual, multilingual, and heritage speakers.

This article traces my own reflections upon my pedagogy and classroom activities. Kathleen Blake Yancey calls for writing instructors to be "reflective practitioner[s]": to "adjust [our] teaching, [and] engage in constructive reflection over a set of teaching experiences" (15). Through my own reflections, I have learned that peripheral student populations need individual reflective writing exercises and assignments. Individual reflection is a silent, non-threatening space for students to share their knowledge and growth—but it is a more comfortable space, as I will show, than in-class discussions.

What's Discourse Analysis Got To Do With It?

Understanding workplace communication through the lens of discourse analysis has been increasingly explored since the late 1980s.[1] However, little scholarship examines teaching technical and professional writing students how to use discourse analysis to analyze their own and other's communication choices. Pedagogically, discourse analysis is often applied to the second-language or multilingual learning classroom in order to better understand the linguistic choices students make. However, in scholarship focused on teaching business and technical communication, scholars dance around the concept of discourse analysis without explicitly naming it or applying its conventions to curriculum. For example, Nancy Roundy Blyler writes about the importance of teaching authorial intent in business communication because "readers

1. A few representative examples include John Hagge and Charles Kostelnick's "Linguistic Politeness in Professional Prose: A Discourse Analysis of Auditors' Suggestion Letters with Implications for Business Communication Pedagogy" (1989); Rachel Spilka's edited collection *Writing in the Workplace: New Research Perspectives* (1993); Susanne Niemeier, Charles P. Campbell, and René Dirven's edited collection *The Cultural Context in Business Communication* (1998); and Paola Evangelisti Allori and Giuliana Garzone's edited collection *Discourse, Identities and Genres in Corporate Communication* (2010).

are not passive receivers of text" and readers "create discourse and purpose as they read" (17). Likewise, Mark Mabrito explains in "The E-Mail Discussion Group: An Opportunity for Discourse Analysis," that an in-class email analysis activity can teach students about genre conventions. However, he does not mention discourse analysis within the article. Finally, David R. Russell implicitly acknowledges the importance of discourse analysis within the business and technical communication classroom, but he fails to call it as such. He writes, "[The] microlevel textual negotiations that workplace writing mediates show the deeply social and often political nature of written communication that students become enmeshed in when they enter disciplinary and professional networks" (256).

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Heeding Bertha Du-Babcock's call to "introduce new theory and build new teaching approaches to our [business and technical writing] pedagogy" (261), my article closes this gap by showing how discourse analysis can be integrated into the technical and professional writing classroom to teach students ways to reflect upon their discursive choices, an implicit nod to the knowledge they bring into the classroom. By instructors teaching students, novice and expert learners alike, to recognize the transactional nature of communication, they can learn how to harness their discursive agency, an essential factor to their academic and professional success.

Discourse analyst Barbara Johnstone explains that discourse represents "ideas as well as ways of talking that influence and are influenced by the ideas" (3). Furthermore, Gee offers this perspective: "Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or 'kinds of people')" (*Social* 3). Both scholars describe discourse as fundamentally social, undergirded by a transaction between people and their interpretations of and experiences in the world. For peripheral student populations who have not learned how to engage in social transactions, discourse analysis can help them reclaim some agency.

Discourse analysis is a useful framework precisely because it is not an "abstract system," Johnstone notes, but rather a method that seeks to understand

> what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on the memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty.... (3)

Similarly, British linguist Norman Fairclough uses the term "critical discourse analysis" (CDA) to define the "transdisciplinary" nature of discourse analysis as a "relational form of research .

. . on social relations" (3). CDA is not an analysis of discourse itself but the "dialectical *relations between* discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as the analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse" (Fairclough 4, emphasis in the original).

Thus, according to Johnstone, Gee, and Fairclough, discourse analysts examine the social nature of communication. Although most discourse analysis scholarship examines the linguistic aspects of language, discourse analysis can be applied more broadly within rhetoric and composition scholarship and pedagogy to examine how and why people communicate—as well as the associations, experiences, feelings, knowledge, and memories connected with language choice. Like compositionists and rhetoricians, discourse analysts recognize that language choices are not accidental, whether or not individuals consciously realize that they are making such choices.

Discourse is also personal. People use language significant to them as individuals. Words and phrases carry private associations, beliefs, connotations, and values that once uttered, contribute to the construction of society. Gee writes,

> Arguing about what words (ought to) mean is not a trivial business. It is not a matter of "mere words," "hair splitting," "just semantics" when these arguments are over socially contested terms. Such arguments are what lead to the maintenance and creation of social worlds. (*Social* 6)

People influence how language functions; they are the agents who decide how language is created and modified with every utterance. "Meaning is not a thing that sits fixed in the mind," Gee writes. "It is not something that sits in dictionaries" (Social 21). However, in order to successfully communicate, there must be common understanding about how language functions between people. Without such an understanding, miscommunication or no communication occurs.

Discourse analysis can be more easily explained by using practical examples. For instance, in the United States, we have a particular understanding of what the word "desk" represents: a relatively flat, horizontal surface where people stand or sit to do some kind of activity that requires a flat, horizontal surface. The surface space varies in size, the materials vary, and the features undoubtedly vary. But if we were to hear the word "desk" in conversation or on the television or radio, we would visualize what that word meant to us: perhaps a roll top desk, a metal desk; one with a filing drawer, one without drawers; one neatly organized with art projects, one messy with mail. Some may remember their father or mother paying bills at a family desk; some may think of the grading they have to do at their campus desk; some may remember how uncomfortable their home desk is because it is too tall or short; some may covet their colleague's/neighbor's/friend's desk.

Although we have different visual associations when hearing the word "desk," we do share a common understanding of the desk's purpose. Our shared understanding of the word "desk" — thus making conversation about desks possible—is a result of many influences. Visualizing "desk"

in a similar manner allows us to share and collaborate in ways that would be vastly different if we had unrelated, dissimilar definitions of the word. However, because we share a definition of "desk," we can collaboratively discuss, design, critique, manufacture, purchase, use, and sell desks.

Because discourse is social, collaborative, and transactional, much of our discourse is influenced by the discourse communities of which we are members. According to Patricia Bizzell, discourse communities are comprised of people drawn together by similar uses of language. Therefore, it is by "the use of language" that discourse communities are established even though they are often "bound . . . by other ties as well, geographical, socioeconomic, ethnic, professional, and so on" (Bizzell 222). Discourse analysis and discourse community scholarship are natural partners in that they both teach us how to respond to the social communications around us. For peripheral student populations who need guidance transitioning from academic outsiders to insiders, they need to learn how to become socially aligned with the insiders they need to engage. One of the ways to become socially aligned is through a sharing of discursive practices (Gee *An Introduction* 35). Therefore, instructors interested in preparing their students for diverse discourse community should consider how to utilize discourse analysis into their curriculum. For peripheral students who are learning to become academic insiders, the blending of discourse community concepts with discourse analysis is especially important: many students believe that they must leave their home discourses and communities at the classroom door. However, this is antithetical to both frameworks as they emphasize adapting to communities' needs—but not as a method for denying students' heritages, cultures, discourses, or communities. Thus, teaching discourse analysis and discourse community in concert with each other can to create a non-threatening space where students can learn about community membership without feeling threatened.

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According to John Swales, one characteristic of discourse communities is that the community "has developed and continues to develop discoursal expectations. These may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discoursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community" (212). Swales's point resonates with my purpose for integrating discourse analysis into the technical and professional writing classroom. Neither writers nor audiences live in bubbles, protected from outside influences. As a means for understanding the relationship between authorial intent and audience, students need to learn

about the complexity of discourse, particularly that discourse is community-created and -defined. For peripheral students who may be less adept at exploring, analyzing, and reflecting upon the diverse communities around them, discourse analysis can help facilitate that learning.

Discourse analysis also provides critical insight into genre conventions, an especially important skill for students learning to communicate in a variety of academic and professional genres. For example, students enrolled in Technical and Professional Writing will be expected to write memos, emails, proposals, and reports for professional audiences. These genres are not "sexy" topics of discussion by any means. However, teaching students how to effectively communicate through workplace documents is vital to their professional success. Students new to writing workplace documents often perceive of them as "boring" writing styles and genres, and many of them approach writing such documents with the mindset that they are fill-in-the-blank templates with little to no thought given to their discursive choices. Instead, technical and professional writing students must be taught that their discursive choices affect the success of those documents as they respond to particular professional audiences (clients, managers, committees, boards of directors, etc.). Genres are not birthed from isolation; they are an exchange between people. Thus, genre analysis complements discourse analysis in that it teaches that genres are social with cultural meaning (Devitt 337). Discourse analysis can unpack those social and cultural contexts.

My Story: Institutional and Course Context

As a second year doctoral candidate in the Rhetoric and Writing program in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Mexico, I began teaching Technical and Professional Writing in 2009. The University of New Mexico is a Carnegie-designated very high research university and is "considered one of the largest producers" of Hispanic undergraduates and graduates (Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr 238-239). The university's HSI designation highlights several demographic realities about the student body. By definition, HSIs have a full-time enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic students, as well as a 50% student population who are enrolled full-time and receive federal financial aid (Hispanic Association). As a result, HSIs serve a large number of students who are historically marginalized and are from a lower socio-economic bracket. Moreover, since New Mexico is one of the poorest states in the nation, many of the institution's non-Hispanic students face similar financial and educational access challenges. Furthermore, HSIs have very diverse student populations; this diversity significantly affects their sense of belonging, sense of community, and social interaction (Vásquez 86). These factors both affect students' willingness and abilities to transition from academic outsiders to insiders.

The Core Writing Program, housed within the Department of English, is responsible for the 100- and 200-level general education writing courses and places a strong emphasis on rhetorical awareness through a genre-based curriculum. A rhetorically focused, genre-based curriculum, as Anis Barwarshi explains, teaches students "ways of discursively and materially organizing,

knowing, experiencing, acting, and relating to in the world" (9). Program stakeholders believe this curriculum teaches Core Writing students how to adeptly engage with the diverse people and communication situations around them. Carolyn Miller refers to genre analysis as engaging in "social action" (153). This social action is conceptualized in the Core Writing Program's emphasis on "the rhetorical situation," an overarching outcome for all 100- and 200-level courses. Writing instructors' curricula include a multiplicity of genres with different real-life audiences and purposes. In Technical and Professional Writing, common rhetorical situations include designing and writing instruction manuals for various companies, writing recommendation reports to the university's Board of Regents, and writing career dossiers for internship applications.

English 219: Technical and Professional Writing is part of a two-segment general education requirement offered by the Core Writing Program. After passing English 101 and 102, students take either Technical and Professional Writing or Advanced Expository Writing depending on their program requirements or personal preferences. English 219, according to the course description, teaches students to "focus on how to analyze and understand readers' needs as well as develop a coherent structure, clear style, and compelling page layout" ("Core Courses" n. pag.). In Technical and Professional Writing, typical genres include emails, memos, reports, proposals, and instruction manuals. Most students who take English 219 major in Business, Engineering, Physical Education, and Pre-Med programs and are required to take the course. Sophomores primarily enroll in the course, with male students often outnumbering female students. In my spring 2013 section, for example, fifteen out of twenty-three students were male. Most of the students are still fulfilling general education requirements and have little or no knowledge of the field-specific writing in their majors or future careers. While this blank slate is certainly useful to build upon, students' lack of knowledge regarding workplace writing or writing in their disciplines can negatively affect their investment in the course.

It was not until teaching Technical and Professional Writing that I fully experienced the impact of students' discursive dexterity on their professional goals. Teaching at a HSI where many students attend the university to gain employment that (hopefully) grants them financial stability and economic mobility, I was keenly aware of the student-as-customer perspective that often bleeds through campus. I do not disparage this point of view. On the contrary, it gave me an additional exigency for preparing my students for writing and communicating in the workplace. Knowing that most of my students were attending university to begin a career, with many of them already supporting siblings and other family members while parents were across the border or while their families lived on pueblos and reservations, I took seriously their needs as communicators. As much as I relied upon rhetorical awareness to help them become better writers and communicators, my methods were not creating the results I wanted to see. What was lacking, I observed, was students' understanding of their own language choices. While they could analyze the rhetorical situation of every writing assignment, they could not talk about their discourse choices or the discourse choices other authors made. However, discussing discursive

choices was a vital part to completing the rhetorical situation: if they could not reflect upon or talk about how discourse is used, how would they be able to effectively use discourse in professional, academic, and personal communication situations?

To test whether my students knew how to reflect upon their discourse choices, I began asking them in 2011 during class discussion, if they ever thought about "why you said what you said." Perhaps not surprisingly, my students seemed dumbfounded when I asked them this question. Their raised brows, silent responses, and blank stares indicated to me that either they did not think about or did not know how to articulate their choices. Even when casually inquiring about their communication on social media, students were unable to express how they made decisions about their language choices. I soon realized the need to step back from the rhetorical situation and start small—with the examination of the very words we use. I decided to experiment with adding discourse analysis more formally in the spring of 2013. Broadly, I intended to complicate students' understanding of the rhetorical situation while teaching them that adapting their discourse to meet the needs of different audiences would not mean that they are betraying their home discourses and communities. When considering my HSI student needs, however, I also recognized that I needed to teach them that discourse analysis might give them the agency that peripheral students often lack. This article recounts my stumbles in my own deep learning as I tried to help usher students into the technical and professional writing discourse community.

To stress the importance of discourse analysis within all communication situations, I framed my spring 2013 Technical and Professional Writing course with discourse analysis. In the first week of the semester, I explained that our discussions would be focused on examining discourse and how we use it. Reflecting upon and analyzing discourse is vital to professional, academic, and personal success because the use of discourse can (and will) affect jobs, grades, and relationships. To steep students in discourse analysis, the opening two weeks were devoted to reading the first two chapters of Barbara Johnstone's *Discourse Analysis*. Chapter one, the introduction, defines discourse analysis and chapter two, "Discourse and the World" covers topics of discourse, culture, and ideology. These two chapters marked important starting points because Johnstone emphasizes the personal, ideological nature of discourse. Both of these chapters highlight the personal nature of discourse, thus implicitly celebrating and honoring students' own discourses, while providing them with skills that will teach them how to become insiders into the communities they so choose. However, students cannot learn to transition from outsiders to insiders on their own; they must have insiders guide them (Bizzell 228). Thus, instructors who teach technical and professional writing are uniquely positioned to guide their students through this transition.

Using Freewrites to Unpack Students' Discourse Analysis Knowledge

My first challenge was getting my students to open up and engage in course discussion. I had never taught such a silent group, and I did not know how to bring them out of their silence.

Because they would not talk in class, in week three I asked them to complete a 300-word freewrite homework assignment on the class's online discussion thread. In the prompt, I asked students eight different questions from our discourse analysis readings, such as "Why as budding scholars, professionals, and citizens, do we need to be, as Barbara Johnstone writes, 'interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language' (3)?", "Have you picked up on any strategic discursive choices in your own reading?", and "Have you noticed any ideologies in your language choices or the language choices of others?"

Yancey writes that if instructors "want to know how" students "arrive at certain conclusions" and "what discourses they are drawing on," she declares, "*Try asking 'em*" (5, emphasis in the original). Reflection is not unrealistic for 100- or 200-level students because they are "intelligent agents who can engage in frequent and deliberate self-awareness" she notes (8, emphasis removed). But the methods in which we ask students to reflect, such as a public class discussion, may not be the best way to facilitate conversation—especially if they are insecure or inexperienced, like peripheral students are. Kelly Belanger and Diane Panozzo write that peripheral students need a "safe environment" because they can be easily "intimidated into silence" (95, 96). Therefore, students may need a more private space in which to reflect. Freewriting is one method to help silent students gain voices—voices that may be too quiet, too unsure, or too insecure to share with the class. And freewrites can be a last-ditch effort on behalf of the writing instructor to figure out what his/her students are thinking.

Students' responses were thoughtful, albeit a bit vague, and showed their understanding that discourse is a powerful, influential tool. For example, Monica[2] writes,

> Another thing that I found interesting was where it states that 'discourses are ideas as well as ways of talking that influence, and are influenced by ideas.' This interested me because it goes along with what we are talking about in classes. Like with this first assignment, we are going to have to influence people into thinking that the job we are presenting is the best job on campus.

She identifies the tension in communication: there is a speaker and hearer, giver and taker, enmeshed in a cycle of communication. While she does not explicitly identify this cycle as addressing the rhetorical situation and audience expectations, her response illustrates a basic understanding in how adeptly applied discourse can make or break a rhetorical situation—exactly what I sought to accomplish in the first few weeks. As well, her ability to link together course assignments with discourse analysis readings indicate that students may find the discourse analysis tools useful to completing their coursework.

Some students were able to show the interconnectedness between discourse, life experiences, and ideology. This is a vital part of discourse analysis: that communicators are

2. All students have been assigned pseudonyms, and their writing style is unedited.

aware of the ideologies that underpin their language uses. Highlighting what he found interesting in chapter two, "Discourse and the World," Marco wrote, "The whole idea of language ideology is to define how and why people speak and put their ideas together, and we can define how they think by studying certain aspect of their language." Marco succinctly expresses how communicators can better understand discourse through the process of learning about speakers' (and writers') world experiences with open curiosity. Marco's reflection indicates how discourse analysis can expand students' perceptions of language use: first, discourse analysis can teach students how to embrace diversity (of discourse, of discourse communities, of people's experiences, etc.). Second, discourse analysis can teach students to willingly adapt to the discursive needs of their audiences and communities without feeling like they are betraying their home discourses and communities. By exploring discourse from a perspective of inquisitiveness, students can learn to analyze discourse and its uses in ways that are non-threatening. In the classroom, this process may take the form of investigating job description phrasing, jargon in a request for proposal, or design elements on a website.

Students also connected with discourse analysis insofar as it taught them about discursive diversity, an important aspect for HSI campuses on which students struggle to find a sense of belonging. Thomas writes,

> The chapters connect to our in-class conversations in that writing is designed to say exactly what the writer wants it to say. There should never be any misconceptions as to what a certain passage is supposed to mean. Instead, the text should clearly convey it's message. There will always be room for interpretations but never room for miscommunication . . . Discourse analysis is not just the study of the content within the text. It is the holistic study of text by the way it is constructed, the ideas of the time, and how those ideas are being carefully crafted in order to convey them to its reader.

Discourse analysis is particularly illuminating for students who have grown up in a bilingual household or community. Miscommunication, as Thomas notes, impacts the message, widening the gap between speaker and hearer, writer and reader. For institutions, like ours, with a large peripheral student population that feel disenfranchised, the recognition of such communication challenges—as well as knowing how to mitigate those challenges—can be empowering.

Moreover, students' responses illustrated that discourse analysis could help them bridge the cultural and linguistic gap commonly found within multicultural communities. Steve, a first-generation American, explains how discourse analysis helps him better understand and communicate with people from different cultures:

> Coming from an immigrant Chinese family, I believe i am able to observe many examples of multi-voices. Growing up in a bi cultural setting, I have been able to see many conflicting instances where one thing in once culture may mean something different in others. For example, when drinking hot soup, I often made a slurping sound which in

Chinese culture dictates an appreciation for the taste, is seen as a negative behavior in the United States frowned upon in formal settings. Since communication is not necessarily spoken or written, I believe this illustrates how non-verbal communication can mean two different things depending on perception and surroundings.

Since student populations at HSIs often feel disconnected with their campus community, it is vital that students embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity instead of resisting it. Some of this resistance comes from students believing that they are alone in their experiences. However, Steve's reflection illustrates that discourse analysts' emphasis on multi-voices—that people use discourse in different community situations—can help students recognize that they are not alone. Most people have to adapt to different communities and cultural norms, whether they are first-generation American or seventh-generation American.

On the whole, students' responses to the freewrite prompt were more honest and thoughtful than in any of the large-group class discussions that semester. For instructors teaching at HSIs or other institutions that face challenges building community within the classroom, freewriting may encourage a safe space where students' voices can be heard. As well, freewriting can help usher novice students into the academic discourse community by asking them to blend their personal experiences with the course content.

Identity Branding, Discourse Analysis, and the Career Dossier

Four weeks into the semester, when students were in the midst of working on their career dossiers (a résumé and cover letter for a job or internship application), I had them apply discourse analysis to their examination of job and internship application materials. The freewrites had shown me that my students could apply discourse analysis to their personal lives; however, I needed to teach them how to apply discourse analysis to situations where language was their ticket in or out. In class, I teach this point by emphasizing that every discursive and communicative moment is a moment in which writers "brand their identity" and "market" themselves. Just as Apple or Google brand themselves through trademarked phrases and products, students brand themselves through the discourse that they (do not) use. Consequently, discourse analysis is a vital component to teaching them how to recognize the brand they are creating, as well as how to re-position or rebrand themselves. One way in which people identity brand is through the discourse they use in job documents. Likewise, companies and people use discourse to market particular job descriptions. As students worked on their own job or internship documents, they had to identify key words and phrases in position descriptions or on websites that alerted them to important values, skills, or knowledge that application readers may want (or demand) to see in submitted documents. Particularly for peripheral student populations who are learning to become academic and professional insiders, as well as learning that they can have agency, relevant and effective identity branding is critical to their success.

To reinforce the importance of discourse analysis when composing workplace documents, I

assigned a reflective memo as part of the students' dossier documents. This memo was submitted with the dossier. One element of the prompt asked them to explain "how your knowledge of discourse analysis, discourse communities, and/or literacies affected your document creation." This was a broad, open-ended prompt because I wanted to see if students were actively thinking about how to meet their audience's needs and how specific they could be in their reflections.

Students' reflections illustrate that, with varying levels of specificity, they recognize the importance of meeting their audiences' expectations by incorporating key words or phrases to show their experiences and skills. Frank writes in his reflection,

> I used many words emphasizing my previous experience as a bike mechanic, and also my mechanical and budgeting ability. I used these because the employer was looking for someone with past experience working with bikes, and also wanted someone with experience helping customers while staying within their set budgets. As I have had experience working in small, and large shops before, I wanted to emphasize my experience as a whole.

He recognizes that his job success depends on the how well he meets the expectations of the application readers. Because career dossier documents are discourse-sensitive, meaning that committees include carefully chosen nouns and verbs to denote the qualifications they want from applicants, assignments that ask students to articulate their choices, like this reflection memo, provide timely opportunities for teaching the importance of discourse analysis in high stakes situations.

Amanda more specifically explained her word choices to highlight that her documents were attuned to the job specifics: "I had to choose specific words in my letter of intent for the Student Support Aide job that would help make it stand out and stronger. Some of the words and phrases I used were: experience, highly qualified, collaborative skills, and exceptional work experience." Both of these examples illustrate how students can apply discursive awareness to their own real-life rhetorical situations. And if students can articulate the discursive choices they make and why, such as Frank and Amanda did, they may be able to apply their analysis skills to all communicative situations. Perhaps most importantly, these examples show that students can be taught to capitalize upon and embrace their agency.

Refining Discourse Analysis with the Help of TED

While the reflection memo illustrates that students were able to draw connections between discourse analysis and their personal and professional lives, they still had difficulties engaging in classroom discussion about discourse analysis. This was a bit problematic for me because my pedagogy emphasizes the classroom as community of respect and community of sharing. My pedagogical beliefs meant that I could not just accept students' silence. Therefore, midway through the semester I integrated TED Talks[3] into the course material to see if visual content

would get students talking amongst themselves. If anything, I hoped that students would be willing to talk about what they liked or found interesting from the Talks, thus encouraging a community of respect and sharing—the first step toward creating a sense of community within the classroom.

The three TED Talks I selected apply to technical and professional writing and discourse analysis in that they emphasize agency: Sheena Iyengar's "How to Make Choosing Easier," Rory Sutherland's "Life Lessons from an Ad Man," and Sebastian Deterding's "What Your Designs Say About You." Each presenter speaks to the complexity of choice, perspective, and audience; this made Iyengar, Sutherland, and Deterding natural fits with discourse analysis and the course content. Iyengar encourages listeners to "practice the art of choosing," reminding listeners that each one of us possesses agency. Sutherland questions, "How many problems in life can be solved actually by tinkering with perception rather than the tedious hard working and messy business of actually changing reality?" An apt reminder about how we hold the power of perception. And Deterding asks, "What are your intentions?"

TED Talks do get students talking—and in-class chatter and conversations related to the content they liked or the new information they learned but not discourse analysis or technical and professional communication. Nevertheless, it was much easier to generate class conversation about the power of choice, perception, and intention that students have on a daily basis. The Talks encouraged students to think about their agency in different ways, learning that professionals—whether ad men or designers—must capitalize upon their agency in order to succeed. This vein of thought allowed me to fluidly transition back to discourse analysis, reiterating that professionals and monarchs use discourse analysis in almost every situation. For example, in Sutherland's talk, he tells the story of how the Emperor of Prussia, in an effort to encourage the populace to accept the potato, planted potatoes in the royal garden. Leaving the garden loosely guarded, the Emperor wanted the people to steal his potatoes. And they did. Soon the potato was widely accepted and eaten across his empire. I used this particular segment as an example of how discourse analysis can impact rhetorical purpose: the Emperor changed the perceived value of the potato simply by classifying it as a royal food item. Language "is inherently powerful in creating and sustaining realities," Mo Yee Lee explains, and it becomes "the medium through which personal meaning and understanding are expressed and socially constructed in conversation" (462).

Despite students' willingness to talk about TED Talks, they were still unwilling to share how they might synthesize the TED Talks with technical and professional writing or discourse analysis. In one moment of classroom silence during week seven, I used class time for students to freewrite in a discussion thread posting about their understanding of discourse analysis thus

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3. TED is a non-profit organization "devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment, and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics" (TED n.pag.). "TED Talks" is the term for the conference presentations. TED Talks can be watched on TED.com, Netflix, or YouTube.

far. Their homework had been to watch Sebastian Deterding's talk and read Johnstone's fourth chapter, "Participants in Discourse: Relationships, Roles, and Identities," and I thought/hoped that students would be willing to share their ideas in class. But they did not. Although assigned in a moment of frustration, the freewrite showed me that students were grappling indeed with high stakes issues.

Students' responses noted the challenges they face balancing the discursive expectations of different discourse communities while also trying to develop the identities that they want to have. In a particularly representative example, Monica reflects,

> I think this whole semester has been using language to shape how we want people to see us. My purpose is to get through college, get a job, and one day a lambo.[4] So, when choosing words I have to consider how people are going to view me. I have to think about how I wan't them to view me in a professional way, so that I can get a job that is well paying. Then on the other hand I have my friends, and they wan't a whole other side...they don't want to think business...They don't want me to sound professional...they wan't me to entertain...To be there to make them laugh when things aren't going so well.[5] It is two completely different type of audiences with two different purposes, and both of them require completely different types of wording. . . . Yep, so who you are talking to, and what your goal of the conversation is shapes your word choices.

Monica's response highlights the difficulties students face transitioning from one discourse community to another while wanting to please both. There is a real challenge for students to figure out how to be true to themselves and their needs (like Monica's desire to get through college and get a job) while also maintaining their support systems (like Monica's friends). In first- and second-year writing courses where students are learning to balance work and life, they need our support as they learn to balance their discourse communities and the expectations of each. Aside from encouraging open and honest conversations about the challenges students face adapting to different discourse communities, instructors of peripheral student populations can use discourse analysis to help students think about how discourse is used in different yet meaningful ways.

Another important theme for students was Johnstone's emphasis that "participants shape, and are shaped by what goes on in discourse" (128). Students connected the most with ideas of discourse, identity, and agency. These are relevant emphases as many of my students were still trying to figure out their academic, personal, and professional identities. For example, Jake writes:

> I've had to think about this stuff a lot lately. What type of identity do I want to create in

4. Lamborghini.

5. These first four ellipses were in Monica's reflection. I added the fifth and final ellipse for brevity.

> my personal life, business life, student life, etc? Do I want them all to the same, or do I want to complement each one with the others? The difficulties for me have been compounded by the fact that I'm thinking about changing direction of my student life during my senior year.

College often presents students with the opportunity to confront questions about identity as they are thrust into new experiences with new people. However, students' strong ties to cultural heritages and histories sometimes impede that opportunity. As Jake illustrates, discourse analysis is more than just learning about discourse uses; it can also affect how students reflect upon their lives and chosen paths. So while Jake did not write about how he uses discourse analysis, his post does indicate an agency that he had not expressed previously.

In another example, Joe writes about learning to recognize how his identity informs his worldview and the power he has to shape his image:

> Through the last few months I have seen how my image, as presented in everyday society and online, reflects my world and how my worldview reflects me. I believe that my efforts in life may not actually be reflected in my person or in my public image, but, with recent considerations taken into account, there may be something to be done about this.

Joe recognizes that language is powerful and can be used to project the identity(ies) he wants to present to different discourse communities. Seeing his trajectory of growth, Joe is beginning to embrace the agency he does have in creating the brand he wants to project to those around him. What is most important in Joe's response is that he knows he can do something about his brand should he want to. This agency instills confidence in students by teaching them that regardless of their backgrounds and experiences they do have power to create an identity that is a more accurate representation of who they are and what they can contribute. This rebranding can bolster their academic, professional, and personal success.

Moving Forward: Embracing the Private Space and Surveying Students' Knowledge

Embracing Personal Reflection

When I began polling my classes in 2011 about their discursive choices and when I received silent stares in response, my first reaction was to assume my students were unaware of their roles as agents in the communication process. This was not an entirely accurate assessment of my students' capabilities or thought processes, however. What I learned from the spring 2013 section is that my students may need a more private forum for expressing their ideas. Based on the sample of student responses, it is obvious that they were grappling with high stakes questions about identity, worldview, perception, and agency, to name a few. As an instructor who wants my classroom to be a safe space for learning and growth, I embrace such questions because I know it is impossible to divorce learning from personal growth. Particularly for marginalized students who

are struggling to balance their academic and home lives while learning to transition from academic outsider to insider, personal reflection is one genre that may help them process through their growing pains. As well, these types of low stakes assignments may be the only opportunity that students have to honestly reflect upon their struggles.

Reflection is equally important to helping students embrace their voices. When Yancey charges writing instructors to ask their students about their reflection processes, we may immediately apply that charge to our classes as a whole, assuming that all students are comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas with the class. Writing instructors teaching peripheral student populations may need to be more aware of (and sensitive toward) students' silence as an issue of confidence and not their abilities or knowledge.

Surveying Students' Knowledge

While I learned about students' application of discourse analysis through freewrites and a reflection memo, instructors may want to gather a more accurate baseline of their students' knowledge and abilities. I recommend creating a simple pre- and post-test that is given once at the very beginning of the semester and once at the very end of the semester. The pre- and post-test should include open-ended questions like "How do you think about your language choices?" and "How do you analyze your audience before deciding which word and phrases to use?" that encourage thorough and detailed responses. The results can be used to alert instructors to the knowledge that students bring with them into the classroom, as well as help instructors avoid inaccurate assumptions about their students' experiences, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, if crafted with the intention of learning as much as possible about their students, the pre- and post-test can help instructors develop and refine assignments, readings, and class activities that better meet their students' needs. Instructors can present the pre- and post-test to their students as a honest and genuine effort to learn about them; this interest and caring about students' knowledge can significantly impact peripheral students who feel disconnected from academia and/or the classroom, or who believe that their instructors do not value or respect the knowledge and experiences they bring into the classroom.

Fostering Thoughtful Language Choices and Agency with Discourse Analysis

My students' reflective writing indicates that they are capable of thoughtfully applying general principles of discourse analysis to their writing choices and to their lives. Discourse analysis, and especially Johnstone's text, is difficult to grasp. And I knew that introducing it in English 219 might be a bit like "throwing students into the deep end." However, this experience taught me that students will wrestle with difficult reading and difficult ideas if the instructor places enough emphasis on it. I often told my students to try to understand at least one or two things from the chapter readings and not to get "bogged down" with language or ideas that were complicated. And, much to my excitement, they worked through the text.

It is impossible to tell if all of my students learned to see themselves as having discursive

agency, but based upon many of the examples shared in this article, it is apparent that students can grapple with complicated ideas about workplace communication, identity branding, and discourse analysis. In addition, I learned that students do connect with discourse analysis insofar as it helps them reflect upon their own lives. Especially for student populations that feel disenfranchised or disconnected from the classroom and academia, it is vital that instructors connect course material to students' own lives. Asking open-ended questions about how students can apply discourse analysis to their lives is one way to make discourse analysis personal.

Discourse analysis impacted students in a variety of ways: from learning about their own identities, learning about their communities, and learning to embrace diversity. The common thread between these learning gains is that discourse analysis exposes students to the power of language—a much needed tool as they learn to become expert writers and communicators. Teaching students to embrace that power provides them with tools to make important communication decisions within their personal, professional, and academic discourse communities. In the workplace, this agency can ensure job promotions, budget increases, and hiring decisions, among others. Thus, those who become discourse analysts have the potential to influence the world around them. In academia, this agency can help students learn to communicate with their professors, to build community among students, and to embrace the campus diversity around them. Effective communication, particularly writing, "is a ticket to professional opportunity" in an economy where "employers spend billions annually correcting writing deficiencies" (National Commission 3). As a professional, I am aware of the reality that my students' communication skills will directly affect their abilities to get jobs and promotions. Therefore, my adoption of discourse analysis intends to begin the process of teaching students to reflect on their language choices as they plan effective writing and plan and present documents, two outcomes of the course. In the long term, I hope my students will apply discourse analysis to other professional, civic, and personal situations in order to succeed beyond the classroom.

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