On the contrary, one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.

To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people. This objectivistic position is as ingenuous as that of subjectivism, which postulates people without a world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction.

Paulo Freire
_The Pedagogy of the Oppressed_

Everyone has felt how superior in force is the language of the street to that of the academy. The street must be one of his schools.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
_Nature_

I have been asserting that what critics call the crisis of literacy and education in America is less a deficiency in students’ skills and abilities and more a crisis in the legitimacy of the literacies that have been institutionalized within American colleges and universities. In the previous chapter, I have argued that the practices of literature and composition textbooks establish a decontextualized and universalized version of academic literacy. As linguistic representations of modernism, conventional academic literacies become meaningful within an institutional culture that aspires to totalization and unity, a culture which is situated within the subjectivity of the romanticized individual that, paradoxically, has been separated from its historical and social contexts. As indicated by the best-selling textbooks, academic institutions rely upon naturalized discursive practices that are informed, in one way or another, by culturally-bound rhetorical modes. These in turn, give rise to versions of the ideal
reader or writer as an essentialized rational mind communicating to other rational minds within a foundational version of the world based upon the primacy of a transcendent rationality and a search for universal Truths. As such, this (academic) version of literacy must deny difference and discontinuity, which, for students coming out of cultural experiences of fragmentation based upon the local, the specific, and the contingent, creates a fundamental inconsistency that, I believe, has contributed to the conditions that critics are calling crises in literacy and education. In other words, conventional academic literacies offer students a modernist cultural capital that, I believe, has little currency for students, who come to our classrooms from postmodern cultures.2

In the many challenges that have been made to conventional academic literacies, critics have been, at some level, challenging the modernist institutions that legitimize these literacies, yet these conventional literacies retain a currency as central educational practices within these institutions, in part, because of their historical prominence3 and because of the nature of academic institutions themselves. Nevertheless, the critiques of the practices of English departments, which have been popular for almost as long as there have been English studies and English departments, have been around so long and have produced so few changes4 that even the critiques have begun to receive their own critiques, which sound surprisingly similar to the original critiques. For example, Masu’d Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton criticize the “exploitative and oppressive character” of the ostensibly postmodern English departments at Syracuse, Duke, and elsewhere for the ways that “the dominant academy” participates in the “asymmetrical distribution of economic resources at a global level” (2). In many ways, the central issue, it seems to me, turns upon competing versions of cultural capital, and particularly on issues of authority and legitimacy in the conflicts between students’ (and, increasingly, American society’s) cultures and the cultures of the academy. Such a context seems to inform David Bartholomae’s observation that, in appropriating (or being appropriated by) academic discourses, students must negotiate a “compromise” between personal and disciplinary histories as they, in effect, invent the university “by assembling and mimicking its language,” or at least appearing to do so, long before they become proficient in these literacies. In the remainder of “Inventing the University,” he offers suggestions for establishing credibility and authority within academic culture(s), beginning with “simply stating” one’s “presence within a field of a subject” in the form of personal experience and, later, by “mimicking the rhythm and texture, the ‘sound’ of academic prose without there being any recognizable interpretive or academic project under way,” in order to assist students’ in their appropriating efforts (590, 611–12). In other words, Bartholomae seems to be suggesting that students
must negotiate a position within academic cultures through an effort of will from which they can “speak our language” or “carry off the bluff” until such time as they have developed proficiencies in these literacies.

However, he seems to idealize the college student and the social institution of the university, which leads to two significant problems. First, he appears to be overly sanguine about students’ agency, as if they can generate such a compromise between relatively uniform personal and disciplinary histories with ease. Second, he seems to ignore the political realities of academic institutions, which, on their own, are relatively inflexible and impervious to students’ efforts. From the perspective I described in the prologue, I want to argue that Bartholomae’s compromise is perhaps better defined as a paternalistic “take it or leave it,” in which the students (and teachers, I would add) must accept the terms established by the institutions. Or they can resist, often at significant personal and intellectual cost if they’re tenacious enough to remain in the institution (as Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Helen Fox, and others have demonstrated) or a social and, ultimately, economic cost if they opt out altogether—which, according to ACT, Inc., more and more are doing. Bartholomae’s compromise, and perhaps even Bizzell’s, situates the authority and legitimacy entirely within institutional cultures. In order to establish a credibility, students must acquiesce, or give the appearance of acquiescing, to these cultural values, or, if they intend to resist, they must do so within institutionally prescribed ways—what Bartholomae calls taking “possession” of the discourse by locating “themselves within it aggressively, self-consciously” or doing intellectual work “within and against conventional systems” (607). Thus, the forms of resistance are determined before those students who dare to resist even do so.

Now, I do not want to deny the insights that Bartholomae has into the realities that students encounter in classrooms. In fact, he has done much to help me, and others, I’m sure, understand students’ experiences—both what I was up against when I was a student and what the students with whom I work today encounter—in their efforts to earn their degrees. What I would like to do, however, is to reconsider the issues of authority and legitimacy with respect to academic cultures. If the crises in literacy and education are, in fact, crises of meaning and legitimacy, then looking for ways to help students invent the university, particularly through the compromises that Bartholomae has suggested, cannot dissolve these conditions. In beginning and ending in academic institutions, Bartholomae leaves the sole basis for authority and legitimacy in academic cultures, which are alien to students already. What I want to suggest is that, in order to resolve these crises in meaning and legitimacy, academic literacies and academic institutions must be reinvented in ways that recognize the legitimacy of both the cultures of the academy and the cultures that students bring
with them into classrooms. However, this is much easier said than done, as Bizzell explains near the end of her article “Arguing About Literacy”:

I do not know that anyone has yet articulated a truly collaborative pedagogy of academic literacy, one that successfully integrates the professor’s traditional canonical knowledge and the students’ noncanonical cultural resources. Certainly I cannot do so. It is extremely difficult to abrogate in the classroom, by a collective act of will, the social arrangements that separate professors and students outside the classroom. Integration has not been achieved if the students are simply allowed to express affective responses to canonical knowledge as conveyed by the professor, or if the professor simply abdicates the role of guide to the tradition and encourages the students to define a course agenda from their own interests. (251)

Ignoring, for now, Bizzell’s implicit denial of the legitimacy of teachers’ noncanonical practices, often referred to as lore, and of the legitimacy of students’ canonical practices, however fragmented, which they bring with them into classrooms, the political difficulties that she acknowledges must be negotiated in order to generate a collaborative literacy. And this can lead to a dialogic legitimacy, one that emerges from both academic cultures and students’ cultures, that can resolve the conditions that critics have called crises in literacy and education, not to mention the concomitant issues of authority that, even within her explanations of her own classrooms, has drawn critical attention.7

In classrooms in American schools, the effort that comes the closest to generating such a dialogic legitimacy is what critics and teachers have called critical literacies. From Maxine Greene to Patricia Bizzell and Henry Giroux to Donaldo Macedo and countless others, there are many who argue, both in theory and in practice, for the potential of critical literacies to transform English studies and education in American colleges and universities. Though many neo-Marxists, such as Louis Althusser, Göran Therborn, and Michel Foucault have influenced the tradition of critical literacies and radical pedagogies in American colleges and universities, the authoritative source for critical literacies has been Paulo Freire, and, in particular, his early works, which bring together marxist theories of culture with Freire’s own personal, political, and religious experiences into a social humanism and marxist materialism. In Education for Critical Consciousness, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and other early works, Freire argues that reality is constructed through concrete social relations, which can be subject to critical analysis through literacy practices. For Freire, oppression is the condition of accepting naturalized and legitimimized class relations as natural and legitimate, a condition in which, according to Freire, some people have constructed the world for others.9 Using Freire’s own terms, the “ontological vocation” of humans is to become subjects who act
upon and transform their world in ways that lead to fuller and more satisfying experiences, both collaboratively and individually. According to Freire, people can come to understand the historical and social nature of reality, as situated within social relations, through the acquisition of what he calls a critical consciousness, which emerges from an analysis of experience, an awareness of contradictions between the world as described and the world as experienced, and action that rereads and rewrites the world through literacy acts. When combined with authentic dialogues, critical consciousness can lead to a praxis that transforms the world, a praxis that, Freire maintains, is a necessary element of critical consciousness and, obviously, social transformation. In educational situations, the praxes of Freire’s critical literacy, or what he calls a critical pedagogy, involves students and teachers in a dialogue that originates in the specific material and social conditions in which they find themselves, a dialogue that, unlike Socratic dialogues, denies universal and transcendent knowledge and meaning in favor of a constructed intersubjective reality. Also called a problem-posing pedagogy, these praxes involve historical and social contexts through the use of generative themes in order to problematize reality and to dissolve the traditional subject positions of students and teachers, which Freire sees as being antithetical to critical literacies. Along with reconfigured relationships between students and teachers, the praxes of critical literacies lead students and teachers to collective action that alters social conditions.

Though, in his early work, Freire limited his analyses primarily to class, his later work acknowledges additional cultural variables, such as gender, and later theorists and teachers have resituated his original observations within postmodern contexts. In U. S. educational contexts, these postmodern rereadings and rewritings of Freire have, in general, taken three different forms. The first is that of postmodern critical rhetorics, which has largely focused on using rhetorical approaches to understand the intersections of class and society. For example, Raymie McKerrow has defined postmodern critical rhetorics as a synthesis of Freirean critiques of domination and power into a theory and praxis of critical rhetoric, freed from the dominations of Platonic theory, that rely upon contingency, epistemological doxa, and critique as performance. Other manifestations of postmodern critical rhetorics have called for using rhetorical studies as a way of recognizing the rhetorical designs of an epoch and critiquing postmodern culture, and for bringing together rhetorical practical wisdom with audiences. The second is that of postmodern critical literacies, which focus predominantly upon the politics of schooling in American society. For example, Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren have edited a collection of essays entitled Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern, in which numerous theorists and teachers advocate postmodern critical literacies
as an approach to studying writing and reading practices, as a way of preparing students with the skills to critically assess dominant and subordinate traditions and to disrupt universalized versions of reason and linear notions of history, as a means of interpreting the social present for the purpose of transforming cultural life through investigating the communication strategies that construct and position subjectivities, and others. The third is that of critical multicultural literacies, which, though not wholly distinct from the second, deliberately extends the context beyond class to identify other cultural variables, such as gender and ethnicity. For instance, Danny Weil in *Towards a Critical Multicultural Literacy*, defines a critical multicultural education as one that invokes an educational equity, a culture-specific reasoning, and an understanding of the logic of oppression (131 ff).

In spite of the increasing popularity of critical literacies in American education and their reinscriptions within rhetorical, postmodern, and multicultural contexts in American colleges and universities, the ways that critical literacies have been practiced in classrooms often fail to resolve the conflicts between competing cultures that have generated the conditions that critics have been calling crises in literacy and education. While I do not pretend to speak definitively on these failings, I can see at least two related reasons for this failure. First, the proponents of critical literacies in American colleges and universities have generally avoided analyzing the practices of each other—which, given the politics of critical literacies, is unexpected though often seems to be the case in early generations of scholarship. In some ways, it seems as if Freire’s explicit and implicit assertion that, while the theories transfer, the practices of critical literacies must emerge from specific contexts has granted an authority to those who have been associated with Freire specifically and with his practices generally. The second reason, and one that is more clearly linked to the conditions that critics have called a crisis in literacy and education in America, has to do with the issues of legitimacy in classrooms characterized by teachers as critical. In short, these classrooms tend to grant legitimacy either to institutional cultures, or to the cultures of students lives, and they often ignore the ways that the praxes of critical literacy invoke a collaborative legitimacy that emerges from the dialogic interactions of these cultures. Often, these classrooms tend to impose an ultimate legitimacy upon the practices of the institution though, perhaps more alarming, such a legitimacy is often couched within an appearance of privileging students’ cultures at the expense of institutional cultures.

In each of these shortcomings, the problem is the way that these classrooms maintain the distinction between literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below, which often take the dualism of school-based literacies and popular literacies. In “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital,” Richard Ohmann
uses the terms *literacy-from-above* and *literacy-from-below* to describe the literacy practices that occurred within communities in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the practices that were appropriated by state institutions, such as school, in both England and America. These terms, I believe, can be used to understand the relationship inscribed between school-based literacies and popular literacies, a hierarchy in which school-based literacies, as literacies-from-above, have legitimacy and other versions of literacy, as literacies-from-below, do not, regardless of the cases to be made for (e.g., the intellectual sophistication and linguistic aesthetics of) these alternative literacies. For instance, Geneva Smitherman makes a powerful case for African-American English in *Talkin and Testifyin*, and Patricia Bizzell makes a similar case in “Hybrid Discourses,” and yet the classrooms that recognize the legitimacy of using Africa-American English or Bizzell’s hybrid discourses for intellectual work are, I would argue, few and far between. In maintaining this distinction, these classrooms fall prey to the danger that Freire outlines in the epigraph to this chapter, for a distinction between literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below often gives rise to an objectivism and subjectivism. In these situations, classrooms grant a legitimacy either to literacies-from-above or to literacies-from-below, or, even more confusing for students, some, as I shall demonstrate, appear to authorize students’ literacies, as literacies-from-below, while ultimately privileging conventional academic literacies, as literacies-from-above, making it all the more difficult for students to appropriate, or to allow themselves to be appropriated by, the literacies of the academy.

In this chapter, I shall turn our attention to the classrooms of James Berlin and Ira Shor, whom I have chosen for two reasons. First, both of them have been influential in the theories and practices of postmodern critical literacies and English studies, and second, each of them represents an opposite end of the objectivism-subjectivism dualism that, almost by necessity, denies a collaborative legitimacy. Within the critiques that I have been making of literacy, meaning, and education in America so far, as well as my critique, in this chapter, of critical literacies in college classrooms, one way to read Berlin’s and Shor’s

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I cannot remember when I first learned to write and read, though I do have distinct memories of trying to teach myself. Shortly after I was two, my parents moved us from St. Louis, where my brother and I had been born, to a small rural community in southern Illinois, where my father set up his medical practice and where the Catholic church would play a significant role in my life for the next fifteen years. I remember sitting on the concrete stairs outside my father’s medical office, mimicking the scrawls I had just seen him scratch across his
classroom practices is to see them in the terms that Freire uses in the epigraph to this chapter. Particularly when the world of students, at least within the classroom, is limited to academic institutions, the terms that Freire uses enable me to offer a reading of Berlin’s and Shor’s classrooms that indicates the ways that they, too, are complicit with academic institutions and participate in the conditions that have given rise to what critics have called a crisis in literacy. Using Freire’s terms, I would want to argue that the objectivism of Berlin’s classrooms lies in his insistence upon neo-marxist methods for reading and writing the world that leave students without the will or means to assume responsibility for their own literacies. By contrast, the subjectivism of Shor’s classrooms is in the ways that he focuses primarily upon transforming students’ consciousnesses while leaving the material structures of classrooms and academic institutions intact and unchanged. In the case of the former, the goal is to master a particular way of reading and writing, which reenacts a classroom narrative not unlike the banking mode of education—an exchange of cultural values being the only difference between Berlin’s literacies and conventional academic literacies. In the case of the latter, the focus of classroom attention is upon students’ worlds and students’ lives beyond the classroom, and—potentially, at the expense of their lives within the classroom—is achieved in

patients’ charts, and I recall the recognition during one morning mass of discovering the discursive organization behind lines and stanzas of church songs.

For the most part, writing and reading were things I did at home, because my peers were different, and things I did at school. In my mind, reading and writing were obvious responses when the adults grew weary of conversations or when I had finished the week’s homework on Monday because, for as long as I can remember, I have been obsessed by language and discourse. As a child, my nickname was WJBM—the call letters of the local talk radio station. My mother claims that the year before I started school, I approached a future teacher to explain that my father was an obstetrician and gynecologist and that I would explain those words if she wanted. During elementary school, I would read the dictionary for hours, fascinated by things I’d learn later to call polysemy and etymology. Early in my first year at the Catholic grade school that I would attend for eight years, one of the nuns took me to the public library after school and persuaded the angry librarians to allow me to check out whatever books I wanted. Teachers began to send me to the school’s library during class, so often, in fact, that most of my memories from grade school are of climbing chairs to retrieve a book from the shelf and then reading, for hours on end.
ways that leave them without the literacies to survive their psychology classes and their economics courses, let alone to transform the institutionalized ethnic, gender, and class biases of academia. Moreover, again, I will suggest that Shor’s classroom practices are particularly difficult for students to negotiate because of the ways that they embed an ultimate legitimacy in the literacy practices of the academy while appearing to recognize the legitimacy of students’ literacies.

And while I may be tipping my hand too early, let me explain that, in subsequent chapters, I want to examine classroom practices that aspire to a collaborative legitimacy by bringing together both the objectivism of sanctioned discursive practices (including, yet not limited to conventional academic ways of writing and reading) with the subjectivism of students’ and teachers’ experiences, both inside and beyond the classroom, and aspire as well to a version of literaci(es) that enables students to reread and rewrite classrooms and the academy through the ways that they negotiate contingent ways of reading and writing in specific contexts. First, a word about the postmodern critical literacies of Berlin and Shor.

THE CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND LITERACIES OF JAMES BERLIN

Though James Berlin consistently challenges the practices of conventional English departments, he is perhaps most explicit about his until I wandered back to the classroom. By fourth or fifth grade. I had read myself through most of the books in that small, Catholic school library, at least the books I wanted to read, such as Poe’s The Fall of the House of Usher or biographies of Benjamin Franklin or Allan Pinkerton. I even tried reading some of the ones that were uninteresting, such as Punt, Pass, and Kick, but I quickly abandoned these in favor of rereading the ones I previously read.

From that day in first grade. I became an outsider even within my own homogeneous-white, middle class, rural, catholic—community. Increasingly aware of this outsider status, I began to insist that I was being punished for talking too much in class, and I started arguing with older students that A’s actually meant awful and F’s fantastic. By the time that one teacher began bringing books, such as Orwell’s 1984 or Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities, for me, I had perfected elaborate resistances, which I would detail to my peers. until I succumbed to my curiosity a night or two before my response to the book was due.

High school was worse though by this time I had learned to sit silently through honors courses as I completed grammar drills and read ahead in the textbook while the teacher lectured on the genealogy of Zeus and
alternatives in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, and since, as he explains in his acknowledgements, *Poetics* elaborates and expands upon texts and ideas that previously appeared in a number of other venues, I will rely predominantly upon it in my efforts to describe his classrooms and the literacies they endorse (ix). Specifically, the part of *Poetics* that I want to focus upon is his description of two hypothetical courses, based upon experiences which he and teaching assistants had over the previous four years,\(^\text{19}\) that serves as his material performance of his disciplinary and institutional challenges. His introduction to these courses is important, particularly in the ways that he theorizes about them: “Both are designed to involve students in an equal share of writing and reading, with student responses at the center of classroom activity. The two courses insist on a balanced inclusion of poetical and rhetorical texts. In short, they are intended to challenge the old disciplinary binaries that privilege consumption over production and the aesthetic over the rhetorical” (*Poetics* 115). His prototype for an alternative literature course, which he calls “The Discourse of the Revolution,” is organized around “a consideration of signifying practices and their relation to subject formation within the contexts of power at . . . important moments in political and textual history, focusing on texts and their contexts in England during the time of the two Hera. All the while, I maintained that distinction between the writing and reading outside of school and the writing and reading in school.

In my first year of high school, I qualified for the summer Gifted Program with the second highest score in the school, and refusing scores directing me towards math and science, I persuaded school officials to allow me into the English program, where I publicized my desire to learn to write. After a session or two of the thesis statement and unity and coherence, I explained to the teacher that I wanted real writing, not school writing. So the next day, upon returning from a walk in the neighborhood around the school, she asked us to describe what we had seen, and on reading my description, she assured me that I would never become a writer.

That fall, I was assigned to Charles Tom VonAlmen’s sophomore honors English class. The rumors about him—that he had been a green beret in the war, that he had stuffed a student in a locker, that he was the meanest teacher in the district—scared me more than the summer teacher’s declaration. On the first day of class, VonAlmen cursed at me because I was too frightened to ask my question again, and yet before the semester was over, he would become my best friend. Partway into the semester, he approached me during class...
revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century—roughly between 1775 and 1800” (131-32). The course serves as a site where students examine both rhetorical and poetic discourse in “interacting generic, ideological, and socioeconomic environments” in order to enable them “to consider the ways in which the signifying practices in texts were working to form subjects, to create particular kinds of consciousness along the lines of gender, class, race, age, sexual orientation, and related categories” (135). In this classroom, students would read rhetorical texts in ways that elicit “the recommended subject position” and poetic texts in order to understand “the intense conflict over poetic forms that appeared at this time and the relation of these differences to economics and politics” (137, 139). In a related way, Berlin’s prototype for an alternative composition course, which he calls “Codes and Critiques,” centers, at least in theory, around “reading and writing the daily experiences of culture, with culture considered in its broadest formulation” through a variety of texts, including advertising, television, and film: “The course consists of six units: advertising, work, play, education, gender, and individuality. Each unit begins by examining a variety of texts that feature competing representations of and orientations toward the topic of the unit” (116). With the central concern as “the relations of current signifying because he heard that I was training for the St. Louis Marathon, and he had just started running. Besides our affair with language, our interest in running became the basis for our friendship until his death just before I finished the Ph.D. Over the next several years of high school, he and I would talking about books as we ran across miles and miles of empty country roads, and on the weekends, I would sit in his living room with his wife and kids as he talked about a piece of my writing I had shown him.

In many ways, college wasn’t much different. To be sure, there were certain classes that engaged me, such as my introductory history course where the professor asked us to read Neil Postman’s Amusing Ourselves to Death, or my introductory composition course where Jeff Skoblow, who would become my mentor for the Dean’s College, spoke about writing in ways I could recognize. However, most of my classes were more of the same—sitting through lectures, memorizing lists, taking multiple choice exams, etc. My literature and composition classes were so dissatisfying that I changed my major seven or eight times, yet I always returned to English hoping, like a battered spouse, that this time, things would be different. Unfortunately, the Shakespeare comedies classes and the American literature surveys were more about tests and grades and less about
practices to the structuring of subjectivities,” this course begins with students’ experiences and encourages them to negotiate and to resist these codes towards “more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements,” which is the only way for students to become “genuinely competent writers and readers” (116). In exploring these units, students are to “discuss the culturally coded character of all parts of composing—from genre to patterns of organization to sentence structure” in an attempt to understand how inconsistencies are not problems of reference but rather “interferences of a social and political nature,” and the ultimate goal of “Codes and Critiques” is to prepare students for “critical citizenship in a democracy” (130-31).

From these classroom practices, it is possible to understand the version of literacy that dominates Berlin’s classrooms. In theory, the literacy of Berlin’s classroom identifies the practices of reading and writing as “inescapably political act[s], the working out of contested cultural codes affecting every feature of experience” that rely upon “teachers in an effort to problematize students’ experiences, requiring them to challenge the ideological codes students bring to college by placing their signifying practices against alternatives” (131). In fact, he is quite explicit in his theorizing about the functions of discursive practices in his classrooms:

satisfying reading and writing. During my last semester, I signed up for an advanced writing course, where I first began writing about the problems I encountered in classrooms, the same problems that would become the basis for this book.

Unconvinced that graduate school would be any different and yet unsure of what else to do next, I took the GRE examination one bright January morning and emerged to gloomy winter afternoon feeling stupider than I had ever felt before. Five weeks later, I discovered that I had earned a nearly perfect score in math, an almost perfect score in logic, and a mediocre score in verbal abilities. Convinced that the problem was mine, I explored philosophy, education, and other graduate programs and, in fact, sat through my first graduate course in a different department, before returning to the English department, where in pursuing a M.A. with a specialization in writing, I once again hoped for the reading and writing that were satisfying and fulfilling. The writing classes were interesting, and the classes in women’s literature, class literature, and gothic literature were less stultifying. At the same time, I entered the classroom as a teacher at the veteran age of twenty-two at the St. Louis Community College teaching two sections of at-risk writers.

In the spring, I arranged to do an independent study on
In enacting the reading and writing process, students learn that all experience is situated within signifying practices and that learning to understand personal and social experience involves acts of discourse production and interpretation, the two acting reciprocally in reading and writing codes. Students discover that interpretation involves production as well as reproduction and is as constructive as composing itself. (130)

From this theoretical vantage, the practices of reading and writing in Berlin’s classrooms are acts in which “different conceptions of economic, social, and political conditions are contested with consequences for the formation of the subjects of history, the consciousness of the historical agent,” which necessarily rely upon context in order to generate meaning (132).

Comparing the practices of Berlin’s two classrooms, the acts of reading and writing appear somewhat different. In his literature classroom, the act of reading involves a conventionally prescribed method from secondary to primary sources, a method that, in the end, maintains the rhetorical-poetic distinction that he seeks to dissolve. For example, students begin their reading of rhetorical texts with a “consideration of concrete economic, social, and political events of the period,” such as Michel Beaud’s A History of Capitalism or Linda Colley’s Britons: Forging the Nation, and then turn to “changes in publication practices and the reading public, in Ian Watt’s “The Reading Public and the Rise of the Novel” or T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens when I discovered the Gateway Writing Project, the local site of the National Writing Project. Immediately, I dropped the independent study and applied for Gateway’s summer invitational institute, which was scheduled to meet for six weeks during July and August at Harris Stowe State College. During these six weeks, Michael Lowenstein, Jane Zeni, and others at Gateway provided me with a model of education (teachers teaching teachers), a methodology (reflective practice and action research), and, perhaps most importantly, a discourse which would enable me to talk about my experiences as a student and, increasingly, as a teacher, thereby extending what had, up to that point, been a personal search into a social context—the discourse of critical literacy.

That summer, Michael concurred that the legitimacy of a Ph.D. in English would afford me the authority to continue my efforts to understand the disparity between literacies in the world and literacies in the classroom and to construct classrooms in which I could bring the satisfying experiences of writing and reading from my life outside of the academy. Because of my previous experiences with
Bridge Hill’s Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England (132-34). Only after completing their readings of the context can students turn to reading primary texts, such as George Campbell’s The Philosophy of Rhetoric or Hannah More’s Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, a process which is prescriptively begins with determining “the recommended subject position” by eliciting “who is allowed to speak and who is allowed to listen and act on the message of the speaker,” then considering “rules for evidence” in ways that raise “questions of epistemology and ideology” by uncovering “the available means of persuasion, principles that distinguish true from untrue knowledge, indicating what counts as real and what is ephemeral, what is good, and what is possible,” and finally ascertaining “the manner in which language is conceived in each rhetoric, considering its relation to knowledge and its role in bringing about agreement and disagreement” (132-34, 137-138). As for reading poetic texts, students follow a similar pattern for secondary texts except for the fact that the texts are identified as works of poetic theory and criticism, such as Samuel Johnson’s Rasselas or “Preface from Shakespeare,” appropriate sections from Hugh Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, and William Wordsworth’s “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (140). Again, students can, only after completing their readings of a theoretical context, turn to “poetry itself,” beginning with canonical texts, such as Johnson’s The Vanity of Human Wishes or George Crabbe’s The Village and then, considering noncanonical texts, such as Anna Leatitia Barbauld’s “Washing Day” and “To the Poor” or Phyllis Wheatley’s Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral (141-42).
In a similar way, Berlin is surprisingly prescriptive as to what it means to read in his composition classroom. In his explanation, for example, of how students are to read a newspaper article from *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “The Days of a Cowboy Are Marked by Danger, Drudgery, and Low Pay” from a unit on work, he instructs them, first, to begin by considering the context through “exploring the characteristics of the readership of the newspaper and the historical events surrounding the essay’s production” in order to identify “key signifiers” (117). Next, readers are told to “place these terms within the narrative structural forms suggested by the text, the culturally coded stories about patterns of behavior appropriate for people within certain situations,” such as race, class, and gender (118). Finally, they are directed to “situate these narrative patterns within larger narrative structures that have to do with economic, political, and cultural formations,” such as examining “capitalist economic narratives as demonstrated in the essay and their consequences for class, gender, and race relations and roles both in the workplace and elsewhere,” such as the distribution of work in beef production (118–19). In the same unit on work, Berlin instructs students to read “selected episodes” from situational comedies in order “to learn to analyze television codes as well as to gather evidence for their essays on the cultural organization of work and its place in forming subjectivity in their lives” (120). In reading this way, students “learn to see these domestic comedies not as simple presentations of reality but as re-presentations—that is coded constructions—of an imagined reality” (120).

Given his ostensive agenda, it is surprising that Berlin is much less explicit and voluminous about the practices of writing in his classrooms. At one point, he writes that students “should keep journals, prepare position papers for the class, and even imitate and parody the materials of the late eighteenth century in an attempt to understand the methods of signification called upon and their relationship to economic, social, political, and cultural constructions” (136). Besides this list, Berlin suggests that “students’ final project might thus be to critique these simple binaries [in neoclassical and romantic poetry], testing the adequacy of them when measured against their own estimates” (144). Nevertheless, he is much more elaborate about the practices of writing and thinking in his composition classroom though he is no less prescriptive in both form and functions. For example, he asserts that students, in response to their readings of situational comedies, should begin by producing “descriptions of the physical settings of the homes and the characteristic dress of the characters depicted in the two programs” in order “to recognize that the sets and costumes are created by the producers of the shows” and “not simply video copies of actual homes and people . . . ” (120). Such descriptions, he claims, lead students naturally into dialogues about the depicted class differences and the relation of
these differences to “work, income, and ideology,” which, in turn, become discussions and analyses of “subject formation, television, and cultural codes” (120-21, 122-23). Finally, students are instructed to consider “the medium’s effects in shaping subjectivity among views” and to discuss “the manner in which they negotiate and resist cultural codes championed in the programs that they watch” in order “to come to terms with the apparatuses of culture as they create consciousness” (123-24). The net result of this and other prescribed processes are fairly traditional texts, such as descriptions or analytical essays—though, to be fair, he does encourage parodies, and reports that he has “experimented with students producing their own short videotaped productions” (120, 129, 136, and 128).

Given these discursive practices, the sanctioned subject positions of the literacy in Berlin’s classrooms are somewhat different from those positions endorsed by conventional academic literacies. Theoretically, Berlin asserts that, in his classrooms, discursive practices are explicitly connected to “larger historical conditions and the formation of historical agents” in the process of “consciousness formation within concrete historical conditions” (Poetics 105; “Literacy” 261). As such, the subjectivity of readers and writers represent “the point of convergence of conflicted discourses” and is “itself the product of discourse rather than the initiator of it,” and not, he seems to suggest, what students do with these discourses (“Literacy” 261). In practice, the sanctioned subject positions are ones from which students can interpret and critique alternative discursive practices and see the value of political struggle and democratic education (Poetics 112). For example, students must assume positions from which they can compare “representations of the two revolutions” in order to understand “the varied formulations that different generic, ideological, and socioeconomic frames encourage,” as is the case in his literature course, or from which they can analyze newspaper articles from The Wall Street Journal within their “generic, ideological, and socioeconomic environment[s]” (145, 117). To assume these positions, students must be willing to resist the “cultural codes, the competing discourses that influence their position as subjects of experience,” including, presumably, those they have experienced in more traditional classrooms (116). For another example, students must assume vantages from which they can identify textual binaries, cultural conflicts, sanctioned subject positions, textualized rules for evidence and meaning, and the function of language in knowledge and communication (117, 132, 137, and 138). Through developing awarenesses that language and textuality are “the terrain on which different conceptions of economic, social, and political conditions are contested,” students can develop “different conceptions of economic, social, and political conditions” in ways that give rise to
new subject positions of readers and writers for “critical citizenship in a democracy” (131).

In a related way, the discursive practices of Berlin's classrooms give rise to versions of the world that challenge those sanctioned by conventional academic literacies. Berlin theorizes that his alternative classrooms define literacy as the act of empowering students and others to name the world as it is experienced, in order to act and to assume control even as literacy “enables the individual to understand that the conditions of experience are made by human agents and thus can be remade by human agents” (101). In his classrooms, meaning and knowledge, he asserts, are the results of experiences situated within discursive practices, and reality—which is defined by economic, social, and political terms—is negotiated through discourse and language (130, 131). Similar to shifts in the subject positions of students, the sanctioned positions for teachers and the versions of learning and education shift, theoretically, in Berlin's classrooms to one from which teachers encourage “complex reading and writing strategies and practices” in order to facilitate an understanding of English studies as “the signifying practices of text production—academic discourse, political discourse, poetic discourse, scientific discourse, media discourse—as well as the signifying practices of text reception,” both of which must be considered in historical and ideological contexts in ways that foreground the politics of literacy (111). In a similar, and theoretical, way, canonical epistemologies, as well as the canon itself, are a product of discursive practices and the functions of literacy and education are primarily to prepare students “for public discourse in a democratic political community” and secondarily to prepare them “for personal and private pleasure” and for “communication in their careers” (110).

However, the practices of Berlin's classrooms suggest a different story, one that comes much closer to resembling conventional classrooms insofar as traditional academic literacies and Berlin's political literacy are both literacies-from-above. At least in the ways that he describes his classroom practices in Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures, his agenda, and an academically legitimate agenda at that, is imposed upon students through his classroom practices, as well as the version of literacy that they naturalize, that center upon rhetorical and poetic discourse in “interacting generic, ideological, and socioeconomic environments,” an agenda for learning and literacy that is imported into classrooms and imposed upon students rather than being an agenda that is collaboratively negotiated with students. (As other critics have pointed out, Berlin privileges his own cultural capital, an academic cultural capital, at the expense of others.)21) Though, in theory, he does do something of a postmodern reading of critical literacy, his classroom practices subordinate this postmodern critical literacy to his neo-marxist cultural agenda in a way that denies the
context-specific conditions of critical literacies in favor of the context-free, or universalized, culturally neo-Marxist literacy. Though he professes to recognize the authority of students’ experiences, he situates them, at best, as qualified participants who merely supply their experiences and react, for example, to teachers, who select the six units of study and the texts to be analyzed in composition classrooms and who determine which versions of “the history of the time” are most useful and which primary and secondary texts to consume in literature classrooms (116-17, 132, 136). Surprisingly, Berlin acknowledges the significance of authority: “As I indicated earlier, authority should be shared as much as possible. While the teacher sets up the syllabus, maps out a diverse body of readings, and offers methods for responding to them, students should have a choice in activities, assume leadership roles in instruction, and participate in an ongoing dialogue on the issues explored” (135). In designating teachers alone as the source of syllabi, readings, and literacy practices, Berlin endorses paternalistic practices in classrooms. In spite of any professed desire to authorize students, these classrooms constrain students, for instance, to presenting their groups’ interpretations of texts recommended to them, seeking conflicts in social narratives identified for them, and completing assignments given to them (135-36), none of which invests them with legitimacy.

As is always the case, his classroom practices, as discursive acts, give rise to subject positions for students and teachers. In his descriptions of his classroom practices, Berlin actually acknowledges the ways that his classroom practices give rise to qualified positions for students characterized by an explicit essentialism that reflects his neo-Marxist agenda:

We start with the personal experience of students, with emphasis on the position of this experience within its formative context. Our main concern is the relation of current signifying practices to the structuring of subjectivities—of race, class, sexual orientation, age, ethnic, and gender formations, for example—in our students and ourselves. The effort is to make students aware of cultural codes, the competing discourses that influence their position as subjects of experience. Our larger purpose is to encourage students to negotiate and resist these codes—these hegemonic discourses—to bring about more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements. From our perspective, only in this way can students become genuinely competent writers and readers. (116)

What makes it more confusing is the way that he professes to be examining the relation of “signifying practices to the structuring of subjectivities,” all the while providing essentialized subject positions for students, the positions of cultural studies, through his classroom practices. In a similar way, not only
does Berlin deny difference in the subject positions of the co-teachers in his “mentor groups at Purdue” whose “shared experiences over the past four years” gave rise to these practices, but he also sanctions essentialized subject positions for student readers and writers, through his own (hegemonic) discourse, that prescribe against difference. Not surprisingly, these practices and subject positions produce universalized versions of meaning and learning and education that are imposed upon classrooms and students. For example, engaging in the naturalized ways of reading imposed upon his composition classrooms “leads, in turn to the a consideration of the ways conflicts in cultural codes are typically resolved in television programs,” which, in the case of *Family Ties*, “the program tended to present the upper-middle-class professional nuclear family as in itself the answer to all of life’s problems—an extension, one student noted, of the Reagan administration’s contention about the place of the family in resolving economic and social problems” (123). Though I believe that one student whom Berlin cites did, in fact, connect *Family Ties* to the Reagan administration, I wonder whether the readings of other students, whose voices are conspicuously missing, were permitted to read *Family Ties* differently. If we are to take Berlin at his own word (“From our perspective, only in this way can students become genuinely competent writers and readers.”), I think we can safely assume that they were not.

As such, Berlin’s practices produce a classroom literacy in which students have education done to them, from above—versions of literacy and education that are discredited in Freire’s most cited work on critical literacies—rather than classrooms in which students’ literacies have any credibility or authority. In this way, Berlin enacts an objectivism that seeks to transform the objective world without a corresponding shift in students’ subjectivities. In Berlin’s classrooms, students exchange the uniformity of conventional academic literacies for the uniformity of culturally neo-marxist literacies. Though Berlin, in theory, connects students’ awarenesses of the relationships between discourses and experiences to “more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements,” the ways that he insists upon naturalized ways of reading and writing, conventional roles for students and teachers, and traditionally hierarchical versions of meaning and education ensure that students continue to do student-ing in the authorized ways. Again, there is a seeming inconsistency between Berlin’s practice of theory and his practice of teaching. In theorizing about the ways of reading rhetorical texts in his literature classroom, Berlin writes that

> [i]n examining the sections of these rhetorics selected by the teacher—or, as often happens, by a student group working collaboratively—class members should
interrogate the texts in a particular way. This does not mean, I should caution, that one only method of reading should be tolerated in the class. No one expects students to abandon their customary methods of interpreting texts. Indeed, old and new hermeneutic strategies should interact in the students’ reaction to the text, and this interaction should become a part of the ongoing class discussion as well as written assignments. (137)

First, Berlin’s ostensive collaboration is not quite a shared authority but a qualified authority that ultimately fails to challenge the authority of the teacher.23 Earlier, he explains that, since “[a]ll texts cannot be read in their entirety,” small groups are assigned, or perhaps allowed to select among “the diverse body of readings” that the teacher “maps out” (135). Second, what seems to be a contradiction between instructing students to “interrogate the texts in a particular way” and tolerating multiple methods of reading is resolved in Berlin’s ensuing explanation: “Students should first determine the recommended subject position of the interlocutor portrayed in the rhetoric along with the corresponding subject position indicated for the audience,” and “[s]tudents should also examine the rules for evidence these rhetorics display, a concern that deals with questions of epistemology and ideology” (137). In a similar way, Berlin’s explanation of reading situational comedies in his composition course invokes a determined way of producing texts, beginning with students “writing descriptions of the physical settings in the homes and the characteristic dress of the characters depicted in the two programs” and concluding with them discussing “the manner in which they negotiate and resist the cultural codes championed in the programs they watch” (120-23). Furthermore, he fails to consider whether the students who appear in his classrooms actually value discursive practices that interrogate cultural codes or whether they are forced to accommodate them in order to pass the courses, almost implying that these particular ways of reading and writing are relevant and credible to all students. Moreover, Berlin is silent about his classroom practices in response to readers and writers who, for one reason or another, refuse to engage in the discursive practices that he suggests the “must” or “should” do.

By prescribing the results of these and other discursive practices and by neglecting to consider their relevance for specific students and particular semesters, Berlin has virtually ensured that all of the students in his classrooms remain relegated to conventional roles in traditional classrooms—the same ones that many students with whom I have worked have encountered throughout most of their educational histories. Similar to the idealized reader sanctioned through the practices of the best-selling textbooks, the ideal reader in
Berlin's classrooms is essentialized with only the basis for this essentialization different. For example, a reader who cannot, or will not, distinguish between the function and authority of Colley's Britons: Forging the Nation and More's Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education or who cannot, or will not, recognize "narrative patterns" or who cannot, or will not, situate them “within larger narrative structures that have to do with economic, political, and cultural formations,” or who cannot, or will not, even recognize such formations as authoritative or relevant, will not be able to read successfully, at least in the ways that Berlin defines reading in his classroom assignments (134, 137, and 118). In a similar way, Berlin's classrooms invoke a foundational world that gives rise to universalized understanding of education and of English studies, with the only difference being that Berlin privileges a neo-marxist foundationalism instead of the enlightenment foundationalism. For example, Berlin's foundationalism can be seen in his explanation of the context for his literature classroom:

Convictions about the existent, the good, and the possible are premises based on conceptions of the economic—the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of wealth—and of political power—the distribution of authority in decision making. During the late eighteenth century, for example, disagreements in England about the colonies usually involved the place of the New World in the economic pursuits that England was encouraging for its own profit. Yet the arguments that disputants offered frequently underplayed the economic interests of an emergent merchant class and the compromise it had reached with the old aristocratic class in favor of religious or patriarchal concerns—the moral responsibilities of the governed to their government or the natural duties of a child to a parent. The emergence of a new ruling group in economics and politics was thus at the heart of the dispute, but the ideological terms of the issue often assumed the language of the old order. Arguments about taste in literature likewise usually involved class conflicts created by the economic ascendancy of the capitalist class. (107)

Though he uses conditionals, such as usually and frequently, he clearly privileges a neo-marxist narrative, which he offers as an undisputed basis for meaning, knowledge, and understanding not only of eighteenth century England but also of his literature classrooms. Not only does this neo-marxist narrative form the basis for meaning in Berlin's literature classrooms, but it also serves as the foundation for his version of the discipline:

English courses must become self-consciously committed to the study of divergent reading and writing practices. Whatever literary and rhetorical texts are chosen, all must be considered in relation to their conditions of production, distribution,
exchange, and reception. Students should examine both the variety of audiences for these texts and the variety of ways that texts were received in their own time as well as the corresponding audiences and reception strategies across time. (105).

In failing to acknowledge that conflict is the defining characteristic of education and academia (as Gerald Graff argues in Beyond the Culture Wars) Berlin denies the provisional condition of his narrative and offers it as a foundation from which the eighteenth century in England, his literature classrooms, and the discipline of English studies can be understood. Finally, it is telling, I think, that Berlin is able to recognize the political dimensions of authority and decision making in the eighteenth century, but he does not acknowledge the same dimensions of his classrooms, a condition that while perhaps leading to minor changes in the focus of English classrooms, ultimately leaves students’ subject positions, as well as their experiences in and of meaning and education, unchanged.

In spite of the ways that his classroom practices impose a literacy-from-above and enact versions of meaning and education that ignore the presence of students, there is much that I value about Berlin’s classroom practices—the ways that it foregrounds the interplay of discursive practices and reality, the use of historical and social contexts in which to understand texts and meaning, or the importance of education that produces social change (117-19, 131-35, and 102 ff). However, their shortcomings ultimately raise important questions about legitimacy and literacies that his classrooms cannot resolve. Though, personally and professionally, I value the ways of reading and writing that Berlin endorses in his classrooms, I am uncertain whether teachers should insist that students read and write in these ways. And I am even less comfortable with the idea of assessing and evaluating on these terms students who do not find these literacies relevant to their experiences and their lives. By insisting upon the literacies that Berlin has sanctioned, teachers potentially deny the autonomy and legitimacy of students’ own literacy agendas. For example, his emphasis upon a particular methodology leaves students without the will or the means to assume responsibility for their own literacies, and his classroom practices do not enable students to reread and rewrite his own classroom, let alone academic institutions. At the same time, these practices deny the contingency of the classroom upon teachers and students, and they give rise to a version of literacy that, at least in its essentialism and foundationalism, maintains the conditions that critics have called a crisis in literacy and meaning. I would argue that the literacies that Berlin endorses would be relevant only in classrooms in which, prior to instruction, all of the students indicated a desire to develop neo-marxist, or, at the minimum, resistant, ways of reading, writing, and thinking. As a result, I
question how much his classroom practices empower students, as he claims they do, for in the end, they amount to naming the world for students in particular ways.

THE CLASSROOM PRACTICES OF IRA SHOR

At this point, I want to shift the focus from Berlin’s classroom practices to the classroom practices of Ira Shor in order to consider a somewhat different problem with the ways that postmodern critical literacies are produced in the classrooms of American colleges and universities. If Berlin’s problem is an objectivist literacy-from-above, then Shor’s problem lies in the ways that, in his practices, he neglects the politics of the dominant literacies by privileging literacies-from-below, all the while tacitly dismissing these literacies—a contradiction that not only fails to resolve the conditions that have been called a crisis in literacy and education in American but also neglects students’ literacy needs and disempowers them further. Since Shor spends most of his time describing classroom practices generally and much less time on the practices of literature and composition classes specifically, I will follow his lead and describe his theorizing about his classroom practices in general (about which he is most explicit in *Empowering Education*) and then I will turn to his descriptions of literature and composition classrooms specifically.

In theorizing his classroom practices as “student-centered” yet “not permissive or self-centered,” Shor explains that the practices are “negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher and mutual teacher-student authority” that “does not teach students to seek self-centered gain while ignoring public welfare” (*Empowering* 15-16). In his classrooms, students “develop skills and knowledge as well as high expectations for themselves, their education, and their future” (16). Though teachers lead and direct the curriculum, they do so “democratically with the participation of the students, balancing the need for structure with the need for openness” (16). Theoretically, teachers contribute “lesson plans, learning methods, personal experience, and academic knowledge to the class,” and yet, at the same time, they negotiate “the curriculum” with students and begin with the “language, themes, and understandings” of students (16). Within his explicit “agenda of values,” these classrooms, he theorizes, are participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, and activist (17 ff). Later, Shor outlines a general framework of model for classrooms practices:

1. Pose a problem
2. Write on it
3. Literacy development
4. Peer group discussion
5. Class dialogue
6. Pose a new problem
7. Write on it
8. Literacy development
9. Peer group discussion
10. Class dialogue
11. Integrate reading material
12. Writing/dialogue on the
Readings → Interim evaluation/adjustment of the process → Dialogic lecture → Student response to lecture → Discussion solutions/actions → If possible, take action and reflect on it → Pose new problem → End-term evaluation. (252-53)

Though he suggests that “[t]he dialogic process is self-evolving, not standardized,” he explains that these “phases,” in his own words, “help me focus on dialogic practices” (237). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the model “should not be followed as a prescription or taken as guarantee of success” because “[t]eaching requires the creative reinvention of even good suggestions so that methods reflect the local situations” (253).

Elsewhere in *Empowering Education*, Shor describes how his theories about a “dialogic process” would be reflected in classroom practices of literature and composition classrooms. In a hypothetical literature classroom in New York, Shor explains that he might begin by asking students to write and discuss their responses to the question “Is street violence a problem in your lives?” after which he would instruct them to transcribe their “family members’ opinions on the issues” for class discussion, thereby extending “the inquiry into everyday life and make the theme a family experience, not merely a classroom-bound exercise” (81). Next, he explains that he would ask students “to jot down their ideas, expand their notes, and choose the order for the points they wanted to make in their essay” before using peer critiques designed to discuss good writing and the problem of violence. Then, he describes how he would “stimulate their imagination in rethinking this social problem” by asking them “to produce fiction,” such as a story in which “someone tries to stop violence in [their] neighborhood,” which, after revising in response to feedback they had received from their families, he would publish in “booklets for the school and neighborhood” (82). Only after “seeking the audiences to read the students’ stories to encourage their self-image as writers” would he turn to the literary texts by comparing “how violence has appeared in different texts through the ages—the official literature published in books”—including nonfiction narratives and sociological essays, as well as fiction—“compared to their unofficial self-created texts” (82). Turning to history, this literature class next “could move backward in time, to examine other moments of violence, like the slave revolt of Spartacus or accounts of Wat Tyler and the Middle Ages or *Romeo and Juliet* or *Henry IV* or the Puritan Army debates of the 1640s or chronicles of Columbus pillaging the Native American societies that he found or narratives of slave life and rebellion in the Old South” or numerous others (82). Regardless of which direction it took, Shor explains, he would instruct students to compare the reactions of their families to one piece of “literature” that the students read aloud. Finally, he would ask students to respond to another
set of questions, such as “what changes are needed to reduce violence? What should the mayor do to make your neighborhood safe? What should the police do? What should neighbors themselves do?” which, with the students’ permissions, he “might send . . . to the mayor, the police chief, to local papers, and to community organizations for their reply” (82).

As for typical composition classrooms, Shor describes a first-year writing course at a “mostly white college in New York City,” in which he began by asking students to write in response to a series of questions: “What is good writing?” “How do you become a good writer?” “What questions do you have about good writing?” and “What are the hardest and easiest things for you as a writer?” (37). After rereading their responses individually, students read their responses to a partner, focusing upon similarities and differences in their answers, and then they read their responses to the entire class, after which Shor and the students discussed each question (38). The students’ replies, along with his own, formed the basis for following classes, which, after exhausting this initial focus, centered upon other social issues: “I asked them to write down the social issues most important to them and to bring in news articles about them, as their self-selected themes and reading material. I photocopied some of their readings for class discussion and compiled a list of their themes in ballot form. They voted on which we should take up in class” (38-39). Finally, Shor “re-presented their most popular themes,” such as personal growth, in what he describes as “a long process of writing, reading, discussion, and critical inquiry” (39).

If the sanctioned version of literacy in Berlin’s classrooms is noticeably different from conventional academic literaci(es), then the version of literacy that Shor’s classroom practices, at least at first glance, seems more so. These practices, Shor theorizes, take part in what he calls “a dialogic pedagogy,” which is “initiated by a critical teacher but is democratically open to student intervention,” a pedagogy that strives to balance “the teacher’s authority and the students’ input” in a way that includes students’ “right to question the content and the process of dialogue, and even to reject them” (85-86). Drawing on Freire, Shor asserts that not only does dialogue connect people “through discourse” and “moments of reflection to moments of action,” but it also offers an implicit challenge to the practices and content of traditional classrooms:

Dialogue is a democratic, directed, and critical discourse different from teacher-student exchanges in traditional classrooms. For one thing, it becomes a meeting ground to reconcile students and teachers separated by the unilateral authority of the teacher in traditional education. Secondly, dialogue is a mutually created discourse which questions existing canons of knowledge and challenges power relations in the classroom and in society. (86, 87)
Unlike Berlin, Shor seems to make no distinction between poetic and rhetorical discursive practices in the way he theorizes literature and composition classrooms. In these, reading and writing are established as mutually informing practices that, at least to some degree, invoke each other. For example, Shor offers a number of approaches to Henry V in a Shakespeare class that invoke this dialogic relationship among various discursive practices: enacting the opening scene and relating it to students’ experiences; responding to the theme of power throughout the play; debating Hal’s right to the throne within the context of Salic Law and Hal’s family tree; using the play to launch a discussion about the relative status of national laws, such as slavery or the unions; comparing the play to other social injustices in American society; rewriting scenes and speeches in order to experiment with alternatives; and others (152-56). In regard to the composition classroom described earlier, Shor writes that

> [i]nstruction in writing began with this participatory approach. It continued in a student-centered way as I used their questions about good writing as starting points for more exercises—“How do you begin writing an essay?” for instance. Instead of delivering a lecture about good writing or assigning exercises in grammar or providing a model essay for students to imitate, I presented good writing as the first problem to write on and discuss, drawing out their words and perspectives as initial texts for discussion and more writing. This class began from their own starting points, which I re-presented to them as further problems for writing and debate. (38)

As dialogic and mutually informing, these discursive practices theoretically supplement traditional academic practices of reading and writing, insofar as they legitimate traditionally dismissed practices, such as producing ethnographies in literature classrooms or reading newspaper articles in composition classrooms.

According to Shor’s theoretical explanations, the version of literacy sanctioned by his classroom practices offer a range of subject positions for students. Unlike Berlin, Shor acknowledges the legitimacy of positions of resistance, both to traditional classroom practices and to his own classroom practices. For example, he describes the ways that students were able to resist his learning contracts or attendance politics (When 92 ff). To this end, Shor’s practices even authorize various resistant positions, such as the “scholasticons”, or positions assumed by the “handful” of students who “want to sit” near the teacher and who “identify with school discipline while expressing their own novel forms of resistance,” and the “siberians”, or the positions assumed by those students who fill “the distant corners first, representing their subordinate and alienated position, which drives them to seek the remote seats of any classroom they inhabit,” these self-constructed “intellectual exiles as far from the front of the room as they can be” (13, 12). Through the practices of his classrooms, he theorizes,
students recognize “that socialization and curriculum are political processes of inclusion and exclusion,” and they are thereby authorized to reread and rewrite their positions as students and their classrooms and educations (Empowering 119). Furthermore, he authorizes these positions with a greater legitimacy when he situates the causes for students’ resistance within larger historical and social contexts, such as uneven levels of development, vocationalism, prior schooling, acceleration and amplification of mass culture, exposure to regressive ideologies, short amount of time in class and on campus in institutional settings, disadvantaged languages, discourses, and literacies, demanding family lives, and poor health and nutrition, and, additionally, in the ways that he assigns responsibilities for overcoming these positions to both students and teachers (210, 217 ff).

As expected, Shor theorizes a link among his classroom practices, these subject positions, and challenges to traditional versions of teachers and classrooms. According to Shor, the practices of his classroom, which “focus on power relations in the classroom, in the institution, in the formation of standard canons of knowledge, and in society at large,” examine “the social and cultural context of education, asking how student subjectivity and economic conditions affect the learning process,” which situate “[s]tudent culture as well as inequality and democracy” as “central issues to problem-posing educators when they make syllabi and examine the climate for learning” (Empowering 31). Drawing extensively upon Freire, Shor theorizes that his classroom practices posit “human beings, knowledge, and society as unfinished products in history, where various forces are still contending” and where students participate “in the contention over knowledge and the shape of society” that, at least theoretically, situate students directly in the construction of knowledges and classrooms:

This does not mean that students have nothing to learn from biology or mathematics or engineering as they now exist. Neither does it mean that students reinvent subject matter each time they study it or that the academic expertise of the teacher has no role in the classroom. Formal bodies of knowledge, standard usage, and the teacher’s academic background all belong in critical classrooms. As long as existing knowledge is not presented as facts and doctrines to be absorbed without question, as long as existing bodies of knowledge are critiqued and balanced from a multicultural perspective, and as long as the students’ own themes and idioms are valued along with standard usage, existing canons are part of critical education. (35)

What is transformed is the relationships that students and teachers have to learning and authority: teachers and students, as “allies for learning and for democracy in school and society,” are no longer “adversaries divided by unilateral authority and fixed canons” (35). Instead, they “redefine their relationships to each other, to education, and to expertise,” and they “re-perceive
knowledge and power” by challenging “[f]ormal bodies of knowledge, standard usage, and the teacher’s academic background” through generative, topical, and academic themes (35, 55 ff). According to Shor, generative themes, which “make up the primary subject matter,” emerge from “student culture and express problematic conditions in daily life that are useful for generating critical discourse” (55). At the same time, topical themes are “social question[s] of key importance locally, nationally, or globally” that are not “generated directly from the students’ conversation[s]” but are products of teachers’ intervention that “ask students to step into territory ignored or covered uncritically by the standard curriculum and the mass media” and “to push against the limits of knowledge in everyday life” (55, 58). In addition, academic themes are comprised of “material brought to the discussion by the teacher, not generated from student speech” that originate “in formal bodies of knowledge studied by specialists in a field,” which neither come from “student culture” nor from “a political issue or topic society” but from “structured knowledge in a teacher’s field” (55, 73-74). According to Shor, both topical and academic themes offer ways to problematize “formal and advanced learning” in ways that generative themes cannot, insofar as topical themes expose “the social world of events mystified by the mass media and by the official syllabus” and that academic themes provide access to “the remote world of specialized knowledge” (83).

According to Shor’s explanation, the versions of literacy sanctioned by his classroom practices enable students to investigate “social experience[s] in education” and offer students “new values, relationships, discourse, knowledge, and versions of authority.” These, in turn, enable them to resist their “socialization into the myths, values, and relations of the dominant culture,” such as “the official content of the textbook or the canon,” through “a dialogic discourse in a mutual inquiry,” an “invented discourse” that he theorizes as “the third idiom, because it is different from the two conflicting ones brought to class by students and teachers: nonacademic everyday speech and academic teacher-talk” (117-18, 255, original emphasis). Given the degree to which the third idiom theoretically represents the literacies of Shor’s classrooms, I want to provide a lengthy explanation in Shor’s own words:

The dialogic third idiom is simultaneously concrete and conceptual, academic and conversational, critical and accessible. As dialogue begins, the students’ language of everyday life is familiar and concrete but not critical or scholarly; the teacher’s language is academic but not colloquial or concretely related to students’ experience. The dialogic process overcomes their noncommunication. It transforms both idioms into a new discourse, the third idiom, which relates academic language to concrete experience and colloquial discourse to critical thought.
Everyday language assumes a critical quality while teacherly language assumes concreteness.

This invented third idiom philosophizes experience while experientializing philosophy. As a discourse evolved in a democratic process, it rejects the unilateral transfer of culture from the teacher to the student. A mutual transformation of academic and community cultures is necessary because teacher-talk and everyday talk are both products of an unequal society. The knowledge and language that exist in daily life and in the academy cannot by themselves produce social and intellectual empowerment. The culture of schooling and the culture of everyday life in nonelite communities need something from each other to transcend their own limits. The current academic canons of language and subject matter need to be transformed in a multicultural way with and for students, to reflect their language and conditions. (255-56)

In other words, the dialogic interaction between the literacies that students bring with them to the classroom and the literacies of the academy transforms students’ and teachers’ discourses in such a way that, in the tradition of Hegelian synthesis, produces a new discourse, a discourse that, in Shor’s words, “philosophizes experience and experientializes philosophy” in ways that lead to social and intellectual empowerment (255-56).

Before I turn to a critique of Shor’s classroom literacies, I want to acknowledge how much he—as much as Berlin or even more—has influenced my own thinking about literacies and teaching. Significantly, Shor theorizes a legitimacy for students’ literacy practices, and he sanctions positions for authority and responsibility for students in their learning (When 116 ff). Through his characteristic narrative, he offers an accessible way of thinking and talking about negotiated curriculum, classrooms, and institutions, as context-specific sites that draw upon competing versions of cultural capital, and collaborative education as interdisciplinary practices of integrated literacies across the curriculum (Empowering 44 ff, 187 ff). Besides recognizing Shor’s influence upon me, I should also acknowledge that reading Shor’s classrooms in this way has been difficult. His classroom practices are uneven, but this is so in part, I suspect, because of what he calls their contingency and specificity. In order to read his classroom practices, I have had to regularize them, which means that, as is always the case, certain instances and particular examples have had to be ignored in an effort to make connections and to draw conclusions—and this makes such a reading somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, I believe that making these generalizations about Shor’s classroom practices and their implications for classroom literacies does reveal something crucial and important about literacies, legitimacy, and meaning.

My reading of Shor’s classroom practices and the literacies that they sanction goes like this: in the classroom, Shor fails to enact his theoretical visions
because, like Berlin’s practices, Shor’s classroom practices inscribe a binary between literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below; unlike Berlin’s, Shor’s practices explicitly authorize students’ literacies, but ultimately he denies their legitimacy, which results in what Freire’s calls a subjectivism that leaves the social structures of classrooms and institutions unchanged. In doing so, Shor’s classroom practices tacitly deny the politics of conventional academic literacities even as they ultimately authorize them as the only legitimate literacies. As a result, Shor’s classrooms do not empower students, as he hopes they do, because they enact artificial dialogues that leave the social structures of classrooms and academic institutions intact, not to mention the larger social transformations that Shor’s critic Irene Ward cites (102 ff). Though Ward bases her criticisms of Shor’s classroom practices—that they are “limited and self-contained dialogues” which ignore the larger social world and which deny students’ authority—primarily upon Shor’s early work *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, I believe that his later works—*Empowering Education* and *When Students Have Power*—reinforce her criticisms. In addition, they reveal both the artificial binary between literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below and the contradictions between the explicitly and implicitly authorized literacies, both of which, I maintain, reinforce the conditions that critics have called contemporary crises in literacies and education.

If the major problems with Berlin’s classroom practices are that, in conflating critical and cultural literacies, they invoke a context-free literacy that is imported into classrooms and imposed upon students, then the problems with Shor’s classroom practices are somewhat different—that they invoke the same binary between literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below by seeming to privilege students’ literacies all the while imbuing academic literacies with an ultimate legitimacy in ways that, in the end, leave classrooms and institutions relatively unchanged. First, Shor’s practices seem to privilege students’ literacies, almost to the extent that they deny the political realities of conventional literacies, and in doing so, they marginalize the discourses and the literacies that would enable students to acquire social and political power. For example, Shor explains, in the description of his literature course cited earlier, that he would begin with a question about students’ experiences of street violence and then ask them to produce texts from interviews with their families, to write essays on violence in communities, and to produce fiction in which characters resist street violence. Only after “seeking out audiences to read the students’ stories to encourage their self-image as writers” would he turn to the institutionally legitimized purpose of the course—consuming texts traditionally considered to be literature, which he would supplement with nonfiction narratives and sociological essays, which students would take to their families for their
responses. After this, to complete the process, Shor would ask students to produce an additional piece of writing in response to social questions about the reduction of violence in their neighborhoods, which, with their permission, he would distribute within the community (81-82).26

Second, he invokes essentialist versions of literacy that ignore the power of sanctioned discourses and privileged cultures. Though Shor, in his descriptions of his practices, reveals his essentialist literacies in several practices, such as what he calls Think-Itemize-Write, dictation sequence, or, as Ward also cites, voicing,27 I will limit myself to dictation sequence, which, as he describes it, clearly denies the cultural conflicts inherent in classrooms:

The key feature here is connecting spoken language to written language. Dictation involves not only mental imagery, but also speaking, listening and composing, in a phased technique. The dictation sequence begins by asking students to break into groups of two. One member of the team will be dictating his or her verbal thoughts on the theme for composition, while the second member of the unit will record, on paper, verbatim, what the person speaks. Then the two change places, the recorder becoming the speaker and the speaker becoming the composer. The students are asked to gain a sharp mental picture of the things they want to speak before they begin talking to their partners, and each recorder is urged to ask the other to speak as slowly as necessary to get every word down. (131)

In justifying this practice, Shor explains that “it is important to make clear that the written language of our culture is nothing more than encoded speech” and that “[s]tudents should make a connection between their speaking language and the act of writing language on paper” (131). Though “transcribing the language of a peer,” assuming that the practice includes “respectful care,” may legitimate students’ discourse, which, Shor maintains, “turns out to be far richer than they had imagined,” it ensures that students remain confined within their “own native speech,” thereby virtually guaranteeing their positions as outsiders to academic discourse communities, unable to change them or even to participate in them.

In his endorsement of students’ primary and popular discourses, Shor denies the politics of literacies in classrooms and in society. Though Shor claims that, at least in theory, his classrooms do not work against “subject matter, scholarly knowledge, or intellectual passion” in their attempts “to recover that eagerness to learn” (84), this literature classroom that he has described does marginalize the very subject matter and scholarly knowledge of literature courses, as defined by academic communities. While I would applaud his efforts to connect classrooms and students’ lives, and while I would agree that traditional classrooms must be changed, I believe that beginning and ending with, and devoting the bulk of the
time to, activities and experiences other than those identified as legitimate by the academy is to place students at a disadvantage by denying them experiences that would enable them to reread and rewrite their classrooms and their educations. Furthermore, to marginalize the experiences that their peers would have in other sections of the same literature course is to deny them experience with the cultural capital of the academy, thereby ensuring that, to the degree that literature courses prepare them for the close reading expected of students in colleges and universities, they are at a greater disadvantage.

In his composition classrooms, this same denial is evident. As for the Think-Itemize-Write, there is seeing, and then there is seeing, and, as we all know, some ways of seeing are more powerful than others. Whether or not students, in their “native idiom,” have “strong speaking skills,” the connections that Shor suggests they make in the dictation sequence “between their speaking language and the act of writing language on paper” (131) deny them the experiences with the conventional discourses and literacies of the academy and ensure that they will remain powerless to effect changes in classrooms and institutions. Finally, Shor’s practice of voicing reveals his essentialism at the sentence level, suggesting that meaning is separate from and independent of language, which he implies is merely a vehicle for its transmission, and ignoring his own theoretical conclusions about the importance of cultural contexts and discursive politics. While Shor is right, I think, when he argues that “[m]ost students possess more language skills than they will display in school” and that “[t]he turn towards student reality and student voices can release their hidden talents” (130), his failure to foreground the conflicts between students’ cultures, which makes these “language skills” meaningful, and the culture(s) of the academy, which makes these talents hidden talents, denies the politics of literacy that will prevent students’ from rereading and rewriting their experiences in any way that will be granted an institutional legitimacy, which is necessary in order to effect change in classrooms and institutions.

In his haste to assert the legitimacy of students’ cultures—that is, presuming that students even need to be informed of their cultures’ legitimacy by their teachers—Shor overlooks the manner in which his practices authorize conventional academic literacies with the ultimate, and in some ways exclusive, legitimacy in his classrooms, which merely reinforces traditional institutional formations. While his day-to-day class activities and assignments laud the power of students’ primary literacies in ways that deny the politics of sanctioned literacies in the academy, his assessment methodologies reveal that conventional academic literacies are the ones that count. In Empowering Education, Shor describes his use of learning contracts. Since he tells students that he would prefer those who plan to earn a D or an F to drop his course at the outset,
his learning contracts, which he distributes during the first week of the semester, only describe three grades—A’s, B’s, and C’s:

For each grade, I usually propose different levels of participation, attendance, length of papers, number of papers, project work, books to read, and so on. I hand out the contracts, ask students to read them, discuss them, and then ask questions for whole-class negotiation. Then I ask them to take them home, think them over, and make one of three choices: sign the contract as proposed and amended in class at a specific grade level, or negotiate further changes with me individually, or throw the contract out and negotiate a new one of their own design. (159)

On the surface, Shor’s practice of learning contracts appears to invite students to collaborate in the assessment of their classrooms, yet a closer analysis indicates otherwise, as the criteria he lists—“different levels of participation, attendance, length of papers, number of papers, project work, books to read, and so on”—suggests. In *When Students Have Power*, Shor offers two versions of learning contracts from a 300-level elective literature and humanities course on utopian societies—his proffered contract and then the negotiated version—both of which are worth examining. As for the first, his proffered contract reveals Shor’s expectations for students’ performances and literacies. As suggested by this contract, Shor expects the average student to “write 500 words on each of three assigned books” and “[d]o one Utopia project and hand in a written report (500) words on it,” as well as have “C quality on written work,” in order to be assigned a C. He expects the superior student to “write 1000 words on each of the three assigned books,” “make class presentations” on “two Utopia projects, one on changing the College and one on changing NYC,” and “hand in a written report (1,000) words on each,” including “A quality on written work,” as well as have “all work handed in on time” and “be a leader in class discussion” in order to receive an A (77). Surprisingly, Shor’s expectations are thoroughly conventional, and, at least at the level of his expectations, students must engage in conventionally academic literacy acts in order to earn these grades. The negotiated contract merely reinforces these conventional expectations: “C-level minimum words (500) on all written work,” written responses to “all 3 assigned books,” “sometimes” participation in class discussions, and a written project report, including “C-quality writing on all written work” for the average evaluation and “A-level minimum number of words (1,000) on all written work,” written responses to “all 3 assigned books,” leadership in class discussion through responding to other students, keeping the dialogues focused, and participating every class,” two group projects or one project and participation in an out-of-class group, and two written reports and class presentations on projects, as well as “A-quality writing on all
written work” for the superior grade (120). Interestingly, the major differences between Shor’s proffered contract and the negotiated contract are a provision that enables students to rewrite homework assignments “for a higher grade if handed in on time and if redone one week after [the students] get them back” and a clarification of his expectations for leadership in class discussions and for the projects (120).

As I read Shor’s use of learning contracts in this 300-level literature and humanities classroom, I am surprised, given both his practices of theory and classroom assignments from Critical Teaching and Everyday Life and Empowering Education (which foreground students’ literacies almost to the exclusion of conventional classroom literacies), by the ways that the standards for literate performance in these classrooms imbue conventional academic literacies with the ultimate legitimacy. In other words, at least in Shor’s literature and humanities classroom, the ultimately legitimate literacy acts are those that have traditionally dominated classrooms in U.S. colleges and universities: three to four page papers with specific word limits, oral in-class presentations, reports on projects, etc. Given this contradiction, the sanctioned literacies in Shor’s classrooms may be even more difficult for students than Berlin’s. While Berlin’s sanctioned literacy resembles those that most students have already encountered throughout their educational histories, though with a different foundation, Shor’s sanctioned literacy offers students contradictions that, to their credit, do not take students long to recognize and resolve, as Shor’s explanation of the final learning contract suggests. Not only were the students savvy to the contradictions in his classroom, but they also saw that they were denied a legitimate role in the classroom. Despite offering students classroom experiences that may have challenged conventional academic cultures, Shor constrains them, in the end, to conventional literacy acts, as both versions of the learning contract suggest. Furthermore, his summary of their negotiations over the standards for literate performance in their classroom reveals that, if collaboration occurred, it was over “legalistic” terms, to use Shor’s word, and not over substantive issues of assessment, standards, and literate performance:

[the students bargained for more absences and a more lenient lateness policy. They insisted on maintaining the legal minimum of absences specified in College policy, similar to their legalistic demand for ten minutes less class time through dismissal at 3:40 instead of 3:50. I retained the discussion leadership clause for A-level students and the quality provision for written work at each grade level. The students debated and accepted the use of plus and minus grading (A-, B+, etc., instead of just A and B). The college had implemented plus and minus final grading without consulting students, so I chose to present it to them as an option they could accept or reject. They also bargained for one late assignment without penalty. (120)
As this explanation suggests, students selected relatively safe issues to negotiate, perhaps in order to conform to the teacher’s expectations. Furthermore, none of these negotiations, not even re-presenting the “option” of “plus and minus final grading” for acceptance or rejection, challenges classrooms or institutions in substantive ways.

Though I am interested in the ways that Shor seems unwilling (or uninterested) in problematizing the culturally-specific standards of ideal students in terms of punctuality that reinforce students’ earliest experiences in classrooms, I am even more interested in the moves that Shor makes, such as “quality provision for written work,” that disable more authentic collaboration in establishing the standards for literate and learning performances. In regard to this example, Shor reports that, when the students challenge the authority of “A or B quality on written work,” he offers the following justification: “my ethos, my face of good intentions—experience, openness, fairness—jury-rigged with standards of serious thought I look for in student writing, coupled to ways for student to contest my decision and to rewrite for higher grades” (80, 87, original emphasis). What I find interesting is that such a move not only reverts to a traditionally absolute and universal authority for teachers in classrooms but also sublimates any conflict among culturally-specific standards for literate performance and learning within an ostensibly collaborative practice of learning contracts.

In neither his proffered contract nor the negotiated contract does Shor create the space for literacy differences, which, given the legitimacy accorded to conventional academic literacies by their historical and social presence in classrooms and institutions, is necessary if he intends to produce the third idiom that he theorizes from what he believes about his classroom practices. In his classrooms, he offers no space in which a “dialogic process” actually “overcomes the noncommunication” by transforming “the students’ language of everyday life” and “the teacher’s language” into “a new discourse, the third idiom,” that “relates academic language to concrete experience and colloquial discourse to critical thought” (Empowering 255-56). Tellingly, Shor theorizes of this transformation as if both discourses have an equal currency in classrooms when, even in his own classrooms, the disparity between these discourses is evident. Furthermore, the (false) dualism that Shor constructs between students’ literacies and teachers’ literacies forces him to suggest that students’ discourses can be neither critical nor scholarly: the third idiom, he explains, is “simultaneously concrete and conceptual, academic and conversational, critical and accessible” in its transformation of “the students’ language of everyday life” and “the teacher’s language” into a new discourse in which “[e]veryday language assumes a critical quality while teacherly language assumes concreteness” (255-56). Such an explanation begs the question as to what Shor actually means by critical and
Contrary to the dualism that forms the basis of Shor’s third idiom, academic language is about experience—just different kinds of experience from “the everyday”—and concreteness has more to do with perspective than with some autonomous quality that can be assessed outside of context. Moreover, he seems to invoke *academically critical* and *academic scholarship*, which are culturally-specific terms and features and, as Geneva Smitherman, Keith Gilyard, Helen Fox, Jane Tompkins, Victor Villanueva, and others have demonstrated, are not the only ways to be intellectual.

As with Berlin’s, there seems to be a discrepancy between Shor’s theorization of his classroom practices, and the literacies they sanction, and the classroom practices themselves, which authorize a very different literacy. In theorizing of the third idiom, his dualism between students’ literacies and the literacies of the academy is the same dualism that produces literacies-from-above and literacies-from-below. Through his assignments and other classroom practices, Shor privileges literacies-from-below, often at the expense of those of the academy, yet through his practices of assessment and evaluation, he simultaneously authorizes these same literacies-from-above with the sole legitimacy in his classrooms. As a result, Shor’s classroom literacies fail to authorize students to reread and rewrite their classrooms and their worlds in any meaningful way. For example, Shor argues that, in the practices he describes in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, “reading and writing are legitimized as human activities because the class study turns towards daily life in a *critical* and *dialogic* fashion” whereby “students are not lectured about the meaning of their reality, but rather engage in a self-regulating project through which they discover and report that meaning to each other” (196). Even as Shor’s self-regulating projects may enable students in his remedial writing class to produce what Shor calls “an interesting document” in the form of a new Constitution, which was published in the school paper and may have led students in this same class to plan, write, and act out a television show (199), they do not necessarily afford these students the literacies they need if they are to reread and rewrite their remedial status within the academy, and to access and to mediate the dominant discourses of the academy, both of which can be disabling for students who have already been identified as lacking the requisite cultural capital of the academy. In fact, of the nine or so language projects that he describes in *Critical Teaching*, only two of them—“The Model Classroom” and “College Re-design”—have the potential to offer students the literacies that can enable them to reread and rewrite the conditions of alienation that characterize the students that Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater describes and many of those who appear in the classrooms in which I work, the alienation that, I maintain, is responsible for the current crises in literacy and education.
Though I disagree with Xin Liu Gale’s claim that conventional academic discourses must be taught before resistant discourses, I do agree with her assertions that, if students are not afforded experiences with conventional academic discourses, they will not acquire the requisite literacies and that, if they are only offered experiences in conventional academic discourses, they will have gaps, to use her word, in their education (Teachers 90). In Shor’s classrooms, students run the risk of experiencing the worst of both worlds—few, if any, experiences with conventional academic discourses plus assessment methodologies that authorize these same discourses with the sole legitimacy.

Collaborative classrooms and dialogic literacies go beyond offering choices about how students arrange their desks or whether they raise their hands or if teachers use pluses or minuses, as in Shor’s classrooms—and even beyond beginning with students’ experiences or contextualizing canons and cultural codes, as in Berlin’s—to substantive and significant shifts in classroom practices and theorizations about experiences. As Bizzell suggests early in this chapter, it is extremely difficult by a “collective act of will” to overcome the inequalities inscribed within classrooms. Something more is needed, something that will deconstruct and reconstruct classrooms in order to provide legitimate challenges to the “unilateral transfer of culture from the teacher to the students” that Shor envisions (Empowering 256). What is needed is not some external literacy that, as in Berlin’s classrooms, is imported into classrooms and imposed upon students, nor some hopeful speculation that, as in Shor’s, simply foregrounds students’ literacies without concomitant and substantial changes to the social structures of classrooms and institutions. Something more is needed, so that this unilateral transfer will cease and so that a dialogic exchange will occur between two cultures in the classroom that are both legitimate.

In the next chapter, I shall offer some of the ways that students and I have tried to establish this something more, this something additional—though, in the end, it, too, seems to fall short of resolving the conditions that critics have been calling crises in literacy and education in American colleges and universities. Nevertheless, these efforts have been productive in what they suggest about the impediments and obstacles that must be resolved in order to come closer to “mutual transformation of academic and community cultures” that enables both “to transcend their own limits” and to produce the classroom experiences and the discursive practices that critical literacies dream about.