To Build Maps of Writing and Critical Consciousness: Transfer in Writing Studies & Critical Pedagogies

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Spencer J. Smith
April 2017

© 2017 Spencer J. Smith. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled

To Build Maps of Writing and Critical Consciousness: Transfer in Writing Studies & Critical Pedagogies

by

SPENCER J. SMITH

has been approved for

the Department of English

and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Ryan P. Shepherd

Assistant Professor of English

Robert Frank

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

SMITH, SPENCER J., M.A., April 2017, English

To Build Maps of Writing and Critical Consciousness: Transfer in Writing Studies & Critical Pedagogies

Director of Thesis: Ryan P. Shepherd

Composition instructors have investigated how students transfer writing knowledge into contexts beyond composition classrooms in higher education (e.g. Reiff, & Bawarshi, 2011; Wardle, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014). These scholars have used studies of transfer in education (e.g. Beach, 1999; Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000) in order to see how composition instructors might teach for the transfer of learning.

In this thesis I show how critical pedagogues (Freire, 1978, 1997; Shor, 1987a, 1996; Keating, 2007, 2013) have also been thinking about how to foster students’ use of knowledge in new contexts.

In this project I develop a framework from the work on transfer from Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000). Then, I use this framework to analyze the pedagogies of Freire (1978, 1997), Shor (1987a, 1996), and Keating (2007, 2013), in an attempt to put these pedagogical ideas in conversation with each other, hoping to inspire more interdisciplinary research.
I dedicate this thesis to my immediate family at Smith Brain Connections and the extended family that has adopted us as we attempt to transfer our experiential learning.

In a very real sense, this thesis would not exist without all of you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply thankful for the many teachers and colleagues at Ohio University and beyond who have supported me in helping me investigate the connections between critical pedagogy and the transfer of learning.

Dr. Ryan P. Shepherd, in directing this thesis, agreed to work with a novice of transfer scholarship. This project and I have benefitted greatly by working with someone whose knowledge of transfer is vast and deep.

Just as I relied on Dr. Shepherd’s knowledge to supplement my understanding of the transfer of learning, I relied on the rest of my thesis committee to check my understanding of the pedagogues I considered here. Dr. Mara Holt was helpful in providing me feedback on my chapters investigating the pedagogies of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor. Her comments spurred me on and helped me see the importance of my work.

I am so lucky to have crossed paths with Dr. Gabriel Hartley again. In introducing me to the pedagogies of AnaLouise Keating, Dr. Hartley helped plant the seeds that grew into the ideas expressed here. I am thankful that he agreed to help with this project. And I am helpful for pushing me to think about the philosophical questions this project has raised.

I want to thank Dr. AnaLouise Keating, as well. Her excitement to read this project gave me much-needed last minute motivation.

Finally, I want to thank Dr. Paul Jones and the English Department at Ohio University for taking a chance on me. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Paulo Freire’s Critical Literacy Pedagogy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Ira Shor’s Liberatory Learning</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: AnaLouise Keating’s Pedagogies of Invitation</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Final Thoughts</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

When I assign and teach a specific essay in my first-year composition course, I do so not because I expect my students to enter lives after my class that demand for them to write expert visual analyses, for instance. Instead, I expect that the instruction and practice of the assigned essays will help them develop their own theories of writing (for more discussion of “theories of writing” see Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014), which they can then use in diverse writing contexts. In other words, I expect for my students to transfer skills they learn in my class to new writing tasks.

Psychologist Douglas K. Detterman, in his critique of the concept of transfer of learning, has defined transfer in this way: “the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new situation” (1993, p. 4). Though Detterman critiques it, transfer as repetition of behavior seems like a worthy goal of education. Indeed, other researchers have discussed the importance of the transfer of learning as a metric for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 135).

In their discussion of expertise in their study investigating a pedagogy foregrounding the transfer of learning, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) mentioned Paolo Freire’s banking model of education in order to describe a new conception of expertise and learning (p. 41). The authors do not mention Freire anywhere else in the book. It is disconcerting that neither Freire nor any other critical pedagogue is mentioned in this study of transfer because it leaves the purpose of teaching for transfer unexamined. In other words, does mention of Freire mean that considerations of the transfer of learning are exempt from critical investigations? While teaching for transfer may solve
common pedagogical problems (i.e., helping students use their writing knowledge gained in one classroom in new contexts), it also runs the risk of de-radicalizing the kind of liberatory critical pedagogy that Freire theorized.

This sanitization of critical pedagogy is a troubling trend across writing studies, especially in scholarship concerned with how writing is taught. Bowen and Whithaus, for instance, may have appropriated Freire when they positioned their proposals for multimodal composing as “an embodiment of Paulo Freire’s (1970, 1991) notion of praxis” (2013, p. 7). This sanitation is especially troubling when critical pedagogy might be a valuable resource for teacher-scholars to make classroom learning more relevant to students.

In their introduction to their edited collection *Citizenship Across the Curriculum* (2010), Michael B. Smith, Rebecca S. Nowacek, and Jeffrey L. Bernstein articulated a common complaint from college students: “One of the central problems facing the academy is how disconnected many students feel their classroom learning is from what so many of them refer to as ‘the real world’” (2010, p. 1). This perceived disconnection is a problem for pedagogies seeking to foster the transfer of learning. It is for this reason that Yancey et al. (2014) drew on research that has investigated ways to make writing instruction more relevant for students (p. 26). Making writing instruction relevant to students’ lives, though, must be in service of providing agency to the students to incorporate their learned and prior knowledges into future writing tasks. Yancey et al. (2014) argued that writing instruction ought to a “larger road map” instead of a GPS for

---

1 See Robinson and Burton (2009) and Hilgers, Hussey, & Stitt-Bergh (1999) for that research.
navigating writing tasks. The difference, they said, is that while a GPS might get students from point A to point B, a road map allows them to see the connections that enable them to make that trip. This map, Yancey et al. (2014) claimed, has allowed for greater student agency (pp. 41-42).

This focus on increased agency for writing instructors has been similar to claims that critical pedagogues have been making. “Critical pedagogues believe that education should provide all students the opportunity to question, discover, and transform their futures [emphasis added]” (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 1). Pedagogies that have enabled students to transform their futures have given those students increased agency and thus greater likelihood for the transfer of critical knowledge into their lives outside of the classroom.

Critical pedagogues, I will show in this project, have necessarily been finding ways to ensure that students transfer learned knowledge into their everyday lives. If critical pedagogy was repositioned as a suitable resource from which teaching for transfer scholars could draw, it would allow richer understandings of what teaching and learning mean. Instead of using critical pedagogy to simply name problems that transfer seeks to solve (i.e., Yancey et al., 2014; Bowen & Whithaus, 2013), transfer of learning scholarship ought to look to critical pedagogy in order to build on pedagogies encouraging the transfer of learning. This project looks to do that kind of work by theorizing a framework from scholarship on the transfer of learning and then applying it to three critical pedagogies.
Scope of Project

With this project, I seek to theorize connections between teaching for learning transfer and critical pedagogy. I will use my definition of transfer from Detterman (1993). His conceptualization of transfer as "the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new situation" has provided something tangible that transfer might do (1993, p.4). In other words, teaching for transfer is creating a classroom environment that enables students to apply classroom knowledge to new tasks in the classroom or, more interestingly, outside of the classroom. Detterman (1993) has taken issue with this definition of learning transfer, though, as too all-encompassing: “In a trivial sense, all repeated behavior must be transferred” (p. 4).

Some scholars have latched on to this sort of criticism. To answer this kind of criticism, for instance, King Beach (1999) found it useful to rethink transfer as a kind of “consequential transition.” A “consequential transition involves a developmental change in the relation between an individual and one or more social activities” (Beach, 1999, p. 114). While it may be true that all learning is transfer, important work is done by conceptualizing that learning as developmental change for individuals and/or social activities. Beach concluded his investigation into “consequential transition” with a proposal for a concern that education should take up: “how to prepare individuals to participate in the transformation of society. It is this second concern to which consequential transition is directed” (1999, p. 130).

Teaching for transfer (or “consequential transitions”), then, necessarily involves students applying learned knowledge to re-make their worlds. This real-world application
is an oft-repeated goal of critical pedagogy. Indeed, in defining critical education, Ira Shor said, "Critical education prepares students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture" (1987a, p. 48). Similarly, an important part of Yancey et al.'s (2014) Teaching for Transfer (TFT) pedagogy is not just helping students create a map they can read of how writing works in different contexts but also helping students use that map in creative, imaginative ways. Thus, both teaching for transfer and critical pedagogy allow that their end results may occur in transformative ways for students as they remix learned knowledge into new contexts unforeseen by the teacher.

To investigate this relatedness, I plan to first extrapolate a framework of what teaching for transfer looks like. I will do this largely relying on teaching for transfer literature as well as literature in both education and composition studies that elucidates some of the concepts that would help an instructor attempting to teach for learning transfer. After I establish a framework, I will apply it to analyze the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and AnaLouise Keating. Ultimately, I plan to argue that critical pedagogues have already been paying attention to similar concepts that teaching for transfer asks an instructor to pay attention to. I hope to conclude with a recommendation to critical pedagogy to draw on the scholarship around the transfer of learning in order to use teaching for transfer in a way that maximizes the goals of a critical pedagogy.

What Is It Grounded In?

For teaching for transfer to work, such teaching must be relevant for each individual student. Indeed, Yancey et al. (2014) in *Writing Across Contexts*, have discussed how important individuality is for transfer. In their discussion of the
individual's role in transfer, they quoted from Rebecca S. Nowacek’s *Agents of Integration* (2011). Nowacek (2011) described how "individual cognition" has often been a problem in academic institutions that do not necessarily value transfer. Nowacek has theorized “agents of integration” as an understanding of students as they take on more agency while integrating their “individual cognition” into the new knowledge they learn in a college classroom, and Yancey et al. have pointed to “agents of integration” as an appropriate way to think about students (2011, p. 38 quoted in Yancey et al., 2014, p. 55). In this way knowledge of the individual is extremely important for the instructor wishing to foster transfer. This knowledge of the individual student has nearly always been important for teachers.

Socrates, perhaps the archetype of a great teacher, was definitely concerned with the individuality of his students. The knowledge Socrates had of his students is what makes Plato's Socratic dialogues so captivating. In *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates coaxed Phaedrus into reciting Lysias' speech by saying:

Phaedrus—if I don't know Phaedrus, I've forgotten even who I am. But I do, and I haven't; I know perfectly well that when he heard Lysias' speech he did not hear it just once but repeatedly asked him to go through it for him. (2004, trans. Rowe, p. 4)

The critical pedagogues I am considering in this project have taken a similar interest in their students’ lives. For instance, AnaLouise Keating (2013) has talked about the importance of knowing an individual student's rationale, and Paulo Freire (1978, 1997) has talked about the importance of getting to know the communities to whom instructors
hope to teach literacy. Ira Shor (1987a) has also discussed "autonomous thought," which is similar to individual agency in that both are concerned with the individuality of the student. He has written, "By hegemonizing the routines of existence, the interferences crowd out autonomous thought, feeling, and action, the base on which an alternative society could grow" (1987a, pp. 49-50). In other words, Shor (1987a) has seen the ubiquity of contemporary media as keeping him from knowing his students as individuals with “autonomous thought.” For Shor (1987a), perhaps, it is not that students lack writing maps, as Yancey et al. (2014) have suggested; instead, they are supplied with too many, making it nearly impossible to choose the appropriate map, which has a similar outcome.

Outline

In this chapter I will build a framework from work on transfer in order to approach the rest of the parts of the project of my thesis. This framework will come from scholarship on teaching for transfer in education, which is useful to compositionists thinking about transfer.

Once I have considered this framework of what teaching for transfer looks like, I will place it next to the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and AnaLouise Keating. I will argue that these pedagogies are versions of teaching for transfer and that, conversely, it makes critical pedagogy more manageable to consider it through a lens of transfer.

The final part of my argument will be in the form of takeaways. The things learned from putting teaching for transfer in conversation with critical pedagogies, I argue, results in valuable thinking about how to teach for transfer.
Before I begin to develop my framework, it is necessary to examine the literature on the transfer of learning and critical pedagogies and how they might overlap.

**Literature Review**

Some researchers have said, "Higher education is not effectively incorporating new discoveries in cognitive science and human learning into effective teaching strategies" (McEachron, Bach & Sualp, 2012, p. 226). This is especially true in writing studies. While research methodologies, like cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (as conceptualized by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky), have been developed to better understand how students undertake writing assignments from their instructor, this methodology has been used almost exclusively to study primary and secondary students (for instance, see Barrett-Tatum, 2015 and Leander, 2002).

Cultural historical activity theory, though, has to do with context—something that compositionists think about regularly. Indeed, *Writing Across Contexts* (2014) is a study of such contexts for thinking about the transfer of learning. Yancey et al. wrote of "concurrent transfer," which is horizontal in nature (2014, p. 36). The authors defined concurrent transfer as "a situation where students are writing in two contexts at the same time and borrow and/or share from one to the other or both" (2014, p. 133).

While there has been some scholarship that has investigated how well concepts taught to students transfer to other contexts, very little attention has been paid to how

---

2 including, for instance, Yancey et al.’s *Writing Across Contexts* (2014), James (2010), and Driscoll (2011).
critical pedagogy results in students transferring newly acquired critical consciousness into their everyday lives. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in *Situated Learning* (1991), though, made it clear that all learning is mostly only this type of critical-into-the-everyday learning—"cognition and communication in, and with, the social world are situated in the historical development of on-going activity. It is, thus, a critical theory [emphasis added]" (p. 51). I propose to argue in this project that critical pedagogues have always been thinking and reflecting on the transfer of their students' class-developed critical consciousness into their everyday lives.

This kind of critical transfer is what critical pedagogues like Ira Shor, Paulo Freire, and AnaLouise Keating have been hoping to engender in their students. Indeed, Ira Shor's entire project in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (1987a) seemed to be supplying his students with frameworks with which to transfer a critical knowledge gained in the classroom to their everyday lives. Shor has written about how critical instruction might be used to influence students to imagine more Utopian futures for their everyday lives (1987a, p. 60). In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Shor has given "a flexible agenda of pedagogical resources" that "can be useful in provoking critical reflection by teachers and students" (1987a, p. 94). Thus, this book is a resource for transferring critical knowledge into everyday experience. In other words, Shor (1987a) hoped to give his students critical roadmaps in which they could be critical of the terrain of culture in much the same way that Yancey et al. (2014) have wished for larger writing maps for their students. In *When Students Have Power* (1996), Shor showed how these critical roadmaps might be taught by describing a class in which he imagined and
implemented pedagogical strategies for relinquishing power in the course to students in order to develop their agency and autonomy.

Writing studies scholarship has long been coming close to, but ultimately falling short of, making the kinds of observations I am planning to make in this study. In 1999 College English published a review by Mary Ann Cain of Shor's *When Students Have Power* (1996) and Yancey's (and Irwin Weiser's) collection *Situating Portfolios* (1996). Writing of how these texts speak to one another, Cain wrote:

> Reading *Situating Portfolios* in light of Shor's classroom negotiations illuminates how portfolios are often employed within classrooms where teachers and administrators still determine curricula, often unreflectingly, with little or no student input, few "protest rights" as Shor puts it, and little "public" discussion about their choices. Portfolios are still, by and large, something assigned by the teacher to be read by the teacher or outside evaluator. (p. 223)

I hold, though, that the agency Cain claimed that the scholars failed to give their students in *Situating Portfolios* (1996), Yancey et al. were able to deliver in *Writing Across Contexts* (2014).

Similarly, AnaLouise Keating (2013) in *Transformation Now!* , has developed a pedagogy of invitation in order to guide students through a critical difficult transfer that may ask them to reject long-held "status-quo stories." Providing an example, she wrote this about moving students to think more critically about the status-quo story of individualism: "I don't deny the value of individualism and ask students to reject it; instead I reframe the concept in relational terms. By so doing, I invite students to shift
their perspectives and adopt a much broader—though inevitably partial—point of view" (2013, p. 177). Keating's mission in lessons like these was threefold: 1) to posit the inclusiveness, rather than the exclusiveness, of individual identity and community identity; 2) to challenge individualism; and 3) to move students "to work for social change" (2013, p. 176). This pedagogy of invitation that Keating (2013) developed works with transfer as one of its primary aims. In my proposed project, I plan to argue that it is useful to think about how a critical pedagogy of invitation can both be helped by a consideration of transfer and also help teacher-researchers think about how to incorporate into their praxes the emotional and affective side of teaching for transfer.

Ultimately, by placing the pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and AnaLouise Keating next to the teaching for transfer literature as theorized by Yancey et al. (2014), Beach (1999), and others, I plan to focus on teaching for transfer's call for development of student agency as a way to encourage students to begin to take ownership of their learning. Ownership of their learning, I argue, allows students to transfer their writing knowledge to new contexts and also to begin to use this knowledge more critically in their everyday lives as Shor (1987a) has theorized. Along the way students begin to build maps of writing as well as complicated maps of critical consciousness.

Transfer of Learning Framework

In order to do this study, we need a map by which to judge the critical pedagogies. For such a map, we might look to a 2000 study by the National Research Council, How People Learn (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000). There the authors give four “key characteristics of learning and transfer”: 
Initial learning is necessary for transfer, and a considerable amount is known about the kinds of learning experiences that support transfer.

Knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer; abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer.

Transfer is best viewed as an active, dynamic process rather than a passive end-product of a particular set of learning experiences.

All new learning involves transfer based on previous learning, and this fact has important implications for the design of instruction that helps students learn. (p. 53).

From these principles there are four questions that it will be useful to ask of the critical pedagogies. First, how well do these critical pedagogies initially teach their content? Second, do students understand that not the examples but the critical themes linking them are the true lessons? Third, are students provided with reminders that knowledge is a dynamic, recursive concept? And finally, how does the pedagogy account for the students’ previous learning?

Freire, Shor, and Keating have written about student reception of their pedagogies. In what follows I will analyze these receptions based on the framework for transfer I have given here and using the scholarship of teaching for transfer that I have begun to discuss in this introduction. I will analyze Freire’s critical literacy pedagogy present in Pedagogy in Process (1978) and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1997). Then I will analyze Shor’s critical pedagogy in Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (1987a) and how he practiced this pedagogy in When Students Have Power (1996). Finally, I will
consider Keating’s invitational pedagogy described in *Teaching Transformation* (2007). By doing so I hope to draw conclusions that will show how critical pedagogues have already been doing the kind of work to foster “transformation of society” that King Beach said should be the outcome of “consequential transitions” (1999, p. 130).
CHAPTER 1: PAULO FREIRE’S CRITICAL LITERACY PEDAGOGY

In the previous chapter, I argued that it is valuable to look at critical pedagogy through a lens of learning transfer, and I set up a framework for doing so. I said that the value of placing critical pedagogy next to learning transfer is the light such placement shines on student individuality. This recognition of student individuality that both critical pedagogy and teaching for learning transfer demand, I have argued, encourages students to transfer writing knowledge to begin to apply that knowledge to their own specific worlds in order to re-make those worlds.

Then using the National Research Council’s 2000 study, *How People Learn*, I formed four questions to ask critical pedagogies about learning transfer—1) how does the critical pedagogy account for the student’s previous learning? 2) how is the content of the pedagogy taught? 3) are students able to comprehend the generalizability of the content? and 4) how does the critical pedagogy provide for students to learn the dynamic nature of knowledge?

In this chapter I seek to ask these questions of Paulo Freire’s critical literacy pedagogy. But first, I will give a brief summary of his pedagogy. Then I will set out to answer the questions about transfer I posed of this critical pedagogy, drawing on literature investigating learning transfer to do so. Finally, I will make the argument that for Freire, literacy is inseparable from transfer—that literacy has little significance if individuals cannot transfer that literacy to live more humanistic lives.

A rough sketch of Paolo Freire’s pedagogy can be surmised from a summary of its components. Freire divided a pedagogy of liberation (as opposed to an oppressive
pedagogy) into two stages in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1997). In the first stage, the oppressed people learn the code of their worlds, and in the second, the pedagogy begins to work towards liberation for all people (p. 36). Since a traditional first-year composition classroom is populated with literate students who mostly know the alphabetic codes of their worlds and since the second stage, which Freire calls post-literacy, seems to be a transfer of literacy learning to spaces where that learning can have liberating action, I will now focus on Freire’s process for this post-literacy pedagogy.

Even though compositionists definitely think of themselves as engaged in work in literacy development, it is important to remember that for Freire post-literacy and literacy were interconnected. He wrote in *Pedagogy in Process*, “This [post-literacy], like the act of knowing, is not something separate from literacy training itself, but its logical continuity. In this way, post-literacy finds itself already known (announced) in literacy education” (1978, p. 89). He observed, “We have never understood literacy education of adults as a thing in itself, as simply learning the mechanics of reading and writing, but, as a political act, directly related to production, to health, to the regular system of instruction, to the overall plan of society to be realized” (1978, p 13). Thus, the very act of literacy should contain the beginning of post-literacy—political involvement, production, and healthy living. In other words, post-literacy for Freire, is what students do with their new-found literacy. In this way post-literacy is a kind of learning transfer; both post-literacy and learning transfer are concerned with how students apply what they have learned from the teacher to their own everyday lives.
Freire wrote in *Pedagogy in Process* (1978), of his communication with the Guinea-Bissau Political Commissioner of the Army about the nation’s burgeoning post-literacy phase, which busied the newly literate “two hundred military personnel” (p. 167). Of this phase Freire wrote, “We are intensely interested in readying these former soldiers for activities like the preparation for activities like the preparation of land for cultivation, as well as other agricultural work, including planting sugar cane, starting fruit orchards and planting rice” (1978, p. 168). Thus, after being taught to read and write in the literacy phase of their education, the soldiers were asked to use those skills to make new meaning in their worlds in the post-literacy phase. The post-literacy phase is characterized by using literacy in new contexts. This new contextualization of literacy is not unlike the ease of writing in new contexts that Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014), for example, hope to engender with their Teaching for Transfer pedagogy.

This idea of the transfer and application of literacy skills to new contexts is consistent with how compositionists have understood literacy. Indeed, compositionists have said that literacy is more than knowing what letters on a page symbolize. “Literacy is thus not a binary but a web of interconnectedness of saying and doing. I am not literate until I can see how a single entity connects to some system,” Pat Belanoff has written in *College Composition and Communication* (2001, p. 414). Similarly, Freire wrote, “The learning of reading and writing involves also learning to ‘read’ reality by means of correct analysis of social practice” (1978, p. 89). Thus, some scholars—both critical

---

3 When referring to Yancey et al.’s (2014) Teaching for Transfer pedagogy they designed for *Writing across Contexts*, I will capitalize Teaching for Transfer or refer to it as TFT, in order to distinguish it as an example of pedagogy informed by the transfer of learning research.
pedagogues like Freire and compositionists like Belanoff—have long been saying that students cannot be taught to write without some engagement with the world. This kind of engagement is consistent with research in learning and transfer. In How People Learn, researchers noted practice as an important part of the learning process but also claimed that “abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 41). Practice or engagement with the world, functions as a component of any good literacy instruction. This practice (or engagement with the world) must be supplemented by the abstract theory and knowledge of alphabetic literacy.

Freire, throughout his writing, was always thinking about how he could connect the abstract theory and knowledge of literacy to his students’ more concrete worlds. Pedagogy in Process (1978), for instance, was Freire’s description of the elements of his literacy pedagogy in order for him to help educators in Guinea-Bissau institute adult literacy education. The educators in Guinea-Bissau were interested in using Freire’s pedagogy because of his success in Brazil in teaching to disrupt and liberate the people from colonialism (1978, p. 7). In the introduction to the letters he wrote the literacy team in Guinea-Bissau, Freire discussed some of the basic characteristics of his literacy pedagogy, which would corral students into post-literacy training. First, Freire (1978) talked of the importance of learning about the population of learners and teachers in Guinea-Bissau. Freire (1978) said it was not possible for him to take a position responsible for literacy teaching without first “learning with [the population of learners and teachers] and with the workers in the fields and factories” (p. 9). One component of
Freire’s pedagogy involved an intimate knowledge of the learners and their previous learning.

Freire often discussed in his writing the content teachers would teach. He rejected traditional primers because they limited creativity, having “already been programmed” with the kind of literacy, words, and themes desired by their authors (1978, p. 11). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he offered problem-posing as a replacement to these pre-programmed primers: “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (1997, p. 64). The content of Freire’s literacy education was co-constructed with students and it sought to problematize his pupils’ status quo beliefs about the world. In other words, Freire (1997) asked the problem-posing educator to question long-held beliefs the pupils had of the world in order to encourage those pupils to either begin to communicate the logic for those beliefs, or if their learning suggested otherwise, to begin to see that their status-quo stories kept them from reading reality (p. 62). For Freire this problem-posing process involved a systematizing and organization of existing knowledge (in alphabetical form) that could then be questioned and analyzed with the help of the new-found skills of literacy (1978, p. 24). Thus, the “generative words” of existing knowledge were organized into “generative themes,” which were the local status-quo stories that could then be posed as problems (1997, p. 91).

Freire (1997) used this problem-posing as a launching point for post-literacy by emphasizing the role that reflection must take in this process. He wrote: “It is only when
the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection” (1997, p. 47). Thus, reflection becomes the link between literacy and post-literacy—between the intellectual and action. Once students learn how to de-code the world by reflecting on its de-coded meanings, they can bring opinions to dialogue with teachers. Reflection is a crucial part of my analysis of Freire’s literacy pedagogy in terms of teaching for the transfer of learning. Indeed, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) have commented on the importance of reflection to encourage transfer (p. 30). In their study of a transfer-informed pedagogy called Teaching for Transfer (TFT), they referenced Beaufort’s (2007) College Writing and Beyond where Beaufort claimed that “thinking about thinking” and reflection “if part of a writer’s process, will increase the ability of the writer to learn new writing skills, applying existing skills and knowledge appropriately (i.e., accomplishing positive transfer of learning)” (p. 152).

Once students were able to reflect on their thinking in Freire’s pedagogy, they were able to enter into a more dialogic relationship with their teacher. This kind of relationship fostered “Unity and organization [which] can enable them [the students] to change their weaknesses into a transforming force with which they can re-create the world and make it more human” (1997, p. 126). This re-creation of the world is an example of the kind of work that Freire means when he says “post-literacy.” Indeed, in Pedagogy in Process, Freire (1978) referred to a program in which urban schools were moved to rural areas so that students and teachers could interact with the people living
there and participate in activities with their literacy practices that were meaningful in the world (pp. 20-21).

Hence, in describing his pedagogy, Freire discussed the importance of learning about the student population (1978, p. 9), the content of a literacy pedagogy for these students (1997, p. 64), and how reflection can be used to move from literacy education to post-literacy education (1978, 1997). How does this pedagogy measure up against a pedagogy concerned with the transfer of learning?

Before I investigate this question using the framework I developed in the previous chapter, I want to make a distinction about the use of the word “transfer.” Freire has used the word “transfer” in an important way in describing his literacy pedagogy; when he wrote “transfer” he meant it as the opposite of the problem-posing dialogic pedagogy he theorized. In *Pedagogy in Process*, he wrote, “they [teachers] might understand and accept intellectually that their roles as teachers should not be that of transferring [emphasis added] knowledge as though they knew everything and the learners knew nothing” (1978, p. 80). In such a way, Freire used the word “transfer” as synonymous with the “banking model of education” he theorized in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. There he defined the model this way: “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1997, p. 53). “Transfer” for Freire denoted the way content was communicated from a teacher to his students. This use of “transfer” is different from the way it will be used in the rest of this chapter. Instead of
transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, transfer as I defined it for this project in
the previous chapter “is the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new
situation” (Detterman, 1993, p. 4). Detterman’s definition of “transfer” is more closely
related to Freire’s post-literacy than his own use of the word “transfer.” For Freire (1997)
post-literacy was how the students used their literacy in their lives and worlds. Since for
Freire (1997) literacy education was teaching mostly illiterate pupils how to read and
write, post-literacy programs were used to encourage newly literate pupils to transfer
those skills of literacy into their everyday lives (p. 104).

Knowledge of Students’ Prior Learning

The first characteristic I will consider in my transfer-of-learning-informed study
of Freire’s literacy pedagogy is how the pedagogy accounts for students’ prior learning.
Researchers in How People Learn noted that “all learning involves transfer from previous
experiences” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 41). In their study of their
TFT pedagogy in and beyond first-year composition (FYC), Yancey, Robertson, and
Taczak (2014) used Reiff and Bawarshi’s 2011 study of prior genre knowledge in the
first-year composition classroom to begin to theorize the effect of prior writing
experiences for students in their study (pp. 13-14). Yancey et al. suggested that the
categories Reiff and Bawarshi identified—boundary guarders and boundary crossers—
are useful for thinking about how students interact with their previous learning
experiences. Boundary guarders are students who hold on to previous learning
experiences even when doing so is inappropriate for a new writing task or when doing so
makes the task more difficult. Boundary crossers, on the other hand, are students who can
more easily repurpose their prior knowledge in order to assist them in new writing tasks (Reiff and Bawarshi, 2011, p. 325). Yancey et al. (2014) discussed how a goal of their TFT was to make boundary-guarding students become students who are comfortable with boundary-crossing (p. 14). Based on the description of Freire’s pedagogy I give above, Freire had a similar goal in the post-literacy stage. He sought to move students from defenders of the status quo to change-agents in their communities.

Characterizing students as boundary-guarding or boundary-crossing was a part of the attention Yancey et al paid to knowing their students. Yancey et al. (2014) designated a chapter in their study in order to discuss students’ prior knowledge. In that chapter they noted that there are three ways in which prior knowledge can serve or not serve students in transferring writing knowledge to a new writing task. First, their previous writing tasks might give students writing knowledge that they can very successfully translate into new writing assignments. Yancey et al. (2014) found in their study that this kind of successful transfer was experienced by those students in a Teaching-for-Transfer (TFT) FYC. Second, knowledge learned from previous writing assignments may not transfer to new writing assignments. Finally, knowledge from previous writing assignments may be at odds with what a new writing assignment requires (2014, pp.104-105). The authors ultimately concluded that instructors might ask their students to consciously think about the prior knowledges they bring to tasks, suggesting cases of absent prior knowledge will encourage students to learn new knowledge (2014, p. 125). TFT pedagogy might use students’ prior learning in this way to foster new learning.
Similarly, in his pedagogy Freire made it a point to utilize his students’ prior knowledge even when his students did not “realize that they, too, ‘know things’ they have learned in their relationships with the world and with other women and men” (1997, p. 45). While talking about his literacy work with the people of Guinea-Bissau in *Pedagogy in Process*, Freire noted that “Guinea-Bissau does not start from zero. Her cultural and historical roots are something very much her own, in the very soul of her people” (1978, pp. 7-8). Additionally, Freire noted the importance of getting to know the community of the literacy training. Indeed, he began his Introduction by writing how valuable it was to experience traveling to Guinea-Bissau for the first time as a kind of “return” since he had previously grown to love African soil while visiting Tanzania (1978, pp. 5-6). For Freire this previous knowledge of the region enabled him to be able to more intimately know the region as a “returner” rather than simply as an educator hired by a place he had never visited. He could rely on his own previous knowledge to better understand the kind of previous knowledge his students would bring to the classroom.

Content Initially Taught

Now that I have shown that Freire indeed accommodated students’ prior knowledge, I want to investigate the second characteristic of my transfer of learning framework—how is the content of the pedagogy taught? It was important to Freire to get to know the communities of his students so that he could begin to use the knowledges they were bringing to the classroom in order to build upon them with the literacy knowledge he wanted to teach them. In a letter to the literacy team in Guinea-Bissau, Freire asked, “How can we, beginning with our very first contacts with the people, begin
to link literacy to some concrete tasks to be accomplished through mutual help, rather than perpetuate the present perception of it as an intellectual activity that contributes to individual progress?” (1978, pp. 151-152). This knowledge was immensely important for Freire because it formed the basis of his pedagogy—how could he link the abstract nature of literacy-learning to “concrete tasks” in his students’ lives? Similarly, this foundation has been a driving force behind scholars studying learning transfer. In describing how they set the curriculum for the Teaching-for-Transfer-oriented first-year composition curriculum, Yancey et al (2014) noted that all higher education should be concerned with assisting students understand how the theory contributes to more concrete practice. They noted that this attention to the theory/practice relationship was important for a Teaching for Transfer pedagogy (p. 4).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire implied the importance of knowledge of a community in order to know what kinds of problems to pose to a community for its literacy education. Then, when responses were collected from this problem-posing literacy education and formulated into “generative words,” “generative themes” could be investigated in the post-literacy stage (1997, p. 91). In other words, this observation process allowed the teachers to always be engaging in a dialogic learning experience with their students who learned the literacy code of their daily lives, began to ask questions about those codes, and then used those codes to re-construct the meaning of their daily experiences.

In the same way that a teaching-for-transfer FYC pedagogy seeks to use students’ prior knowledge or lack of knowledge to connect students’ skills to new writing tasks,
Freire’s critical literacy pedagogy positioned students’ knowledge outside of the literacy classroom as a strength to be used in investigating literacy and, ultimately, the world. This positioning enabled students to better, and more critically, incorporate this critical literacy into their pre-existing knowledges of the world (Freire, 1997, pp. 63-64).

How did Freire use his knowledge of students’ prior knowledge in order to deliver his pedagogical intention? In other words, how effective is Freire’s pedagogy in promoting understanding rather than memorization of critical literacy? Researchers in *How People Learn* recognized the importance of thinking about how to foster understanding rather than memorizing in initial learning (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 53). In his critique of the banking model of education, Freire intuited the importance of understanding and doing over memorization. He wrote, “The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he [sic] cognizes a cognizable object while he [sic] prepares his [sic] lessons in his [sic] study or his [sic] laboratory; during the second, he [sic] expounds to his [sic] students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher” (1997, p. 61).

Freire (1997) pushed back against this model of education. As has been stated previously, he proposed a problem-posing method in its place. That method also involved two stages—the literacy and post-literate stages. In the literacy stage, educators fostered investigation of the students’ “generative words;” and in the post-literacy stage, educators used problem-posing to investigate “generative themes” (1997, p. 91).
Problem-posing as proposed by Freire is very much related to his conceptualization of reading and writing. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Freire wrote, “The learning of reading and writing involves also learning to ‘read’ reality by means of correct analysis of social practice” (1978, p. 89). In order to encourage this reading of reality, educators, wrote Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, should increasingly pose to students “problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world.” Freire, in continuing his description of this pedagogical tool, said that students “will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated” (1997, p. 81). This process has significant implications for thinking about teaching for transfer if understood through Belanoff’s (2001) definition of literacy. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Belanoff has defined literacy as a skill that enables the literate individual to determine how an item is connected to a larger system (2001, p. 414). Knowing what an “a” sounds like means little if a student is unaware the function the letter serves. Belanoff has said that literacy is connected to both reflection and activity (2001, p. 417). It is not enough to teach students the *activity* of literacy; they should be asked to reflect on what that activity means. Likewise, the activity of literacy can help foster reflection. Neither activity nor reflection comes first; they must occur simultaneously. Similarly, learning about a particular problem or asking specific questions is meaningless if students do not comprehend how that problem relates to and influences other problems. However, we teach students literacy in order that they
may solve their problems. Neither comes first; they must occur together. It is for this reason that Freire’s mention of interrelatedness is important as we analyze his literacy pedagogy for its ability to foster learning transfer, in which metacognitive skills are encouraged to develop in order that students are able to think about how they think (Beaufort 2007).

A problem-posing method of literacy pedagogy serves two purposes then. First, it teaches students the use of a critical literacy. In the banking model of education of the oppressor, literacy education’s use is one of control—one in which students are indoctrinated “to adapt to the world of oppression” (1997, p. 59). In the problem-posing method of literacy teaching, students are encouraged to decide what they want to learn in dialogue with the teacher (1997, p. 61). By engaging in this dialectical relationship, students regain agency and use literacy to better control their lives rather than the oppressor using literacy to better control the oppressed students.

Second, the problem-posing method of literacy encourages students to begin to apply the process of literacy to other parts of their lives—to de-code and then re-code their everyday worlds. Since Freire’s notion of literacy included being able to read (and write) the world, it is useful to think of this critical de-coding as a writing process. Freire hoped his students would learn the process of de-coding and re-coding aspects of their lives and then would transfer and apply that process to new contexts. This application is consistent with the way literacy instructors think about teaching for learning transfer. Indeed, in their review of literature of writing process pedagogy, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) found that students frequently develop a writing process in first-year
composition classrooms and then transfer that process as they move on to new writing tasks (pp. 15-18). Furthermore, helping students understand the process of critical literacy is the kind of abstract knowledge that the researchers in *How People Learn* have noted helps aid transfer (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 41).

Yancey et al.’s project in *Writing Across Contexts* (2014) was to figure out a kind of pedagogy that made this kind of transfer easier and more efficient for the student (p. 33). In their conclusion they drew on *How People Learn* (2000) to declare six characteristics a pedagogy should have if it wishes to encourage transfer. The first characteristic they gave is to “Be explicit. Writing is a social practice; it’s governed by conventions, so it changes over time. Writing requires both practice and knowledge, which is what a FYC course provides. These are very explicit lessons, and as the research on learning demonstrates, if we want students to learn them we do better to be straightforward in our teaching” (Yancey et al., 2014, p. 138). I am suggesting here that to achieve the kind of liberatory literacy that Freire theorized, teachers must be explicit in the purposes of the problem-posing method. Research in teaching and learning has suggested that part of the dialogic relationship that Freire used should be used to help students understand explicitly the oppression of their social practices, conventions, and specific times.

Indeed, Freire also knew the importance of explicit instruction. In his Postscript to *Pedagogy in Process* (1978), he discussed his work with Guinea-Bissau’s Commissioner for Education, writing that the Commissioner “believed in youth and in the fact that young people could be challenged (not threatened) to assume their proper role in the task
of national reconstruction. He did not have some vague, diffuse confidence that might result from an opportunist position. Nor did he have an ingenuous certainty that, left to themselves, the youth would discover with clarity their role in the task” (Freire, 1978, p. 157). Thus, Freire suggested that in the execution of his problem-posing literacy education, the Commissioner knew when to provide explicit instruction to lead students to the kinds of problems that would help them analyze the conventions that governed “national reconstruction.” Freire argued that literacy content should be delivered with both attention to the abstract and the concrete—both the abstract symbols on the page as well as the concrete meanings of these symbols in the world. Freire also knew that this kind of instruction could only be effective if instructors created it with their pupils so that they would have a stake in the concrete meanings of the abstract notions.

Generalizability

I have considered how Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy measures up against two of the four questions about learning transfer I developed from How People Learn (2000)—how the pedagogy accounts for students’ prior knowledge and how the pedagogy initially teaches its content. Freire very creatively used students’ prior knowledge in his problem-posing pedagogy and its method allowed for a blend of student- and teacher-oriented instruction that fits well with the Teaching-for-Transfer pedagogy Yancey, Taczak, and Robertson (2014) created for their study. Next, I will ask whether and how Freire’s pedagogy accounts for the ability of students to generalize their learning. To finish up the four questions I developed for pedagogies analyzed under a learning transfer lens in the previous chapter, I will consider how Freire deals with the
dynamism of knowledge. Finally, I will conclude this chapter arguing that Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy cannot exist without some attention to transfer and that the growing body of learning transfer scholarship can help the critical pedagogue wishing to use Freire’s pedagogy.

Yancey, Taczak, and Robertson (2014) have considered generalization as a term that is synonymous with transfer (pp. 8-9). They used the work of Wardle (2007) and Moore (2012) to tie King Beach’s (2003) work on generalization to their work with transfer (Yancey, Taczak, & Robertson, 2014, pp. 7-9). Yancey et al. (2014) drew on many scholars in composition and teaching and learning in order to make this connection. For instance, in How People Learn, the researchers gave this as one of the characteristics of transfer: “Knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer; abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 53). This characteristic, in other words, is one of generalizability.

Does the student, for instance, understand that the lesson is an example of more general knowledge?

Freire achieved this generalizability. In theorizing this generalizable pedagogy in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire wrote, “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (1997, p. 29). In other words, Freire’s students received the literacy of oppression through particular examples of its causes and then were able to generalize that literacy into revolutionary transformations.
Indeed, in his discussion of his literacy pedagogy in Guinea-Bissau in *Pedagogy in Process*, Freire wrote, “The question facing the Guineans is not that of whether to do literacy education for its own sake or do it as a means of transformation but, rather, how to put it at the service of national reconstruction” (1978 pp. 29-30). The students in Guinea-Bissau were achieving exactly this kind of generalizability, according to Freire. Educators actively encouraged this element of transfer. First, educators brought students to do the kind of work that citizens were doing in reconstructing the country (1978, pp. 20-21). Then, Freire wrote to the Guinea-Bissau educators to pair this work with “critical reflection.” Freire suggested that this process—of concrete work and then critical reflection—already encouraged students to move into “post-literacy” thinking even as they were being instructed in literacy (1978, p. 100).

It is evident that this kind of reflective work is useful for fostering learning transfer. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak built reflection into their TFT curriculum as a necessary part of the metacognitive tasks required of the students (2014, pp. 4-5). This connection is consistent with research in teaching and learning. “Transfer can be improved by helping students become more aware of themselves as learners who actively monitor their learning strategies and resources and assess their readiness for particular tests and performances,” noted the researchers in *How People Learn*, who further noted that an effective way to encourage this kind of metacognitive behavior was to work reflection into lessons (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 67).

Just as learning and teaching scholarship has explained the importance of students developing images of themselves as learners, Freire’s literacy pedagogy made space for
students (the oppressed) to develop an image of themselves as humans: “But, sooner or later, these contradictions [of the banking model of education] may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human” (1997, p. 56). This “turning against their domestication” based on knowledge gained from Freire’s problem-posing literacy pedagogy can be a kind of generalizing. Students are generalizing their critical lessons to make broader conclusions that involve them rebelling against their status-quo stories.

Dynamism of Knowledge

This generalizing is encouraged by the tendency of problem-posing to make students see knowledge as dynamic. Whether the pedagogy encourages a concept of knowledge as dynamic is the last question I proposed we ask of the critical pedagogies considered in this project. Knowledge for Freire was definitely not static. It is for this reason, among others, that he found the banking model of education so problematic. In the banking model of education, Freire wrote, “The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher” (1997, p. 61). Freire proposed the problem-posing method as a solution to a model that kept knowledge static and thus able to be memorized: “The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary” (1997, p. 65).
This conceptualization of knowledge and learning is consistent with research on the transfer of learning. In their discussion of a student who was in the class with their TFT curriculum, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak noted that the curriculum had succeeded in broadening and destabilizing his conceptions of knowledge and writing (2014, p. 125). Although the status quo stories of a traditional college first-year student are different than those of the illiterate peasants that were at the center of Freire’s pedagogy, Yancey et al.’s TFT curriculum encouraged a first-year student to re-conceptualize his preconceived notions about what writing is and how it works. Rick, a first-year student who enrolled in the TFT section in Yancey et al.’s study, was able to transfer the genre and audience knowledge he had gained in his first-year composition class to help him when he got a lower grade on a lab report in a chemistry class. Rick thought he had a stable conception of what a lab report was and so ignored a professor’s change to that stable conception. His knowledge of genre and audience allowed him to navigate that destabilization (2014, p. 122).

This type of destabilizing of knowledge was central to Freire’s critical literacy pedagogy. In Pedagogy in Process, he spoke of his pedagogy’s potential for liberation in his students and contrasted it with the increasing focus of pedagogy in “advanced capitalist societies where more and more training in a limited number of skills takes place” (1978, p. 65). This founding idea set up Freire’s pedagogy to foreshadow research in the transfer of learning. Just as Yancey et al. (2014) implemented a pedagogy that allowed students to wrestle with conceptions of writing in order for them to develop a theory of writing that could more easily transfer to new, future writing tasks (p. 125),
Freire theorized that the most useful pedagogy, like his problem-posing model, would be one in which students were encouraged to look to the future (and new, unknown tasks) instead of the past (1997, p. 65).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have placed Paolo Freire’s pedagogy next to conceptions of learning transfer, including the Teaching for Transfer pedagogy developed by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014). I have demonstrated how it fulfills each of the four characteristics of learning transfer given in How People Learn (2000). I have further implied that Freire’s problem-posing method and theorization of a post-literacy stage were harbingers for contemporary conceptions of transfer scholarship. To close this chapter, I want to call on researchers to do more work on what I call the destabilizing, unknown aspect in any literacy education—I do not know what writing tasks will even exist in my students’ futures. Freire explicitly pointed to this unknown when he championed his problem-posing method as “prophetic” (1997, p. 65). Freire recognized his pedagogy as giving his students potentialities he could not imagine. Likewise, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) recognized that first-year composition instructors do not know what the future holds for their students and so built a Teaching for Transfer curriculum that would enable students to become masters of their own learning. Future research might investigate how a specific critical literacy curriculum, for instance, helps students become prophetic masters of themselves as they enter new discourse communities.
CHAPTER 2: IRA SHOR’S LIBERATORY LEARNING

In the previous chapter, I analyzed Freire’s literacy pedagogy using the transfer for learning framework I developed in the introduction. After analysis I concluded that Freire might be a valuable source of knowledge that compositionists should revisit when thinking about how to teach writing in a way that encourages the transfer of learning. Using Freire in this way, though, may place unnecessary strain on teachers in understanding the founding concepts of his pedagogy because of his focus on literacy training for students who largely began as illiterate. A teacher concerned with this difference might turn to the work of Ira Shor, an educator whose thinking has been influenced by time spent collaborating with Paolo Freire.

Indeed, in his Preface to the 1987 Chicago Press publishing of his 1980 *Critical Teaching & Everyday Life*, Shor recounted how his thinking had been modified by his own investigations into the socio-historical contexts of Open Admissions in New York City, where he taught, and investigations undertaken with Paolo Freire—investigations undergone since the book’s original writing. Of the kind of conclusions these investigations led him to, Shor wrote, “My dialogues with Freire confirmed the lessons of the Open Admissions battle—that the classroom cannot be defended from inside the classroom, and that teaching cannot work if it is controlled from outside” (1987a, p. viii).

Because of Shor’s concern with the implications of Freire in the college composition classroom and his attention to the world outside of the classroom, an analysis of Shor’s pedagogy using the transfer of learning framework I developed in the Introduction from *How People Learn* (2000) would be useful to a compositionist curious
about the transfer of learning. Transfer, as I have noted in previous chapters, “is the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new situation” (Detterman, 1993, p. 4).

This chapter will follow a similar structure to the last. First, I will give a summary of the important parts of Shor’s pedagogy as he described it in *When Students Have Power* (1996) as well as in *Critical Teaching & Everyday Life* (1987a). Then, I will analyze this pedagogy on four metrics: how well the pedagogy accounts for students’ previous learning, how the initial teaching of the content promotes the transfer of learning, how the pedagogy encourages generalizability, and finally how the pedagogy promotes a conception of knowledge as dynamic. Analysis of Shor’s pedagogy will uncover the importance of student agency and how a teacher might position that agency in a class to encourage the transfer of learning.

Shor’s Liberatory Learning and Situated Pedagogy

To reach these conclusions, Shor’s college English pedagogy must first be understood. Shor borrowed from Freire in order to theorize what Shor called liberatory learning. In *When Students Have Power* (1996), Shor quoted from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to set up the problem liberatory learning was supposed to solve:

“Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (1997, p. 53, qtd. in Shor 1996, p. 17). Liberatory learning was a term Shor developed in *Critical Teaching & Everyday Life* (1987a). There he wrote of the humanizing, democratic, and Utopian nature of liberatory learning, ultimately saying that

---

4 Shor used a 1970 publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* so the page number he cited in *When Students Have Power* (1996) is different than mine. He cited this quote as on page 59.
“liberatory learning rejects the behaviorism of rote lessons and machine testing. Liberatory theory can be analyzed and systematized, but each liberatory class cannot be standardized” (1987a, p. 96). Shor’s liberatory learning was learning facilitated by the teacher but also by the individuality of students. Shor’s students were liberated to pursue their own individualized interests in the pursuit of learning.

Thus, for Shor, contemporary education was a contradiction since it was ludicrous to suggest that anybody could at all times occupy the positionality of teacher in a classroom space. All members of the classroom space are both teacher and student. The student-teacher contradiction has led to the standardization and dehumanization of education. Liberatory learning has been Shor’s solution to this contradiction, which conceptualizes pupils as both students and teachers and instructors as both teachers and students.

In his experiment with a student-teacher-negotiated power-shared class, Shor found himself without planned answers on his second day of a class he was teaching about Utopia. On the first day of class, instead of handing out a syllabus, Shor had proposed to his class that they might try to create a kind of Utopia in their classroom. To start this creation of Utopia, he told his new students that they would spend the second day of class negotiating what they would like to see in this course this semester (1996, pp. 63-65). On that second day of class, negotiations over seating (1996, pp. 67-68), grading (1996, pp. 78-88), class participation (1996, pp. 88-90), and what would be read in the class (1996, pp. 90-92) went off uneventfully. The students mostly negotiated in ways and for things that Shor had already considered. Then, a student took issue with
Shor’s proposed attendance policy—“one absence for A level, two for B level, and three for C”—saying that students did not need to come to class in order to earn those grades (1996, p. 94).

This negotiation forced Shor to improvise order back into his classroom—how else would he convince his students to attend class? First, he declared that students would have “protest rights” in his class—“each student has the right at any time to protest what we are doing” (1996, p. 112). Ultimately, he felt like he had barely convinced his students the value of mandatory attendance and so to “seal the negotiations” he proposed an “After-Class Group”—

a voluntary committee of students who would stay after class with [Shor] to review the session we just had so as to decide what was working, what was not, what to change, and what to do in the upcoming class. (Shor, 1996, p. 116)

By granting his students “protest rights” and establishing a policy for constant re-negotiating, Shor solidified the importance of student agency in his classroom. Indeed, Shor noted that a key purpose of the After-Class Group, was to solve the teacher-student contradiction by providing support as students more fully adopted and became comfortable with their teacher-roles (1996, p. 201).

Researchers in How People Learn have identified the standardization of education and its focus on rote memorization for success on standardized tests as an obstacle to education that hopes to encourage the transfer of learning. They have emphasized the importance of understanding in place of memorization and have noted the importance of
formative assessment\(^5\)—in which teachers provide consistent feedback for learners—to increase “students’ learning and transfer” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 141). Shor’s liberatory learning has provided a way to practice constant formative assessment. By providing students with a medium through which they could voice student misunderstandings and questions, Shor (1996) was able to craft a system which allowed him access to the same information that formative assessment would give access to—what concepts students were having trouble learning and what teaching methods would be most useful in addressing those unlearned concepts. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) have noted how the results of appropriately-designed formative assessments can make teachers to redefine their praxes (p. 141). Shor (1996) discussed how he changed his teaching practices in order to better accommodate the prior knowledge and learning preferences of his students (p. 127).

Shor wrote that a student questioning his grading criteria has not been something that has occurred in every class that he has taught based on this course—in this case the questioning student reinforced the situated pedagogy Shor hoped to engender (1996, p. 201). Drawing on Paolo Freire’s pedagogy, Shor has theorized situated pedagogy as a:

goal [that] asks teachers to situate learning in the students’ cultures—their literacy, their themes, their present cognitive and affective levels, their aspirations, their daily lives. . . the situated course will not only connect

experience with critical thought, but will also demonstrate that intellectual work has a tangible purpose in our lives. (1987b, p. 24)

Thus, situated pedagogy for Shor meant that even if he had taught a similarly themed course, every specific class section of that course has been and will necessarily be different. In *When Students Have Power* (1996), Shor described how he came to adopt a Gulf War generative theme in his Utopia-oriented. He wrote:

> Although a teacher-initiated topic in the Utopia class, the Gulf War was not merely a theme from my agenda because some students from the previous term had generated it for class discussion. This makes it partially a Freirean “generative theme” emerging from student suggestions, experiences, conditions, and expressions. (1996, p. 40)

Shor’s situated and liberatory pedagogy allowed and encouraged for students to take agency in both how the class was run (i.e., “protest rights” and the After-Class Group) and the content the class covered (i.e., generative themes). These characteristics will be important to keep in mind as I begin to analyze Shor’s pedagogy in my transfer of learning framework.

How did Shor’s pedagogy encourage his students to transfer what they were learning in his classroom to their lives outside and after the class? As I did with Freire’s literacy pedagogy, I will seek to answer this question by first investigating how Shor’s pedagogy accounted for his students’ previous learning. Then, I will compare how Shor constructed his course with what researchers know about the transfer of learning. Next, I will comment on the generalizability of Shor’s Utopia course content and pedagogy. And
finally, I will note how Shor was sure to aid his students begin to conceptualize knowledge as dynamic.

Knowledge of Students’ Prior Learning

In teaching his Utopia-themed college English class, Shor was invested in knowing his students’ prior school experiences. It was important that Shor spend time knowing his students in this way if he wanted them to apply their educations to their academic careers or lives after his class. Awareness of students’ “relevant knowledge and strengths,” Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) have noted, is part of “effective teaching” that “supports positive transfer” (p. 78). It is important for the transfer of learning that teachers have knowledge of their students’ knowledge because “Previous knowledge can help or hinder the understanding of new information” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 78).

In When Students Have Power, Shor (1996) wrote of the typical traits and characteristics of his working-class students, including being “predominantly white ethnic,” “first-generation collegians” who were “traditional, family-oriented,” “moderately ambitious,” “employed in low-to-middle-wage jobs,” had bad diets, and occupied “a very narrow political spectrum from dominant/aggressive conservatives to marginal/moderate liberals” (pp. 5-7). Shor knew these traits of his students affected how well they accepted his pedagogy. He wrote, “In any small sample of students constituting a single class, they [working-class students] can display widely varying age spans, employment profiles, gender mixes, racial and ethnic backgrounds, skin colors, family situations, career choices, academic development, and resistance/openness to
critical-democratic pedagogy [emphasis added]” (1996, p. 7). Shor was aware that the demographics of his students (of which their skills might be a part) as well as their prior learning (i.e., “academic development”) were important for him to know in order for him to teach them because these demographics affected their willingness to engage with him and his teaching.

Shor had to pay attention to this prior learning because he often found himself defending his abnormal Utopia course with students who had enrolled expecting a more traditional English literature course. For instance, one student who had previously attended an “elite campus,” “was the chief proponent for a more scholarly and literary class, more reading of books and more analysis of textual meanings, less of a civic-oriented, student-centered discourse” (Shor, 1996, p. 152). This students’ prior experience with English classes was interfering with her ability to approach Shor’s class with an open attitude. It could be said that this was a case of negative transfer. “Negative transfer occurs when learning in one context impacts negatively on performances on another” (Perkins & Salomon, 1996, p. 423).

This example of a student thinking they know the discourse community of a classroom based on prior classrooms she has been in was not unlike the student, Glen, that Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak identified in their comparative study of a Teaching for Transfer first-year composition (FYC) course who tried to use practices he developed in an Expressivist writing course for a writing task in the humanities (2014, p. 104). Glen ultimately began to understand from experience the rhetorical nature of writing tasks in specific courses (Yancey, Robertson, Taczak, 2014, p. 81). For a short assignment in a
film class later that semester, Glen knew that the writing he did in his Expressivist FYC course would not be appropriate (Yancey, Robertson, Taczak, 2014, p. 80).

Shor’s elite-college transfer-student, Stephanie, had a similar transformation. Stephanie came to Shor’s class having no experience with negotiated classrooms (Shor, 1996, p. 59). Shor “felt the democratic process succeeded when Stephanie and others felt secure enough to criticize [him]” (1996, p. 57). Shor was aware that Stephanie’s prior school experiences were interfering with her ability to find value in his class, but much like Glen in the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) study, new experiences and time enabled Stephanie to become one of the only students in the After-Class group who was critical of the group for becoming “a seminar style continuation of the class” and not living up to its democratic tasks. In an evaluation of the group, she wrote, “When we did actually discuss the class occurrences, we frequently complained about things with which we were unhappy and yet offered few solutions” (qtd in Shor, 1996, p. 217). Just as Glen came to understand rhetorical concepts through setback in the TFT comparative study, Stephanie came to understand the power she was being offered after her dissatisfaction with the group never fully achieving that power.

Content Initially Taught

What was the mechanism that Shor used to engender this development in Stephanie? Now that I have shown how Shor accounted for his students’ previous knowledge, I will move to analyzing how Shor taught his course and how this teaching measured up against research on the transfer of learning.
As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Shor was concerned with the student-teacher contradiction. His liberatory learning has sought to recognize that all members of the classroom are simultaneously teachers and students. To support his students in adopting the teacher pole of this contradiction, he provided many opportunities for them to provide a kind of formative assessment on his performance in class. The After-Class group offered a place for students to provide a voice in the curriculum of the class. This arrangement was consistent with reciprocal teaching.

Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) used Palincsar and Brown (1984) to describe reciprocal teaching and noted, “Transfer can be improved by helping students become more aware of themselves as learners who actively monitor their learning strategies and resources and assess their readiness for particular tests and performances” (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 67). Encouraging students to occupy the teacher pole of the student-teacher contradiction would be a strategy for fostering this kind of metacognition. Donovan et al. (2000) wrote:

The three major components of reciprocal teaching are instruction and practice with strategies that enable students to monitor their understanding; provision, initially by a teacher, of an expert model of metacognitive processes; and a social setting that enables joint negotiation for understanding. (p. 67)

Shor created a pedagogy in his Utopia class that fit all of these components.

The first major component, instruction and practice, was explicitly handled by Shor in the first two days of the class. On the first day, he had his students practice analyzing their lives and asked them to compare those lives to Utopia. He constructed a
sign-in sheet that asked questions such as “Why did you take this course?” and “If you could change one thing for the better about this College and your education, what would it be?” (Shor, 1996, p. 39). Then, he asked them to write about what “Utopia” meant to them and what questions they had about “Utopia” (Shor, 1996, p. 39). In such a way, Shor offered his students early practice with the kinds of questions he wanted them to spend the course asking: what was Utopia and did its meaning have any relation to the lives his students currently lived? Shor initiated this practice even before his students had been exposed to any of the course texts. This early initiation was consistent with the way some researchers have thought about instruction in the context of teaching for transfer.

Citing Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Steinbach’s (1984) research in written composition, Donovan et al. (2000) have described the importance of early explicit instruction to give students the appropriate conditions for goal-setting, a practice that engenders the kind of metacognitive practices supporting reciprocal teaching’s function of developing students as self-regulated learners. By giving students immediate practice with Utopian concepts, Shor (1996) demonstrated what would be expected of them throughout the course.

Additionally, including instruction and discussion about Utopia early on in the course allowed Shor (1996) to identify his students’ interests in the proposed subject of study: Utopia. Using his students’ questions about Utopia, Shor then engaged in a “dialogic lecture” about the origins of Utopia: both its linguistic origins as well as three traditions that have used the concept of Utopia—literature, communities, and social action (Shor, 1996, p. 55). Shor then linked these conceptions of Utopia to the systems of the class itself, telling students that they “might begin questioning and experiment with
the status quo right here, the way we relate as teacher and students” (Shor, 1996, p. 59). This questioning and experimenting might be understood as a practice of the Utopian concepts students were beginning to be instructed in.

Subsequently, on the second day of class, without much additional instruction in the understanding of Utopia, he began the practice of power-sharing, which Shor saw as a corollary to Utopia in that both frequently were concerned with democratic challenges to the “undemocratic status quo” (Shor, 1996, p. 60). Shor posed the relationship between the instruction of the first day and the practice of the second in this way: “Day One had begun a dialogic, participatory, and critical process based in student discourse, with some students participating more than others. In the second class session, I made power-sharing explicit by asking students to consult with me on a number of issues, big and small” (1996, p. 63). Thus, Shor saw the practice of power-sharing as a kind of instruction—important for his students’ understanding of the content of the course.

This instruction and practice, a component of reciprocal teaching as defined in How People Learn (2000), was built on throughout the course and led directly into a second component of reciprocal teaching—provision of the processes of metacognition. The practice of power-sharing these first days directly led to the establishment of another kind of practice—the After-Class group (ACG) (Shor, 1996, p. 116). The first meetings of the ACG made it evident that the students involved were beginning to take on the role of teacher as well as student. In the first meeting, the ACG instructed Shor to not repeat his instruction for those who arrived late. Shor interpreted this instruction as a critical departure from the contract-negotiating in which lateness and absences were central
arguments (Shor, 1996, p. 127). While the first meeting dealt with these kinds of system concerns, the second session of ACG began directing Shor on the kind of teaching that would be useful for students—certainly a metacognitive practice. In the second session, students in the ACG noted parts of the day’s lecture that were confusing and on which they had wished more time had been spent. Shor was able to put this instruction into his practice of teaching the following class (Shor, 1996, p. 128).

Shor’s pedagogy then, especially with the ACG, exemplified two of the three components of reciprocal teaching—instruction and practice as well as fostering metacognitive abilities. The third component of reciprocal teaching—an enabling social setting—was apparent in the ACG as well. Indeed, in Shor’s discussion of the students’ evaluations of the ACG, Shor wrote, “The ACG was thus legitimized to all but one of the AC students by becoming an intense seminar on the content of the course while critiquing/codeveloping the syllabus” (1996, p. 219). One student wrote of the ACG “I also enjoyed the after-class group because it made me feel important… I felt like my voice and opinion did matter” (qtd. in Shor, 1996, p. 215). Thus, the ACG in Shor’s Utopia-themed class provided a space for students to be socially rewarded for engaging in the kind of learning and thinking Shor was requiring of his class.

Although perhaps best exemplified by the After-Class Group, Shor’s pedagogical use of reciprocal teaching was not limited to this select group of volunteering students. Major parts of Shor’s curriculum were “two Utopia projects, one on changing the College and one on changing NYC.” To achieve an “A” in the class, both of these projects mandated that they be presented to the class (1996, p. 77). Through these assignments,
Shor sought to give more students the benefits of reciprocal teaching about Utopian concepts—they had to reflect on and apply their instruction and readings Shor gave them about Utopia in order to help teach their peers about how a study of Utopia might be used to think about a specific problem in their communities (1996, pp. 161-197). These assignments were created to explicitly prompt students to think about transferring their learning about Utopia to contexts outside of class.

It is evident that Shor’s pedagogy both accounted for students’ prior learning and engaged in a kind of reciprocal teaching that some researchers have identified as important for the transfer of learning. To fully understand Shor’s pedagogy against research on the transfer of learning, there are two more metrics to explore—the generalizability of the content and the orientation of the pedagogy towards an understanding of knowledge as dynamic.

Generalizability

Part of Shor’s focus on students’ lives at the beginning of the term served to prime his students for generalizing the content they were learning in their Utopia-centered readings and class discussions to their lives outside of the classroom. Donovan et al. (2000) wrote, “Knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer; abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer” (p. 53). Teaching students about Utopia would mean little if students did not begin to conceptualize Utopia abstractly—to develop governing principles of Utopia that could be put to work in other contexts. Generalization can be understood as a necessary cognitive step before knowledge can be applied. Shor (1996) pushed his students to begin generalizing by asking them to apply
Utopian concepts to issues outside of the classroom. Students completed final project group presentations on issues such as not enough classes, registration at the college, how teaching might be improved at the college, and racism in their home of New York City (Shor, 1996, pp.163-174); students also reported on problems in campus parking, the understandability of teachers to students, and presentations on homelessness, crime, and pollution in New York City (Shor, 1996, pp. 180-187).

As mentioned above, this generalization of class content was made mandatory by Shor since he included two projects in his grading contract—“one on changing the College and one on changing NYC” (1996, p. 77). Even though Shor called for these generalizations and even though some students’ work “offered a few sublime moments of critical perception that other students could ponder or deny, embrace or ignore” (1996, p. 187), some students still fell short of the kind of generalizations that Shor was hoping for. For instance, in the group presenting on campus parking, their solution was a proposal to solve “the parking mess by cutting down trees to expand the already huge parking lot into a wooded green-belt bordering the College” (Shor, 1996, p. 180). Students came to this conclusion even after reading an economically-oriented Utopian novel Ecotopia (Shor, 1996, p. 183). Shor (1996) perceived this as a proposal that fell short of Utopian ideals (p. 187). He wrote that he had invited these kinds of proposals and without knowing the “varied abilities and agendas” of the students in his classroom, he seemed to wonder whether he could judge the success or failure of group projects. Students, in other words, may have been succeeding at generalizing based on the context of their lives; the proposed construction of a new parking lot could very well have been students applying
to their lives the abstract lessons they had developed from their study of Utopia. This example demonstrated a problem with trying to measure generalization.

Shor’s study of his Utopia course had another such problem. Shor seemed to wonder at the real effect of his lessons, when he wrote “With so much activity during and between classes, the hot and dingy room below ground became a center of ferocious cultural production, but I still have to come to grips with the big question: What exactly was being produced?” (1996, p. 180). Shor may have been intuiting a concept that the researchers from How People Learn (2000) have noted is an important part of learning: practice. Donovan et al. (2000) wrote of the appropriate role of practice in language learning: “Experience is important; but the opportunity to use the skills—practice is also important” (p. 95). It seems like the same thing might be true of critical knowledge—exposure to critical knowledge through experience may be important but also an instructor should seek out opportunities for pupils to practice using that knowledge. Shor’s (1996) Utopian course largely did not provide students (besides, those, maybe in the After-Class Group) with a chance to practice their developing critical knowledge.

Because Shor’s (1996) study provided few opportunities for the practice of critical skills, he was unable to show examples of any kind of generalization even among students who showed the greatest potential for it. For instance, one student, Angela, wrote a letter to Shor at the end of the term, saying, “All of the Utopian principles and the 4 R’s [repair, recycle, re-use, reduce consumption] will be of use to me in my lifetime” (qtd. in Shor, 1996, p. 221). Angela went on to say, “Some of the things you have asked
me to think about have pushed my mind to its outermost limits, and that active learning is also a valuable thing to me” (qtd. in Shor, 1996, p. 221).

Angela was especially motivated by how far contemporary society was from any kind of Utopia. In fact, she:

insisted that she would become a change-agent in society. [Shor] asked her if she could keep it up for twenty years or more. . . . So, [Shor] made an appointment with her in twenty years. . . . so [they] can compare notes on how [they] kept trying to change the system. (Shor, 1996, p. 221)

Thus, Angela’s experience in Shor’s class showed that his pedagogy did have potential for generalizing, but these were actions for the future; they were not actual actions Angela was taking by the end of the class.

Despite Shor’s (1996) mention of many students like Angela who have great potential for generalizing but ultimately never show any concrete action that demonstrates that concepts from the Utopia class have been generalized to be used in other contests, Shor (1996) did provide one powerful example of students from his Utopia class practicing skills they had begun to develop in the Utopia class. A few of Shor’s students met with Shor to develop a plan for negotiating power-sharing with other teachers. Shor (1996) advised these students to be sure to build collaborations before going to the professor, to know the concessions they were willing to accept, and to approach the teacher from a position of good academic standing. “A few Utopia students did approach a professor in another course but, unfortunately, were dismissed out of hand by him” (Shor, 1996, p. 211). Going to Shor to discuss how to approach other teachers
showed that students understood that instigating power-sharing negotiating in new contexts would require new tools. This contextualization of knowledge had potential for the transfer of learning. As research has noted:

Simply learning to perform procedures, and learning in only a single context, does not promote flexible transfer. The transfer literature suggests that the most effective transfer may come from a balance of specific examples and general principles, not from either one alone. (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 77)

Thus, Shor’s students recognized the general value of power-sharing but recognized that they needed Shor to help them re-conceptualize that knowledge into a new specific example.

On this transfer of learning metric of generalizability, while Shor and the course readings did not always succeed in engendering his students to think more critically about common issues in both the city and the college, the structure of his pedagogy allowed for students to transfer what they liked about his class to other classes they wanted to influence. Furthermore, students like Angela did latch on to the course readings in a way that allowed them to look at the world more critically, but even these more critical students were not applying that knowledge in any tangible way.

Dynamism of Knowledge

Although a small step, though, it was important that students wanted to take more agency in their other classes. This agency in other academic settings was evidence that should be analyzed in the last transfer of learning metric—how the pedagogy helped
students see that knowledge is dynamic. It can be inferred that students in Shor’s Utopia class began to conceptualize knowledge and education as concepts they could co-create with teachers rather than concepts they had no access to until the teacher taught them. In other words, students were beginning to realize that knowledge is not static.

Many of the students in this class began the term not even excited about the knowledge they expected to gain from Shor. By asking “Why did you take this course?” on the attendance sheet, Shor found that only four of his thirty-five students said anything about the theme of “Utopia” in their answers. Fifteen of the thirty-five simply said that they only took the course because it fit into their schedules or because they needed the credit (Shor, 1996, p. 39).

These attitudes would have been troubling for an educator focused on the transfer of learning. The researchers who authored *How People Learn* have noted that it is important for “learners to actively choose and evaluate strategies, consider resources, and receive feedback” in order to take full advantage of the transfer of their learning (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 66). Shor mandated that his students start taking a more active role in their educations by immediately asking students to negotiate the syllabus and grading contract with him. After the contract had been negotiated, he asked students to sign for the grade they wanted—A, B, or C (Shor, 1996, p. 76). This system caused students to quickly start thinking about their own needs in education settings. Once students started understanding that their needs were an important archive from which to draw inspiration for knowledge creation, Shor hoped that his situated
pedagogy would lead students “to imagine alternative to the status quo” (Shor, 1996, p. 40).

Shor (1996) explicitly challenging the status quo from the beginning of the course pushed students to accept that there might be dynamic alternatives to the norms they accepted. Throughout the term, in addition to challenging the status quo of their city and college as prompted by Shor and his assignments, students also questioned the status quo themselves. For instance, in class discussion over *Ecotopia* (1974) by Ernest Callenbach, Shor broke students into groups charged with reporting what *Ecotopia* said about their topic and posing questions to the rest of the class. The group in charge of urban mass transit posed this question: “How come our system has regressed instead of progressed when we have technology to reach a transportation system equivalent to or better than that of Ecotopia?” (qtd. in Shor, 1996, p. 155). Students challenging status quo systems based on new knowledge was an example of students grappling with the dynamic nature of knowledge—the scenes of *Ecotopia* did not just stay statically in the novel. Instead, students used these scenes in a dynamic way by applying them to other concepts.

Thus, Shor’s (1996) pedagogy provided three avenues for aiding students in understanding the dynamism of knowledge and their role in its creation. First, students involved in the creation of the curriculum and class systems applied that new-found knowledge of self as teacher to their other classes. Second, all students were forced to consider their own roles in their learning when they were asked to negotiate the syllabus and grading contracts. Third and finally, students were encouraged and even expected to apply learned knowledge from course texts to domains outside of the course texts.
Conclusion

It appears that Shor’s (1996) pedagogy measures up against all four of my transfer of learning metrics. Shor’s attention to the demographics of his students allowed him to design a situated pedagogy out of which came effective reciprocal teaching. Once students began to conceptualize themselves as teachers also, they could more easily generalize course concepts to serve them in other spaces. Students did not always generalize in the way Shor conceived they might generalize, but they also made unexpected transfer of learning when they asked Shor for help in negotiating power-sharing in other classes. These surprises were exactly what prompted Shor to do “this experimental search for transformative openings” (Shor, 1996, p. 3). Shor’s talk of a “search for transformative openings” recognized that Shor could not know how his students would transfer their learning to their lives beyond the classroom, but Shor’s pedagogy was ready when students found it beneficial to use elsewhere, or transfer, the knowledge generated there.
CHAPTER 3: ANALOUISE KEATING’S PEDAGOGIES OF INVITATION

In the previous two chapters, I analyzed the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor for their efficacy in promoting transfer of learning. I have been defining transfer of learning as “the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new situation” (Detterman, 1993, p. 4). In order to do this analysis, I measured their pedagogies against a framework developed from characteristics of transfer of learning that the researchers have defined in How People Learn (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000). The pedagogies of Freire and Shor have succeeded and faltered at different parts of this transfer of learning framework; both Freire and Shor, in their pedagogical work I have analyzed here, have noted and have carefully considered the intellectual origins of their students. This consideration, however, has mostly been used to know the knowledges the pedagogies of Freire and Shor have sought to replace. In other words, Freire and Shor have seemingly only cared for their students’ prior knowledge because it is wrong and must be replaced or problematized.

Freire, for instance, wrote of his pupils that they were definitely missing important knowledge:

As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatally accept their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for freedom and self-affirmation. (1997, p. 46)

This kind of orientation to the student is problematic for encouraging the transfer of learning. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) noted the importance of building
bridges “between the subject matter and the student” in order for a teacher to best support the transfer of learning (p. 136). Because Freire was more concerned, in his work I have analyzed here, with providing educators with the skills and orientations required to succeed with this liberatory pedagogy, Freire gave little attention to how his students consolidated their new learned knowledges into their existing intellectual lives. In other words, Freire did not fully conceptualize how his students used or did not use the bridges they were hopefully constructing from their prior knowledges to the new knowledge a liberatory pedagogy gave them access to.

Shor, on the other hand, was often concerned with the prior school experiences of his students, quoting one student in his Utopia class as saying, “I feel unease judging the learning contract proposal. In the last twenty-five years, nobody ever asked me for my opinion on this topic” (1996, p. 33). Ultimately, however, even though Shor (1996) wrote in When Students Have Power of negotiations he made with his class (including, for instance, the After-Class Group) as well as his students’ perceptions of those negotiations, Shor also never fully investigated the effects in the intellectual lives of his students of the transformation from passive education to a more power-sharing democratic class structure.

This absence of thinking about the intellectual lives of students and how those lives might be positioned for “bridge-building” in both Freire and Shor is a place that should trouble an educator seeking to foster transfer of learning in students. Compositionist Rebecca S. Nowacek (2011) has commented on the trouble of ignoring students’ lives. Nowacek has noted that students may experience a kind of frustration
when they “experience a conflict between various aspects of their academic and personal lives” (2011, p. 42). One might conceptualize critical pedagogy as making students critical about this very conflict—what the difference is between their personal lives and what they learn in a classroom. Critical pedagogues have been aware of the frustration this conflict causes in students and that this frustration might trouble learning. Freire mentioned, for instance, the “resistance” members “of the middle class” might experience in his liberatory pedagogy (1997, p. 85).

This frustration may have grave implications for the transfer of learning. In writing about students’ prior knowledge in *How People Learn*, Donovan, Bransford, Pellegrino (2000) said that prior knowledge is not *only* the prior learning students acquire through formal education; prior knowledge also includes cultural knowledge. Thus, Donovan et al. noted that a “mismatch” between cultural knowledge and the knowledge received in school may result in breakdowns in learning (2000, p. 72). To protect against this “mismatch,” they have recommended “respecting and encouraging children to try out the ideas and strategies that they bring to school-based learning in classrooms” (2000, p. 171). Critical pedagogy, then, if it seeks to reveal the “true” world to its students, runs the risk of alienating students who are comfortable in their home cultural knowledges. This alienation may destroy the chance for the transfer of learning in the classroom to their everyday lives.

Some scholars have noted this trouble of critical pedagogy. Teacher-scholar AnaLouise Keating, for instance, has argued that critical pedagogy often relies on “an antagonistic, dichotomous worldview” that asks students to replace one side of “binary-
oppositional thought” with the other (2013, p. 183). In other words, exposed to critical pedagogy, students may sometimes become dogmatic defenders of the other “more critical” side rather than become critical of the very system that divides the “sides.”

In order to problematize these very divisions, Keating has developed an alternative to critical pedagogy: “pedagogies of invitation.” Keating has said that “pedagogies of invitation do not condemn students’ perspectives” (2013, p. 183). By offering no condemnation, she has noted that pedagogies of invitation allow her to “more effectively establish a classroom climate of generosity and respect” (2013, p. 183).

Critical pedagogies, I argue, make relatively little mention of this kind of respect of students’ native knowledges, but a pedagogy that wishes to encourage the transfer of learning demands classrooms be an environment of respect. Knowing their students’ socio-historical contexts may have been important to Freire and Shor, but little attention was paid to the prior intellectual lives of their students as they experienced the critical pedagogies. Keating, I argue, has accounted for students’ prior knowledges in her pedagogies of invitation in a way that has encouraged this “bridge-building” that Donovan et al. (2000) have recommended. Thus, to conclude this transfer of learning study of critical pedagogies, I will analyze Keating’s alternative pedagogies of invitation in order to investigate how critical pedagogues can be sure their teaching transfers for their students to contexts outside of the classroom.

As I have done in the previous two chapters, I will first give a brief description of Keating’s pedagogy. Then, I will analyze it against research in the transfer of learning to determine its ability to account for students’ prior learning, how the content is initially
taught, how the pedagogy fosters students to generalize the learned knowledge, and finally whether pedagogies of invitation help students conceptualize knowledge as dynamic.

Pedagogies of Invitation

Keating has defined pedagogies of invitation as:

nonoppositional. They employ relational teaching tactics that invite and evoke but do not impose change on students... Instead, pedagogies of invitation offer nonoppositional tactics to engage (and, hopefully, transform) these [students’] perspectives by inviting students to self-reflect and examine their perspectives from additional points of view. (2013, p. 183)

Keating has said that while pedagogies of invitation might take many forms, all pedagogies of invitation have three founding principles: 1) All of existence is interconnected; 2) “Transformation is optional and always—in some way or another—exceeds our conscious efforts, attempts, and expectations”; and 3) To encourage transformation, educators ought to be flexible and willing to be changed by their students and their teaching (2013, p. 183).

What Keating means by transformation is investigated in her Teaching Transformation (2007). Her first major use of transformation is in “transformational multiculturalism” (2007, p. 9). She designated transformational multiculturalism, in place of “melting-pot multiculturalisms” or “separatist multiculturalisms,” as the kind of

---

6 Indeed, she has noted she used pedagogies as “plural terms because [her] experience has taught [her] that pedagogies of invitation can (and must) take multiple forms” (Keating, 2013, p. 182). This argument has encouraged me to use the plural pedagogies throughout this project.
multiculturalism that should be taught for social justice (2007, pp. 11-12). To describe melting-pot multiculturalisms, Keating noted, for instance, the practice in “literary studies and other forms of academic knowledge production,” in which “this melting-pot approach builds on overly simplistic assumptions concerning a common core U.S. culture and posits a distinct set of universal ‘American’ values that it finds in every text it reads” (2007, p. 11). Relatedly, separatist multiculturalisms “insist on a rhetoric of narrowly defined authenticity that supports the ‘common sense’ belief that self-contained social identities are permanent, unchanging categories of meaning based on biology, family, history, and tradition” (2007, p. 12).

Opposed to these multiculturalisms, Keating theorized a “transformational multiculturalism,” which “is holistic; it requires nonbinary-oppositional epistemological and pedagogical methods that work in the service of social justice” (2007, p. 14). Transformational multiculturalism seeks social justice by asking individuals to reimagine what it means to be an individual and part of a community (Keating, 2007, p. 14). In this way, Keating’s pedagogy is very much like that Paolo Freire’s and Ira Shor’s. Indeed, she has mentioned that her teaching has been greatly influenced by scholarship in critical pedagogy (2007, p. 49). Keating, though, has cast critical pedagogy as a type of oppositional politics (2007, p. 7). In other words, Keating pointed out that critical pedagogy has too often stopped at enabling students and teacher to only voice their opposition to the oppressor. Because pedagogies of invitation serve as an alternative to critical pedagogy that seeks a similar social justice transfer in students, I plan to analyze it in the rest of this chapter against the transfer of learning framework I developed from
How People Learn (2000). I will ask how Keating’s pedagogies of invitation account for students’ prior learning. Then, I will analyze how pedagogies of invitation work and their implications for the transfer of learning. Next, I will consider how Keating has thought about students generalizing knowledge they create in her class into their worlds outside of her classroom. Finally, I will investigate how pedagogies of invitation foster conceptions of knowledge as dynamic.

Knowledge of Students’ Prior Learning

Central to pedagogies of invitation is respect. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Keating has foregrounded respect for her students’ native bases of knowledge. Two of the six teaching strategies Keating mentioned in Teaching Transformation (2007) as central to her pedagogy are concerned with students’ learning before they made their way to her classroom. One such strategy is “fostering intellectual agency” (Keating, 2007, p. 109). Keating has explained this strategy partly in this way: “I assure students that I do not penalize them for their views, and I try to create an environment that values difference of opinion” (2007, p. 110). The purpose of such orientation to her students, she has said, is to give her grounding on which “to insist on reciprocal respect during class discussion.” She has written, “Just as I respect my students’ opinions, beliefs, and perspectives, I want them to respect those of their classmates” (2007, p. 110).

Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) have drawn on educationalist Eleanor Duckworth to talk about the importance of having this kind of respect for students’ prior knowledge (p. 24). Duckworth (1987) has criticized the idea that the job of education is
to provide students with “a dry, contentless set of tools that they can go about applying.”

Instead, she has suggested that:

If a person has some knowledge at his [sic] disposal, he [sic] can try to make sense of new experiences and new information related to it. . . . By knowledge I do not mean verbal summaries of somebody else’s knowledge. . . . I mean a person’s own repertoire of thoughts, actions, connections, predictions, and feelings. (Duckworth, 1987, p. 13)

Successful teaching, for Duckworth then, positions and recognizes students’ prior knowledge in a way that best enables them to learn the new content being taught. Duckworth (1987) provided an example, for instance, of a student learning about electricity who drew on his prior experimentation to solve a problem creatively that his teacher did not necessarily expect her pupils to answer; she provided the space for the student to show that creativity by posing the question (pp. 6-7).

Keating has done something similar as she has sought to understand her students’ prior knowledge that they may use that knowledge to navigate new concepts. In order to better conceptualize her students’ prior knowledge that is often in conflict with the concepts she has taught, Keating has theorized “status-quo stories.” Keating has defined status-quo stories as the “worldviews and beliefs that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and norms so entirely that they deny the possibility of change” (2007, p. 23). These status-quo stories interfere with teaching because they also are always actively a form of teaching: “Status-quo stories are divisive, teaching
[emphasis added] us to break the world into parts and label each piece” (Keating, 2007, p. 23).

By focusing on her students’ status-quo stories, Keating has been able to expect and plan for resistance to her desired learning outcomes of, for instance, one of the three founding principles of pedagogies of invitation—the interconnectedness of all existence. She has noted, “Like most U.S. Americans, the majority of [her] students have been seduced by these status-quo stories of rugged, self-enclosed individualism” (2007, p. 27). In Transformation Now! Keating (2013) described how to position this status-quo story of individualism in order to bring students to course learning outcomes. She wrote, “I don’t deny the value of individualism and ask students to reject it; instead, I reframe the concept in relational terms.” Borrowing from Gloria Anzaldúa, she continued by defining the “self” as extending “outward—meeting, touching, entering into exchange with other subjects” (p. 177). Keating has not denied individualism to her students but rather redefined what an individual self is.

Thus, Keating has been able to guard against potential negative transfer—when students attempt to use prior knowledge in a way that interferes with new learning. “Negative transfer occurs when learning in one context impacts negatively on performance in another,” scholars David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon have written (1996, p. 423). A commitment to a status-quo story like individualism might result in negative transfer if students cling on to their beliefs dogmatically. If students hold the view that individualism should be valued in every situation, then they may necessarily have problems valuing interconnection. In other words, they may transfer their value of
individualism to their investigation of interconnection, thereby making them unable to conceiving of what the world would be like if they valued interconnection.

Pedagogies of invitation have been essential for Keating in dealing with this potential negative transfer while still respecting her students’ prior knowledge. She has written of teaching her primarily “fundamentalist ‘Born-Again Christian’” students different creationist myths, including Genesis and a Zuni account, “Talk Concerning the First Beginning.” Keating has described how her students object to classifying Genesis as a myth. She has said that when faced with such objections, she has invited her students to think about what the definition of myth is instead of shutting down her students. In this practice, since students were respected as intellectual co-questioners, they were able to come to a more critical standpoint about Western culture than they may have been able to do had they hung on to their objections and faced a perceived defiantly oppositional teacher (2007, pp. 46-48). Keating has been sure to consider the prior knowledge of her students but how has she used this prior knowledge to initially teach her content?

Content Initially Taught

To understand how Keating’s pedagogies of invitation have used teaching for the transfer of learning, it will be beneficial to consider the role reflection plays in these pedagogies as well as the role of six teaching strategies Keating has named and explained in Teaching Transformation (2007). Keating has shown that reflection has been an important mechanism for ensuring that students’ prior knowledge is respected and used creatively. After I have considered how this use of self-reflection shares much with the literature on the transfer of learning, I will move into analyzing how six teaching
strategies, as Keating has demonstrated using in her courses, compare and contrast with research on the transfer of learning and how courses can be taught to encourage this transfer.

For Keating, reflection has been intimately related with helping students understand the interconnectedness of all existence. Keating opened *Teaching Transformation* by proposing a “connectionist approach” to remedy so-called oppositional politics (2007, p. 1). “Connectionist thinking,” she wrote, “is visionary, relational, and holistic. When we view ourselves and each other from a connectionist perspective, we look beneath surface judgments, rigid labels, and other divisive ways of thinking; we seek commonalities and move toward collective healing” (2007, p. 2). In this connectionist way of thinking, Keating has begun proposing a different paradigm of self-reflection—one that uses reflection on previously-held and developing knowledges to make connections with the external world.

Indeed, “Self-reflection plays a vital role in transformational multiculturalism,” Keating wrote. She continued:

This self-reflection is a recursive four-part process in which we become partially aware of our unconsciously held beliefs; explore these beliefs’ connections with messages from the external world (parents, media, education, religion, and so forth); investigate the implications of these beliefs; and choose whether to keep them, modify them, or attempt to reject them entirely. (2007, p. 14)

Just as it serves an important function in Keating’s pedagogies of invitation, reflection also serves an important role in the transfer of learning. The researchers of
*How People Learn* noted reflection as an important metacognitive ability that fosters learning transfer (Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino, 2000, p. 12). The ability of students to reflect on their own processes, successes, and failures of their learning enables them to transfer that learning to new contexts. Reflection has been an important component of investigations into teaching for transfer.

For instance, the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) first-year composition (FYC) curriculum designed by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) supported students in learning how to reflect on their own writing practices and their own writing identities. In the Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak study (2014), students in the TFT FYC course were supported in developing reflective practices in which they were able to develop their own theories of writing, which they could then transfer to other writing contexts (p. 57). Yancey et al. reported that the use of reflection in the writing curriculum enabled at least one student to begin to conceptualize rhetorical concepts like genre and audience as he thought about writing in other classes after his FYC course (2014, p. 92). Reflection served to show both the student and investigators that there was real transfer of learning happening.

Thus, the reflection Keating has encouraged in her students has much in common with research in the transfer of learning. Keating has gone beyond this reflection, though. Not only has she encouraged reflection among her students, she also has adopted reflection as an important part of her pedagogical practices. While encouraging and setting the stage for self-reflection in her students, Keating also wrote of the importance
of self-reflection for her as a teacher as she uses pedagogies of invitation. In explaining how self-reflection as a teacher is related to transformation, she wrote:

Transformation in the context of the classroom is even less within my control. I can neither predict nor direct it. I can’t even guarantee that it will happen! All I can do is set the intention, carefully self-reflect [emphasis added], thoughtfully organize each activity, and remain open to my students’ reactions. (2013, p. 185)

For Keating, this reflection (both hers and her students’) ensured flexibility. Reflection has played a big role in her relational teaching strategies. “I describe transformational multiculturalism’s teaching patterns as relational to underscore what I believe to be a vital but too often ignored insight for contemporary life: We are all interconnected” she wrote. She continued, “Relational teaching begins with commonalities” (2007, p. 44). By beginning with commonalities in her relational teaching, Keating has been able “to encourage potentially transformational self-reflection [emphasis added]” (2007, p. 45). This self-reflection has allowed her students to think about what they share in common with the texts they are studying (2007, p. 45). The self-reflection that she has engaged in as teacher has ensured that she has not taken control of the course and thus forced the learning outcomes she thought she wanted. Keating has used reflection as a way to ensure that she shares with her students the role of determining the direction of the course. This teacher self-reflection has served a similar function as Ira Shor’s After-Class Group—giving agency to the students as autonomous intellectual beings.
Keating has written about the challenges that are created by affording students this agentic autonomy. For instance, asking students to question and reflect on everything has resulted in the kinds of objections to course content and readings I mentioned above, concerning Keating’s teaching of creation myths (Keating, 2007, pp. 46-48). In order to move her students past self-reflections that object to course content, Keating has developed six teaching strategies with which to teach her brand of multicultural transformation.

In her first teaching strategy, Keating has written about the importance of “framing each course” (2007, p. 106). Keating has explained that in addition to frontloading things like course policies and general context for the course, framing the course means “Providing students with a framework for readings and discussions” (2007, p. 106). Keating has noted that providing students with such a framework has allowed them to take a more agentic role in their learning. This first strategy has given students expectations about what the course will ask of them and what they will be invited to consider (Keating, 2007, p. 108). This strategy has helped to build the pedagogical house into which students are invited.

Rather than engage in the problem-posing pedagogy of Paolo Freire or Ira Shor, Keating has been sure to emphasize her beliefs and goals for the course in communication with her students at the beginning of her courses. Experiments in teaching for the transfer of learning have similarly indicated the usefulness of frontloading in this way. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014), when writing about the curriculum of their TFT FYC course, for instance, have noted the importance of giving
students the vocabulary of writing and transfer at the beginning of the semester while supporting them in developing the skill of reflection so that they can spend the semester developing a personalized theory of writing (pp. 57-58). Some researchers have noted that giving students the tools to differentiate knowledge as experts do is sometimes necessary before more active learning can take place (Schwartz & Bransford, 1998).

Framing each course has allowed students to know exactly what is expected of them, respecting their autonomy. This respect has led well into her second strategy, in which Keating has emphasized “fostering intellectual agency” (2007, p. 109). In this strategy, Keating has set up a model of respect—by respecting her students’ differing opinions, she has invited her students to respect each other (2007, p. 110). Because of this culture of respect, students have been encouraged to adopt a position of open-mindedness and to recognize that the class may “have a variety of opinions and views” (Keating, 2007, p. 110). Some scholars have pointed to a similar open-mindedness when thinking about the use of the phenomenon of the transfer of learning and how best to utilize it.

Compositionist Elizabeth Wardle (2012), for instance, has theorized problem-exploring and answer-getting dispositions in students. Students with answer-getting dispositions, Wardle (2012) has written, primarily approach new problems committed to solving them with a single strategy with which they have had success in the past. In other words, students with this disposition would not be open to the possibility that there could be multiple solutions, with different advantages and disadvantages, to solve a single problem. This disposition, Wardle (2012) has written, is not ideal for fostering the transfer of learning since a student with the answer-getting disposition would seek to
apply a singular learned solution to many new contexts for which that answer may be inappropriate.

Wardle (2012) has posed the problem-exploring disposition as the opposite of the answer-getting disposition. “Problem-exploring dispositions,” Wardle has said, “incline a person toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can ‘work’” (2012, “Problem-Exploring vs. Answer-Getting…” section, para. 1). A problem-exploring disposition seems to be the kind of disposition Keating has encouraged in her students. For instance, when Keating had her students discuss the differences and similarities between Genesis and Zuni creation stories, she told her students “they should not assume that they will arrive at ‘the truth’ about these issues” (2007, pp. 47-48). This invitation to conceptualizing a task without a single “right” answer has mirrored what Wardle has said about problem-exploring dispositions—that they allow students to recognize the feasibility of more than one solution to a problem.

In her Introduction to a special “transfer” issue of Composition Forum, Wardle (2012) has argued that an emphasis on the phenomenon of transfer of learning can remedy the problematic answer-getting disposition and is tied to problem-exploring dispositions. Wardle (2012) has further wondered if the reason for the ubiquity of answer-getting dispositions might be a contemporary school system structured to train students to deliver standard answers. In defining these dispositions, Wardle (2012) drew from the work of Bourdieu (1990) who theorized these dispositions as not easily changed.
Noting that some scholars have taken issue with this lack of potential for change, Wardle (2012) has pointed to arguments that Jennifer Maher has made that “change can and does occur” (Maher, 2006, p. 46, qtd in Wardle, 2012, “Can Dispositions Change?” section, para. 1). By respecting the diverse perspectives and insights of her students, the teaching strategies of Keating’s pedagogies of invitation might be a tool to foster problem-exploring dispositions in her students.

Indeed, it is not just Keating’s second teaching strategy of “fostering intellectual agency” that has had this kind of effect, but also the rest of her six teaching strategies (2007, p. 109). In her third teaching strategy, “tactical (non)naming,” Keating has selectively chosen when, if, and how to reveal parts of her identity to her students. Rather than provide them with “answer-getting” responses, she has used this strategy to show the flimsiness of concepts like sexuality and ‘race’ (2007, pp. 111-112).

Similarly, in her fourth teaching strategy, “focusing on multiple interlinked issues,” Keating has further challenged the answer-getting disposition. In describing this strategy, Keating (2007) has explained that she has avoided discussing issues, like sexuality, by themselves. “By discussing sexualities,” she wrote, “in conjunction with ability/health, class, ethnicity/’race,’ gender, region, and/or religion, I normalize this identity category: sexuality becomes one aspect of the complex systems of difference that shape social actors, texts, and traditions in contemporary U.S. cultures” (Keating, 2007, p. 112). Because Keating (2007) has noted, “An exclusive focus on any single category . . . inadvertently reifies the unexamined (Euro-American, male, heterosexual) norm and, by

---

7 I put ‘race’ in scare quotes because Keating has done so to ultimately denaturalize it (2013, p. 209).
extension, implies the abnormality of the group (non-Euro, nonmale, nonheterosexual) under examination” (p. 115), she has been motivated to develop creative ways for “normalizing” identities that are often seen as “abnormal.” This teaching strategy has challenged the “answer-getting” conceptions of identity in order to encourage students to adopt a more complicated, or problem-exploring, conception of identity.

This challenging of commonly held conceptions is also present in Keating’s fifth and sixth teaching strategies. Her fifth teaching strategy is “questioning conventional definitions” (2007, p. 115). She has written of this strategy that she wants her “students to realize that there are no fixed definitions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer identity,” for instance (2007, p. 118). This questioning has positioned conventional definitions as problems to explore instead of ready-made answers. Paired with the heavy attention to reflection in Keating’s pedagogies of invitation, this teaching strategy has had the potential for allowing students to transfer the knowledge that definitions of identities are complicated into their own lives. It also has opened up the possibility that students may recognize that there can be more than one answer to questions of definition based on the context. To help her students understand how multiple definitions for a concept may be “right” in different contexts, Keating (2007) has offered her sixth and last teaching strategy, “historicizing the categories” (p. 119). This strategy has contextualized different definitions for categories of identity so that Keating’s students might realize that these definitions are more dynamic and changing than dictionary definitions.

These teaching strategies, as we have seen, are related to Wardle’s (2012) idea of problem-exploring dispositions, and the emphasis pedagogies of invitation have on
reflection is related to the metacognitive tasks necessary for the transfer of learning. How, though, do students transfer the content they learn in Keating’s classes? To answer this question, I turn to consider the third metric of the transfer of learning framework I developed—generalizability.

Generalizability

One purpose Keating has given for inviting students to understand the interconnectedness of everything is that “it can fuel students’ desire to work for social change” (2013, p. 176). In her discussion of pedagogies of invitation in *Transformation Now!* Keating (2013) has suggested that a teacher might interpret for students the knowledge production of the classroom as a kind of social change. There, she has written, “By openly charting the shifts in my own perspectives and emphasizing that I, too, grow as a thinker and scholar, I demonstrate that it’s okay to change your views and to develop your ideas” (2013, p. 186).

This demonstration may have the effect of students generalizing the learning they are doing in Keating’s class as something they can practice far beyond her classroom. Furthermore, the post-oppositional framework that Keating has used to inform her invitational pedagogies is a framework that Keating has humbly hoped students will transfer to other parts of their lives, but perhaps because of their nonoppositional nature, Keating has not found it important to track her students’ changes—how they are transferring the framework shifts from her classroom to social causes, for instance. While Keating has invited this kind of generalizability, there is no scholarship investigating the
work her undergraduate students do after taking Keating’s courses. She has described her resistance to measuring this kind of change, saying, “we cannot entirely define or in other ways control the changes our students (and we ourselves) might undergo” (Keating, 2013, p. 185).

Keating, though, has described how students have used these pedagogies of invitation in their own lives. She has written about how graduate student Erica Granados De La Rosa has used pedagogies of invitation in her classroom to encourage her students “to create additional forms of individual and collective forms of identity, as well as activist communities, based on complex commonalities” (Keating, 2013, p. 186). De La Rosa has achieved this encouragement. Keating has written that De La Rosa “offers structured yet open-ended activities that empower both the facilitator and each participant to draw on their imaginal power as they learn from each other’s experiences, making new connections” (2013, p. 186). In this way, the classroom has been structured in order for students to apply, or generalize, concepts of identity developed in the classroom to their personal lives.

Indeed, even though De La Rosa has structured her class around perhaps overly contextualized spoken word poetry, she has asked her students to think about ways in which “spoken word poetry [can] cross borders between experiences, politics, etc.” at the end of a teaching activity run as a spoken word workshop (Keating, 2013, p. 206). Prompting students to apply learned knowledge to new contexts is consistent with the

---

8 Significantly, in both Transformation Now! (2013) and Teaching Transformation (2007), Keating has made mention of graduate students. In fact, she has mentioned one doctoral student who has used pedagogies of invitation in the courses that she has taught (Keating, 2013, p. 184).
research into the transfer of learning conducted by Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000). They wrote, “Transfer is also affected by the context of original learning; people can learn in one context, yet fail to transfer to other contexts” (2000, p. 62). Donovan et al. (2000) noted that there are pedagogical techniques that guard against this kind of failure to transfer. All of the strategies they gave involve encouraging the students to do something with their new learned knowledge beyond the context in which they learned it in. For instance, teachers might ask students “what-if” questions that demand students to think about the governing principles and logic governing particular knowledge (Donovan et al., 2000, pp. 62-63). This was the kind of work that De La Rosa’s questions at the end of her workshop activity did—what if, for instance, the dialogic nature of spoken word was applied to politics? (Keating, 2013, pp. 203-206). Now that I have shown how Keating’s pedagogies of invitation have allowed and even encouraged students to generalize knowledge generated in the classroom, I turn to investigating the last metric I developed for analyzing pedagogies for the transfer of learning—how the pedagogies communicate to students the dynamism of knowledge.

Dynamism of Knowledge

Wardle (2012) has written about students in the contemporary school system’s relation to learning and knowledge, saying:

They are, in essence, being forced to participate in a school system that embodies answer getting and eschews critical thinking and exploration at all costs. Such a system seems intended to reproduce in its student participants passive thinking and acceptance without question of whatever is presented.
This praxis is in stark contrast to what scholars know about optimizing conditions for the transfer of learning. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000), in *How People Learn*, wrote, “Transfer is best viewed as an active, dynamic [emphasis added] process rather than a passive end-product of a particular set of learning experiences” (p. 53).

Keating’s resistance to defining the change she has expected to see in her students might be understood as an appreciation of the fact that the learning process is dynamic. Keating has written of a founding concept of her pedagogies of invitation:

> My point here is not to prove to my students (*or to you, dear reader*) that this multidimensional interconnectivity ‘really’ exists, defining ‘really’ in some scientific fashion. Instead, I’m interested in using this ‘ancient idea of relationship’ to develop new stories... innovative frameworks for teaching and enacting social change. (2013, p. 176)

Thus, the existence of the transfer of learning in pedagogies of invitation cannot be measured because they exist outside of our contemporary, scientific understandings of what it means to exist.

Similarly, Keating has made a pedagogical move in many of her teaching strategies that I mentioned above in which she has refused to give her students singular definitions and understandings of course concepts. By refusing to show students ready-made answers, Keating has forced them to take agency in determining the meaning of course lessons. For instance, in discussing the teaching strategy of “tactical (non)naming,” Keating has provided the example of a lesson about ‘race’ and ethnicity she has taught when teaching slave narratives. In that lesson she has asked her students to
guess her ‘race.’ Of this lesson, Keating has written, “If they fail to do so [guess her ‘race’], I briefly discuss my own family history, the rule of hypodescent that marks me as ‘black,’ my family’s various attempts to celebrate, ignore, and deny this racialized designation” (2007, p. 112). Keating has demonstrated that ‘racial’ categories are themselves dynamic and has engaged students in active learning in order to teach that lesson.

Keating has extended this commitment to active learning in other places in her pedagogies of invitation. In her discussion of the teaching strategy of “fostering intellectual agency,” she has written about problematizing “conventional understandings of terms” (related to the “questioning conventional definitions” teaching strategy). Keating’s goal of this problematizing is to encourage her students “to begin (re)defining these terms for themselves” (2007, p. 110).

For Keating, these (re)definitions have been necessarily different for all individuals. Similarly, Keating has described how the learning process of a particular course’s content might be vastly different with a different student population. Drawing on the work of religious professor Christopher Bache, Keating has noted that while her students each year may have been able to more quickly grasp course concepts, class knowledge always necessarily has remained “partial and incomplete” (2013, p. 187). Knowledge of this eternal incompleteness has invited students to take agency in the dynamic process of knowledge creation.
Conclusion

By encouraging students to undertake an understanding of knowledge creation and learning as dynamic processes, Keating has added to what she has hoped to be fertile ground for what she calls transformation—a version, I argue, of the transfer of learning. In this chapter I have shown, using educationalist Eleanor Duckworth (1987), how Keating has first been careful to respect and build upon her students’ prior knowledge. Then, I used Elizabeth Wardle’s (2012) terms problem-exploring and answer-getting to show how Keating has used this prior knowledge to deliver the content that she has hoped students will use for social change beyond her class. Because of Keating’s understanding of the dynamic nature of knowledge and the learning process, though, these elements of the transfer of learning cannot be fully investigated, but it is heartening to see the steps Keating has taken to make sure that her students leave her class with that same understanding of knowledge and learning as dynamic.
CHAPTER 4: FINAL THOUGHTS

In this project, I have maintained that scholarship on the transfer of learning as well as scholarship in critical pedagogy are naturally related and have much to give to one another if scholars moved beyond simple platitudes and investigated each other. I have attempted to do such an investigation here. To do so, I developed a framework from research on the transfer of learning (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino 2000). Then, I used that framework to analyze the pedagogies of Paolo Freire (1978, 1997), Ira Shor (1987a, 1996), and AnaLouise Keating (2007, 2013). While I made the case in those analyses that these pedagogies account for many of the characteristics of the transfer of learning, I will articulate three questions that still puzzle me in this final chapter.

First, how might one go about conducting a more statistical study of the transfer of learning in critical pedagogies? I am troubled by the unsteadiness of a couple of the metrics I named for the transfer of learning. Additionally, it seems like a paradox to both study people and still respect their individuality. I will consider both of these complications.

Two metrics I developed from research by Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) seem especially slippery and resistant to measurement. How can researchers study when or if students generalize their learning? A measurement of this metric seems impossible when, as I have implied in my consideration of Keating’s (2007) pedagogies of invitation, researchers can neither predict nor even perceive sometimes the way students will generalize learned knowledge. The pedagogies considered in this study may have great potential for generalization, but little evidence has been given about instances
of actual generalization. Freire’s (1997) pedagogical goal was one of liberation of the oppressed. Liberation cannot happen without some form of generalization—some application of newly learned critical consciousness into other contexts and areas of life beyond the classroom. How does one study this critical consciousness, though? Is it the same for all people? Do the pupils in Guinea-Bissau (Freire, 1978) have the same critical consciousness as Ira Shor’s (1996) students in New York City? Or, the same as AnaLouise Keating’s (2007) students? Probably not; students probably acquire a contextual notion of critical consciousness, making it exceedingly difficult to quantify what that consciousness entails.

The contextual nature of a more critical consciousness, though, seems like a mostly positive thing. Something would be lost if researchers standardized what it meant to be critically conscious; such a standardization would risk making critical consciousness part of an answer-getting disposition (Wardle, 2012). Even though generalization cannot be explicitly studied, perhaps, it is still worth conceptualizing it as a goal that increases the likelihood of the transfer of learning. Instructors who plan ways for students to engage in reciprocal teaching (Palincsar, & Brown, 1984), like Ira Shor (1996) did, give space for their students to surprise them in applying knowledge in new ways. While generalization is not an easy metric to study, it is valuable as a way to think about what instructors do.

The dynamism of knowledge may be an equally difficult metric of the transfer of learning to study. Keating has written, “Our knowledge will always be partial and incomplete” (2013, p. 187). If our limited knowledge is transient, how can we hope to
study that transience? The dynamism of knowledge seems especially resistant to the restrictions that a study would impose. Like the concept of generalization, though, it is an important concept for an instructor seeking to teach for the transfer of learning. It keeps instructors humble and able to imagine the world the ways in which their students may see it (Duckworth, 1987). While generalization and the dynamism of knowledge make it difficult to study the effectiveness of a pedagogy to foster the transfer of learning, they are both important ideas for the instructor to think about. I hope my study of these metrics in the pedagogies investigated here will provide important understandings of transfer.

The second complication for a study of the transfer of learning in critical pedagogies is the individuality of students. If a major part of teaching for the transfer of learning is accounting for and using students’ prior knowledges, how is a critical pedagogue supposed to account for and use regressive knowledges? Furthermore, if greater consciousness is the goal, how does an instructor keep from treating critical knowledge as a series of ready-made answers? A critical instruction of ready-made answers risks encouraging an answer-getting disposition (Wardle, 2012). An answer-getting disposition reduces the possibility of transfer of learning and may reify the oppositional politics Keating (2007) has hoped to work against. Indeed, compositionist Adam Ellwanger (2017) has also identified the challenges such an oppositional politics in the classroom may create. This erasure of individuality would certainly not be prevented by a statistical study.
This concern with individuality leads well into my second remaining question—how are students’ prior knowledges respected if the goal is always to a more critical consciousness? The pedagogies of Shor (1996) and Freire (1997), especially, run the risk of erasing the individuality of the student and replacing it with a critical answer-getter. Keating (2007) has explicitly questioned critical pedagogy’s willingness to mold students into that oppositional framework (p. 7). The transfer of learning, though, offers an opposite problem. How does an instructor criticize students if the students’ prior knowledges must be respected? Should the Klan member’s prior knowledges be respected? I wonder if the answer to this predicament is in Keating’s (2007) pedagogies of invitation. Keating (2007) has offered a way of recovering and using the individuality of students for the transfer of learning. Her call for connectionist thinking has focused on commonalities (p. 2). Helping students recognize the commonalities between their own personalities and the perspectives of others as well as the commonalities between their prior knowledge and new knowledge can serve as a way to show students the potential for the transfer of learning. Instructors might think of “respect” as this search for commonalities. Of course, these searches for commonalities, in a critical pedagogy or pedagogies of invitation, would be a way of persuading students to move away from their perhaps problematic prior knowledges.

Can individual transfers of learning, though, happen if the instructors know or think they know the final destination of learning? This question is my final remaining question in this study. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (2000) have said, “To provide a knowledge-centered classroom environment [an environment important for the transfer
of learning], attention must be given to what is taught (information, subject matter), why it is taught (understanding), and what competence or mastery looks like” (p. 24). Thus, it seems that a critical pedagogue should be working towards some kind of mastery. It is beyond the scope of the present study to determine what that mastery looks like.
REFERENCES


http://compositionforum.com/isssue/26/creative-repurposing.php


