INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the place and function of student writing have informed composition studies since the rise of the process movement in American higher education. As Sondra Perl notes in her introduction to *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*, this discussion was informed early on by empirical approaches that centered student writing processes as objects of inquiry. These studies often identified conflicts between and among the accounts of writing processes narrated by professional writers, those put forth in textbooks, and those observed in student writers (xii-xiii). What happened to the texts produced by the students in these scenarios is unclear. This lack of clarity about the relationship between the products of student writing and the field still pervades too much of our work. The resulting silences position students of our writing classes—especially our first-year writing classes—too strongly as consumers, too clearly as adapting to, rather than participating in and contributing to, composition studies. I begin here from a moment in time (the 1990s) when many compositionists were beginning to struggle toward redefinitions of student writer subjectivity that challenged this unequal positioning of members of the writing classes in relation to the field and its practices. I look at and move forward from that point in time as a person who saw the practice of teaching undergraduate students as a serious part of participating in and contributing to that struggle.

As Stephen Parks explains in *Class Politics: The Movement for Students’ Right to Their Own Language*, the configuration of composition studies that centered process while marginalizing the products of student writing became institutionalized, in large part, in the 1970s and 1980s through our professional organizations. Parks illustrates the ways that the version of students’ right to their own language (SRTOL), favored by the Modern Language Association (MLA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication
(CCCC), assumed individualistic notions of rights and language over more community-based and activist approaches to writing pedagogies and classroom practices (249–50). *Class Politics* is smart work in many ways, especially because it exposes that the process movement began a trajectory that led us to center internal conflicts as the business of composition studies. Read in this way, the history of composition studies emerges as an imperative within which professional discourses and the texts created by students can be kept apart from one another in significant ways. At the heart of the matter for Parks is the fact that the profession chose this path over the New University Conference (NUC) resolution that would have centered more political and social versions of the SRTOL movement, versions that would have challenged conceptions of composition studies as separate from progressive organizations and movements outside of the traditional structures of academia. Such a focus would have been based on

a professional perspective that understands the writing classroom as one point within a larger system of social and class oppression. Without a [professional] organization which creates connections between such scholars and political organizations, however, the critical mass needed to affect such possibilities in the definition of the writing teacher could not occur.¹ (209)

But this moment also marks a serious and defining set of decisions about the place and functions of undergraduate student discourses in the profession. For as Parks notes, SRTOL was part of a larger activist movement “that would focus on the student as a participant within the discipline of English” and, in the end, this was the “contentious question” that MLA, NCTE, and CCCC managed to write out of their SRTOL statements (71). In other words, the major professional organizations of the discipline set aside the issues of student agency and subjectivity as constructive in and of English studies, replacing them with arguments about the values of standard English given “the way things are.” Ultimately, the repression of student agency in the struggles that led to the formalized SRTOL statement failed to position anything other than middle-class white English as constituting the history of English in America. Parks states:
That is, in a resolution and a document clearly initiated by NUC activists to speak on behalf of African American and working-class students, it would appear that there is little demonstration of what their culture, language, or history represents about the historical development of English in the United States (186).

In the SRTOL statement. Within this frame, “the SRTOL language statement creates an image of dialects as a cultural problem which can be solved by the raised consciousness of its citizens” and “economic concerns are cast primarily in light of how to expand acceptable dialects within corporate capitalism, not how to use dialects to question it” as was the original intent of the NUC’s resolution (184). Using Black English as his case study, Parks shows how the rewritten SRTOL document “does not offer positive models of Black English’s impact on standard American English,” thereby constituting the dialects of Black English, and “non-standard” forms of the language more generally, as the “other” of English studies (186). From this point of view, inclusion of the “other” in “the way things are” takes the place of critiquing and revising the structures of discrimination that allow a false story of the history of English in America to stand as truth in order to construct a notion of a “standard” that rests upon the exclusion of the ways the “other” has, in fact, participated in and contributed to the construction of American English. One can then argue that standardization is necessary to inclusion, even as one argues that the acceptance of “other” dialects is, in and of itself, an important and noble cause.

It is not surprising that letting students tell their own stories in their own voices becomes a valued pedagogy at this stage in our history. But as Parks illustrates, this value is, sometimes overtly and sometimes through implication, a reaction against more radical views of the profession and of language, views that would 1) revise the false assumptions about who participated in and contributed to the history of English in America, and 2) define the writing classroom as a place where the inequities resulting from these false assumptions are addressed and challenged. This is why SRTOL had to work toward a position that defined language, and particularly standard English, as the source of access to resources and power,
claiming that anyone who used that form of English—regardless of race, class, gender, or ethnicity could become “equal” in American democracy. That is, students’ and many teachers’ roles in the writing classroom and in society more generally were restricted in particular ways, ways that favored adaptation to and consumption of standards and process “models” that favored those standards.

Within this frame, the distinction between process and product takes on particular forms. The process, no matter what it manifests is, in and of itself, somehow liberatory. The product, especially its place and function in the discursive field from which it emerges, is irrelevant. But this can only happen because that field itself, composition studies, and its concerns do not emerge as the content of the course. Process itself becomes course content. In “Paralogic Hermeneutic Theories, Power, and the Possibility for Liberating Pedagogies,” Sidney Dobrin explains the problem this way: “Even in the most politically savvy classrooms, process is generally taught by simply reinscribing knowledge, by perpetuating process thinking, by perpetuating inscribed methods of inquiry. . . . Students learn to repeat strategies (138–39). Dobrin later clarifies the consequences of centering process in the writing classroom in this way. “This activity means only learning the processes of a particular dominant discourse and simply reinscribing sets of processes. In many ways, this activity is exactly the sort of oppressive education against which liberatory pedagogies work” (139–40). Student writers and their texts cannot concern themselves with the assumptions, false or otherwise, about the discipline because other matters define the content of the products that emerge from student writing. It is not merely the language of process and or English that is standardized here, but a concept of student subjectivity that maintains students’ positions as consumers of the field.

The tensions created by centering students’ discourses in the classroom but disenfranchising those discourses in the discipline itself emerge as a defining feature of what I will refer to throughout this book as first-phase process model movements. While I will discuss these tensions at length in chapter one, it is important to remember that I am not using the term “first-phase” to designate a time period or a logical sequence. To treat the history or future
of composition studies as a linear progression from one stage to another with definitive breaks between and among those stages would be a mistake. Instead, I use the term “first-phase” in a way similar to that used by Elaine Showalter when she explains the stages of feminist literary criticism in her introduction to The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory. Showalter outlines three stages of feminist criticism. The first stage “concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practices, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history” (5). The second stage “was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominated our culture” (6). This stage led to “a massive recovery and rereading of literature by women of all nations and historical periods” (6). In its third stage, feminist criticism “demanded not just the recognition of women’s writing but a radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing” (8). Showalter is clear that these stages occur simultaneously, sometimes in integrated ways and other times as separate endeavors, and the essays in the collection exemplify each type and invite readers to conceptualize the relationships between and among them. This is not a matter of leaving things behind, but of moving between and among available methodologies with a purpose. First-phase does not refer to a historical time period, or to a single approach as we are used to distinguishing between and among those approaches (e.g., expressivist, cognitivist, etc.). Instead, first-phase writing process models as I define them here are those that bracket student subjectivity in ways that make it difficult for students and their discourses to become active agents in the field.

The fact is that there are components of those models that we cannot identify with as we attempt to revise a historical trajectory that brackets student subjectivity in this way. The ways that those models challenge the over-valorization of explication, the ways that they improve the status of student discourses in the classroom and
in the work of professionals in the field, the ways that they value student voices are not merely precursors to some “new” model. Rather, they are both analytic concepts that expose ideologies about writers and writing and generative ideas around which the field creates practices. The tendency to use different heuristics for the analytic and generative work of the field than those we hold out as appropriate for use by students becomes a serious issue if we wish to create more inclusive concepts of writing and of student writers within a process frame.

Throughout the course of this project, I have become increasingly convinced that while reading the process movement in this different way does not fit into the categories we usually use to tell that story, it is, nonetheless, vital to understanding the potential for more inclusive disciplinary practices that emerge in contemporary revisions to process theories, pedagogies, and practices. I engage in a critical relationship with current revisions to those models for the purpose of re-imagining the ways that we position student writers and student texts in relation to composition studies. This work, then, is an attempt to open spaces in which participation and contribution—rather than adaptation and consumption—can become defining features of the relationships between and among members of the writing classes who constitute composition studies.

The need for rethinking the field in light of this hope and purpose is most clearly outlined by Susan Miller in her 1991 book, Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition. Miller is particularly relevant here because she acknowledges the importance of remembering that

the prominent work of Mina Shaughnessey and of various process theorists like Linda Flower and Bartholomae has demonstrated [that] the prospect of theorizing composition instruction in terms of student learning and actual student writing has persistently captured the imagination and respect of many who otherwise doubt the “intellectual content” of the field [including many who teach in the field]. Consequently, the identity of the student in teaching, research, and administrative practices offers a key to the politics of composition in every issue considered here. (195)
Toward the end of *Textual Carnivals*, Miller outlines the two main ways that compositionists have projected their “posture toward their others” (181) since the more conservative versions of students’ language won out in the struggles Parks outlines as defining the professionalization of the teaching of writing in the 1960s and 70s. The first “posture” is to correct “how composition is ignored, trivialized, unequal and otherwise marginalized in comparison to more privileged departmental, collegiate, institutional, and social surroundings.” The goal here is to make composition “equal to its sister studies . . . [by] explaining unrecognized intellectual (if not ideological) connections between composition and literature, which could become two parallel strains in one disciplinary home . . .” (181). The second “posture”, which “the ‘process paradigm’ and empirical methods have highlighted is fundamentally separatist” (182). This posture aligns composition studies with “established social scientific research methods in cognitive psychology and ethnography and stresses links to research in established humanistic fields such as historical rhetoric and linguistics” (182). Miller criticizes “both the integrationist and the separatist moves because neither has worked on the fundamental structure that necessitates them” (183). She concludes that

both separatists and integrationists inadvertently reinforce their alienation by defending and maintaining the ‘studentness’ of a particular kind of writing, precisely as the student’s right. Keeping student writing in its place keeps composition studies in its place stably inside its regulated frameworks of inconsequentiality. (183–184)

That is, the internal fight suppresses and is restricted by the absence of considerations about the place of student discourse in the profession. To overcome this double bind, Miller proposes that we need “a genuine alternative that would further require questions and answers about human results for both students and composition professionals in their divisions, definitions, and new intellectual movements” (186). She concludes that “powerful attitudes toward student writers and unprivileged writing inevitably control the status of composition studies, its relations to those outside it, and its self-image and ways of working out its new
professionalization” (195). In 2000, Stephen North illustrated the ways that Miller’s insights apply to graduate studies in English, concluding in *Refiguring the Ph. D. in English Studies* that

all sorts of commentators, graduate faculty in particular, will propose changes in just about everything else—different readings, different graduate classroom practices, different teacher-training programs, shorter time to degree, and so on: anything, anything, anything other than giving doctoral students greater license in terms of what they might write. (260)

Like others in the field who are struggling toward opening spaces for contribution and participation to all members of the writing classes, North notes that the role of student writing is a key factor in such struggles. North is willing to be fairly aggressive about how to change the status of student discourses, but even the pedagogical approach he outlines as part of that struggle can fail to reposition student writing as vital to the profession if it fails to see students’ and teachers’ initial attempts as anything other than a starting place—a transition toward more inclusive practices (166).

As I will illustrate in the early chapters of this book, recent responses to the devalued position of undergraduate student writers and student writing have tended to leap over the relationship between these issues and the field itself in their attempts to revise composition studies. Three major revisionary trends in first-year writing illustrate this point: the turn toward cultural criticism, the turn toward community-based literacy activities, and the turn toward audiences outside of the field. Despite their tendency to bracket the profession as a forum for undergraduate student writing, however, some of these revisions to process-based approaches to first-year writing do value participation and contribution outside of the field as appropriate goals of pedagogy and appropriate purposes for student writing. In cultural studies approaches, critique drives the move away from consumption. In service learning approaches, community-based literacy work drives the move away from consumption. In social process approaches, the move toward student discourses that take relevant readers outside of the classroom
as an audience drives the move away from consumption. Ultimately, I argue, these revisions have excluded students from participating in the field of composition studies itself, thereby making it difficult for writing teachers and students to move away from models of consumption and adaptation.

Examining and understanding the contradictions between theory and practice that create, and are created by, these unequal notions of writing subjectivity is critical to redefining undergraduate student writers and their texts as part of our field, as subjects rather than as objects. It would be impossible to change the field in any significant way without acknowledging and working to revise the unequal relationships that drive a situation in which literacy is, by definition, primarily an act of consumption and adaptation for some and primarily an act of participation and contribution for others. Attempting to alter these relationships outside of the field without attending to the very real need for those same changes within the field is a mistake. When compositionists use pedagogies that ignore the field, they lose out on opportunities for positive changes within the discipline. That is why the current study focuses on the place of undergraduate students and undergraduate student writing in composition studies. My purpose is to open spaces that will allow us to conceive of participation and contribution as vital activities in the constitution of composition studies for all members of the writing classes, especially those involved in first-year writing courses.

The first chapter discusses and illustrates the importance of using the concepts of participation and contribution to analyze attempts to revise composition studies to open new spaces for student subjectivities. The second chapter looks closely at images of students and teachers embedded within process and post-process discussions of the teaching of writing to illustrate how these images affect four particular attempts at creating spaces for participation and contribution. Chapter three presents an approach to invention, arrangement and revision that simultaneously makes the discourses of the field more important and appropriate material for first-year writing courses, and makes the products of those courses more relevant to composition studies. Chapter four
presents a curriculum grounded on the approach presented in chapter three, with particular attention to the issue of faculty development. Chapter five places the work in relation to ongoing discussions about the relationship between theory and practice informing composition studies today. The epilogue discusses very recent work with a new group of faculty who are revising a first-semester writing course in ways that center participation and contribution as vital aspects of critical literacy.

The purpose of this book is to invite teachers of writing, especially teachers of first-year writing, to listen more closely to the ways that undergraduate student writers, their texts, and their teachers are vital to our profession. It is my hope that this work will inspire a commitment to transitions that will open spaces for participation and contribution to all of the members of our writing classes in collaborative and inclusive ways.\textsuperscript{4}