

## Adherence to the Academy: Power Relations with the Colonized Student

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*In response to crises of legitimacy, institutions of higher education mobilize conciliatory discourses and initiatives, ostensibly to challenge privilege and power. Instead, these discourses often reify the very power relations they critique through policies and pedagogies that disembody marginalized students from their lived experiences and colonize their lifeworlds. This essay explores the power relations in teacher-student relationships through critical communication pedagogies and instructional communication perspectives. Diversity, equity, and inclusion discourses can both challenge and reproduce hegemonic power relations in classroom communication. The essay is constructed as a poem to maximize the contested terrain for what constitutes hegemony and counter-hegemony. The purpose is to engender a more affective and embodied representation of teacher-student power relations by using reflexivity and critical theory. Metaphor and allegory underpin a mindfulness approach to thinking, feeling, and theorizing how power is constructed and fluid in education.*

### 1. Seeing and Knowing<sup>1</sup>

You see us  
    We imagine you

One and a half-sided point of view

We  
Soften the focus when the colonized speak

We granulate truth and render  
Impressionistic phantasmagoric<sup>2</sup>  
Unknowable

### 2. Discipline and Disembody

Disciplinary discourses discipline<sup>3</sup>

Concepts colonize

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We  
Maroon hearts on islands  
Amidst seas of epistemic oceans  
Launch voyager ships carrying cognition cargo

The best praxis

We  
Insist on disembodied experience

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### 3. Application and Measurement

We

Sharpen the focus when the colonized approach colonizer concepts

Including concepts of resistance

— Watch closely and see what they do with them

Mostly

Fail to look pretty, Think pretty

Fail to disarm us<sup>4</sup>

Aperture chosen

Conceals unconscious power

Biography

History<sup>5</sup>

Aperture chosen

Mobilizes

New social technologies of control

— Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We make space for othering

We

Refine methods and techniques— knowledge and concepts

We theorize through

Intersectionality— mythical normativity and demystification<sup>6</sup>

Critical pedagogies

We embrace reflexivity, autoethnography<sup>7</sup>

We burn through bonfires of citations to appease the gods of journal science<sup>8</sup>

...

We hold onto our capital<sup>9</sup>

### Key Terms and Concepts

**You/Colonized** = Students

**We/Us/Colonizers** = Faculty and Instructors

**Soften the focus** = Perform inclusion

**Sharpen the focus** = Inoculate privilege from diversity and equity

## Notes from a Colonized Student: In the Margins of Transformative Communication Pedagogy

Difficult conversations, difficult for  
All the educators, lovers, haters  
All the students, and more<sup>10</sup>  
A historical, societal, monumental, trial  
Hard to talk in classrooms immersed in  
Unconscious denial

Isms we resist  
But race is hard to miss  
Discomfort in *difference*  
Emotions run hot despite psychological distance

Technologies of control through canons of science  
Death, tears, protest, defiance  
Pain temporarily confining me  
Until I communicate mindfully<sup>11</sup>  
Let's keep the conversation going  
New ways of seeing, being  
Knowing<sup>12</sup>  
Feel our bodies<sup>13</sup>, feel us all  
Vulnerable, fearful, joyful, raw  
Deep listening, heart presence  
Open to difference  
Be present<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See essay 1 in Berger (1972) for reflections on seeing and knowing, history as relationship between past and present, and the concealment of social relations in academic and aesthetic discourses.

<sup>2</sup> See Buck-Morss (1991) for her elucidation of phantasmagoria in the reconstruction of Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault (1977) articulates the role of observation in creating "docile bodies" through disciplinary practices.

<sup>4</sup> Dominant groups in higher education use implicit bias and microaggression trainings to shield themselves from acknowledging their complicity in upholding systemic social and epistemic injustices; and to protect the very privilege and oppression ostensibly targeted by inclusiveness initiatives (Applebaum, 2019). We problematize whether the discourse trinity of diversity-equity-inclusion, as well as other resistance discourses, perform power similarly, and to what extent elements of hegemony and counterhegemony are present within them.

<sup>5</sup> The "sociological imagination" reveals the intersectionality of history, power, and biography (Mills, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See Yep (2016) for how the potential of communication education might be realized in "transformative communication pedagogy" and the demystification of "mythical intersectional normativity."

<sup>7</sup> The dialogue our poem evokes by exploring faculty-student relations illuminates key themes identified by Linabary et al. (2017) in their autoethnographic account of designing and instructing an organizational communication course, specifically the structural constraints on individual and collective agency, tensions of power and voice, and seeing classroom tensions as opportunities to employ creativity and collaboration as transformative praxis.

<sup>8</sup> Our endnote citations are too many and too few. There are too many in that we desire the poem to speak for itself, listen for itself, think for itself, feel for itself, and rise on its own. Our poem must perform work as all poetry performs work, by what it says and what it does not say. The gaps and spaces, the things unsaid, do much of the heavy lifting. Citation practices pose a risk of weighing down the poem, evaporating the power of the poem, blind folding the readers-co-authors and demanding they tell us what they see. Yet our endnote citations are too few to address the breadth of scholarship implicated by the poem. Full representation remains always out of reach and immune to the corrective drive (Hemmings, 2011).

We affirm the value of situating research and theory within broader disciplinary and interdisciplinary traditions to open meaningful dialogue with authors and readers. At issue is how are citations used within the text — as literary convention, as storytelling tactics, as performance of expertise and claim to a privileged subject position as possessor-producer of knowledge, or as meaningful action to deepen reflection and foster understandings of the text, raise questions, and dialogue with scholars inside and outside the academy.

The metaphor of burning "bonfires of citations to appease the gods of journal science" signals the ritualistic performance of storytelling in journal writing and the power dynamics embedded in journal communities. The metaphor agitates with its implicit critique of conventional, formulaic, and uncritical use of citations in disciplinary storytelling. Agitation is one of the powers uniquely suited to poetry — the power to agitate and throw into question what is known and unknown about the world. It is not our position that citations are superfluous or that they inevitably reify power relations. Nonetheless, we do see parallels between conventional, uncritical journal science writing and conventional, uncritical pedagogy in the classroom.

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As Hemmings (2011) argues, citation practices and mobilizing affect are storytelling tactics that secure and make believable dominant narratives in journal science. Citation practices and textual affect are aspects of political grammar and therefore target points for intervention to transform dominant narratives.

We see potential in poetic inquiry to translate and open obtuse academic discourses, rendering specialized knowledges more accessible to a larger public. This is due to the power of metaphor, embodied writing, and to experimentation with literary conventions in journal science which often alienate potential readers-co-authors. We did not author this poem as only autoethnography, immanent critique, and critical communication pedagogy, but also to disrupt what Hemmings (2011, p. 19) calls the “technologies of the presumed” and to theorize within the new spaces created by the disruption.

We concur with Hemmings (2011, p. 162) that citation practices are “productive rather than descriptive” and can act to erase or fetishize scholarly contributions. We feel ambivalence about the inclusion of citations anchored to individual lines in the poem because their presence elevates the risk for over-interpretation or premature misunderstanding due to the fetishization of cited scholarly works. Moreover, lines within a poem must be understood in relation to the contextual totality of the poem, and citation practices anchored to individual lines run the risk of dismembering the poem into incoherent parts. We hope to mitigate these risks by housing our citation practices in endnotes, and through the practice of citation restraint.

The above prose about what we desire our poem to do, the type of writing it is and the goals that animate it, along with the decisions we made regarding citation practices and the use of endnotes, embraces the spirit if not the form of an *ars poetica* poem. Faulkner (2007, 2016) proposes *ars poetica* as criteria for the evaluation of research poetry by making explicit the goals of the work by which the work itself can be measured, as well as the methods employed through discussion of aesthetics, craft, and process.

<sup>9</sup> See Bourdieu (1986) for theorization of “cultural capital” and “social capital.”

<sup>10</sup> Chen and Lawless (2018) discuss the need for educators to facilitate difficult conversations in classrooms to address the challenges of the diverse global world. In this poem, we deploy “diversity agenda” strategies (p. 379).

<sup>11</sup> Huston (2010) explains how students may communicate mindfully (CM) to strengthen their conversational skills, listening skills, and emotional intelligence. CM has potential to increase awareness of experiences as they arise moment by moment in the classroom, including awareness of power operating between students and between faculty and students. We see potential in CM for the democratization of knowledge production and subverting reified power relations in the classroom. This liberation potential derives from CM’s emphasis on active listening, being curious about difference and the experiences of others, cultivating openness to new experiences and creative spontaneity, and intentionally letting go of attachment to habitual thinking, acting, sensing, and believing.

<sup>12</sup> Critical pedagogy and critical pedagogy assessment have potential to facilitate new ways of seeing, being, and knowing through focused attention to power and social justice, and through emphasis on facilitation and process over prescription (Fassett & Warren, 2006; Freire, 2018; Kahl, 2013). Innovations in arts-based research methodology foster a more engaged, embodied, and empathic social science (Faulkner & Cloud, 2019; Leavy, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> We concur with Faulkner (2018) that achieving embodiment and reflexivity is an important refusal of the mind-body dialectic. Poetry has the flexibility and capacity to act as theory and methodology. The choice to use poetry in social science is a feminist practice often with a social justice impetus (Faulkner, 2017; Prendergast, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Our poem advances a postmodern (informed) critical theory of communication that employs feminist methodology (Agger, 2006; Faulkner, 2005, 2018, 2019) to understand power relations between universities, faculty and students. It can be read as “Vox Theoria - Literature-voiced” poetry (Prendergast, 2009). We reflect on how power relations and academic expertise constrain dialogue and liberation potential in classroom learning, including authentic dialogue as might be imagined in the phenomenological tradition of communication theory. We see liberation potential in communicating mindfully (Huston, 2010), which is compatible with critical pedagogies (Fassett & Warren, 2006; Faulkner & Cloud, 2019; Freire, 2018) if students are empowered to author their embodied experiences in the classroom, and when they have access to ample and diverse concepts of justice, critique, and freedom, born inside and outside of the academy. This includes concepts birthed by activists and left social movements. Rationales for attending to the dialectical and dialogical relationships between academic and non-academic discourses can be found in Freire (2018), Said (1994), Craig (1999, 2015), Carbado et al. (2013), and Collins (2019). We concur with Craig (2015) that different traditions of communication theory speak to “different problem frames and normative visions of communicative

practice” (p. 366). Regarding the “problem frame” of racial and social injustice in institutions of higher education, we assert the critical tradition of communication theory (Habermas, 1984, 1987; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972), infused with insights from postmodern and feminist theory (Agger, 2006), has pragmatic value. Postmodern (informed) critical theory provides theoretical explanations for the mobilization of diversity, equity, and inclusion discourses by universities and faculty in public relations campaigns, task forces, syllabi, and classrooms, as a response to perceived threats to power and capital from racial and social justice movements. Our poem problematizes the discourses of diversity, equity, and inclusion (a re-branding of multiculturalism), as well as critical theory and feminist discourses of hegemony-counterhegemony and transformative praxis and interrogates the power and subject positions of the actors pushing them. In the “Notes from a Colonized Student” section of the poem, we author liberation discourses of embodiment, emotion, vulnerability, anticolonialism, antiracism, feminism, defiance, difference, democracy, deep listening, and presence. See Wilkinson (2010) for the poetic theorization of these discourses in greater depth and complexity.