For me, the boldest, best argument in the book occurs in the Afterword(s) on "Contact and Negotiation," which demonstrates that even the most inviting metaphors can wear thin or prove problematic (also see his discussion of "frontier," 79-80), perhaps as the field outgrows its own keywords. As composition studies has committed itself to social theories and political approaches to writing, while trying to maintain its commitment to diverse, marginalized, or underrepresented writers, Mary Louise Pratt's image of the contact zone has become hugely appealing and has offered an alternative to the warm fuzziness of "community." Harris worries that too many treatments of the contact zone represent it as a "multicultural bazaar" where all are welcome but no one is ever challenged. Harris points out some of the usually overlooked elements of the contact zone: that it is "a space to which [no one] owes much allegiance" (119), and that it simply reproduces little utopias ("safe houses") where all can retreat when threatened by difference and where "expressing dissent gets romanticized" (120). Harris shows the serious limits of such a zone and encourages us to do what Pratt fails to do: "to get students to articulate or negotiate the differences among themselves" (118). Harris prefers the keyword "public": "a more urban and less utopian view of social life [that] might help us rethink the kinds of work that can go on in our classrooms" (108). Without idealizing such a space, Harris wants to promote tolerance and civility, "a willingness to live with difference" (109).

As Harris's readers wrangle with the keyword "public," they will need to come to terms with the burden of professionalism and to clarify the differences between being a professional (or an academic) and being a public intellectual. I like the way that Harris openly admits his own investment in composition's professional status (for example, as editor of *College Composition and Communication*), which co-exists uneasily with his worry that professionalization has loosened ties to the classroom (xi). With more books like this one, however, we can strengthen those ties through more "wrangling" and with greater intellectual integrity.

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When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy, Ira Shor (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996, 251 pages).

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In his influential article, "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," James Berlin held up Ira Shor as a shining example of the "New Rhetorician," applauding and promoting Shor's concern with student agency and lauding his efforts to counter the "arbitrary authority" to which students are often subjected

by the academy (491). But more than this endorsement, Shor's own outspoken articles on literacy and student-centered, critical pedagogy have made him an important leader in the debates about the methods and missions of the academy and of composition theory. Shor's new book, *When Students Have Power*, offers a chance to examine the self-reflexive theorizing that powers Shor's own pedagogical method in the classroom, and an opportunity to look at how those theories and methods play out in his practice as a writing teacher.

The setting for Shor's narrative is an undergraduate writing class entitled "Utopias," whose focus and content is based on an investigation of utopian ideals, and whose realities are found in the over-crowded basement classroom of building B-34 at City University of New York. Shor's book follows the day-by-day activities of his class, detailing the rationale and goals that are meant to determine classroom practice, reporting the class's responses, and evaluating the results in terms of those pedagogical goals. As might be expected, this approach creates an intriguingly honest and revealing book, and one that might be of particular interest to classroom practitioners of critical pedagogy.

Although primarily about how Shor's considerable knowledge of composition theory works itself out in practice, the account draws from the genres of creative nonfiction and literary narrative, producing, at times, a highly readable and entertaining text. But this mixed genre also occasionally threatens to muddle Shor's research methods. First, Shor writes that he has used the narrative form in order to produce what Stephen North called "teacher lore." But North's own view of teacher lore is that, no matter how practical, it is ultimately "undiscriminating, illogical, and sloppy," in that it operates strictly on "pragmatic logic" and an "experience-based structure" (North 27). I'm not sure what Shor hopes to accomplish by aligning his research methods with this "emergent genre in composition studies" (xi), especially since Shor's praxis actually relies more on conscious theorizing than on a strictly experiential approach. In fact, Shor's critical pedagogy, at least as it is described here, is consciously and relentlessly based on a blend of Freirean liberatory pedagogy, social constructionism, and progressive politics, and it is his constant searching to ground his practice in these positions that makes the book interesting and useful.

Unfortunately, Shor's book also reinforces North's worries about the methods of teacher lore. While I would not say that Shor's book is indiscriminate or illogical, it is, at times, methodologically messy. When Shor "reads" his student's seating preferences or presents transcripts of their conversations and excerpts from their papers, the book becomes a culture study of a speech community, or an ethnography. In other places, the book is variously a polemic on the value and difficulty of critical teaching, on the virtues of student empowerment, or on the nature of student resistance to institutional authority. Still, in other passages the book's self-reflexive tone threatens to become the confessional of a progressive, overworked, and occasionally overwhelmed writing teacher.

But while the book may be easy to criticize for its methods, it is also easy to admire for its ambitiously revealing look at how praxis may be fueled by self-reflexive theorizing, and how the best-informed teaching may sometimes lead to unexpected missteps and successes. The book is, in part, a very detailed and revealing examination of a speech community, and the description of the first day in class certainly qualifies as the "thick description" required by good ethnography. In these sections, Shor examines everything from the condition of the classroom facilities to the students' reasons for taking the class, and these sections are the most successful blend of narration, ethnography, and self-critical theorizing.

Using an extended metaphor, Shor explains why students choose to seat themselves in the back of the room (which he calls Siberia) or in the front, and describes his own attempts to disrupt the authoritarian architecture of the typical classroom in order to overcome its marginalizing and hegemonic effect. But this is also a prime example of why Shor's text is, thankfully, not "teacher lore" as defined by North. All of Shor's actions to disrupt the top-down, front-loaded nature of the traditional classroom are powered by a consciously self-critical understanding of language and composition theory (in this case the theories of Foucault, Vygotsky, Mary Louise Pratt, Don Dippo, Steven Gelb, and others) and not on a strictly experiential understanding.

Unfortunately, this same theorizing occasionally causes Shor to assume that certain methods will lead to specific results, and he is sometimes caught off guard by the students' unexpected reactions to his pedagogy. This is a position writing teachers must often find themselves in, and in a way, it is comforting to witness Shor's own difficulties and to be privy to his thoughts as he works out these difficult encounters with his students. Often problems arise because of a difference between Shor's and the students' expectation for the class.

Usually, Shor is successful at adapting his critical pedagogy to the contingencies of the classroom while remaining true to the central demand of his theorizing: that students take power over the content and form of their own education. Occasionally, however, he is surprised by student concerns, most often when student-generated issues—in this case, required tests, grading scales, class attendance, and participation—derail his own attempts to mobilize students "to question the mainstream values" they hold (53). What is surprising is that Shor seems completely unprepared for some of these student-generated concerns when they arise. For example, when he proposes that the class sign learning contracts and then offers them his prepared contracts for negotiation, they immediately propose that all tests be dropped from the contracts. Shor accepts this much student power without much ado. However, when one bold student asks how Shor knows "an A from a B" when he grades papers, all Shor can do is reply that "after twenty years of teaching English and reading papers, I try to be open, fair, and careful when I give grades" (82). That this question catches Shor completely off guard perhaps indicates that he may have misjudged his students' expectations for the educational system and their desire for a familiar type of authority. Shor seems surprised that students do not use the power he

grants them to control the content of the course, but rather to try and change the form of the class itself.

What occurs to me is that Shor, like the students, is held under the rule of an authoritarian system that undermines his best attempts to empower students and decenter the teacher, and that the students, at least in this situation, intuitively understand this more than he does. Since Shor has addressed the teacher-academy relationship in some of his other works, I wonder why he did not pause here to situate himself more clearly in his relationship to the academy and to discuss more how the institution's expectations of him affect his pedagogy. How can the teacher "wither away," as Shor hopes he will do, and still be the one who assigns traditional grades at the end of the class?

This is not an unanswerable question, and thankfully, one that Shor at least partially answers, admitting that grades in mass education "severely undermine the egalitarian image created by the enterprise" (86). Still, it seems odd that this is the first time Shor has encountered a student who questioned his grading methods, or that he has not theorized this position more fully in advance.

I hesitate to criticize further the particulars of Shor's experience in this specific setting, for I greatly admire his willingness to share the personal failures and successes of his classroom experience in such a revealing and honest manner. In fact, it is just this type of self-reflexive critical honesty that makes the book interesting and valuable for those "New Rhetoricians" who hope to inform their practice with a strong understanding of theory and a sense of their own ideology. Shor's book is also valuable because it demonstrates the pitfalls of pedagogies based in critical, Freirean, liberatory, and progressive theories in an unabashed way and so provides an object lesson to those compositionists who struggle to empower their own students.

Ironically, the strengths of *When Students Have Power* are also in many cases its weaknesses, and these weaknesses might be inevitable for this type of mixed-genre project. Methodologically, the book is messy, but so is teaching writing. The confessional tone of the narrative is occasionally disturbing, but so is truly self-reflexive educational practice. Shor invokes a dazzling and at times conflicting array of theorists and theoretical positions, bending and reinterpreting them to fit his praxis; but theories must be dynamic and adaptive to survive the contingencies of actual practice.

Most disturbing, though, is the way Shor's book demonstrates how teachers who attempt to practice critical pedagogy in the traditional classroom setting are often thwarted by the students and by the academy, especially by the ways in which both continue to view teacher authority:

> The authority I bring to class has to unbalance the democratic process. I could describe the imbalance this way: As a teacher, I am inviting and allowing the students to practice democracy rather than they having won this right for themselves. The experiment in negotiation is the result of my political initiative, not theirs, representing my long-term social development into such an agenda, not theirs. This makes power-sharing and social critique risky Utopian leaps for them, greater than the steps ahead I am taking with shared authority. (74)

Passages such as this one make *When Students Have Power* stimulating, despite its methodological melange and narrative indulgences. Practicing theory with such constancy is a difficult, messy, and revealing business—one in which the teacher often learns as much or more than the students do. It is indeed valuable to witness a compositionist of Shor's caliber learn his lessons.

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