

Traps, Tricksters, and the Long Haul:

Negotiating the Progressive Teacher's Challenge in Literacy Education

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In recent years, numerous scholars have become disillusioned with first-wave critical pedagogy, particularly the idea that transformative intellectuals can emancipate students and advance progressive politics despite working for reactionary educational institutions. Portraying social justice-oriented teachers as dogmatic, naïve, and self-contradictory, these post-first-wave scholars hope instead to cultivate students' critical literacies within the default and privatized ethos of the American Dream. A handful of other scholars look to literacy education's progressive extracurriculum for ideological refuge from institutional hegemony. This essay, while agreeing that significant obstacles constrain progressive teaching in ways that first-wave critical pedagogues have not sufficiently acknowledged, nevertheless rejects the idea that progressive teachers are trapped by unavoidable paradox. It argues further that, rather than accentuating a dichotomy between institutional and extracurricular, socially conscientious teachers can more productively negotiate the challenges of progressive education by breaking down walls between these locations.

At the core of an ongoing argument about the place of progressive politics in literacy education lies what I call the

progressive teacher's challenge, or the disharmony teachers experience trying to subvert an unjust status quo while serving institutions that primarily sustain it.¹ Any teacher who has taken on a social-justice agenda within formal education has faced one or more versions of this challenge, including different forms of student resistance, self-directed doubt that such pedagogies merely substitute one form of indoctrination for another, and assorted complaints that politics pervert our “true” instrumentalist mission. In fact, examinations of the progressive teacher’s challenge in its various manifestations have become an increasingly prominent theme of social-justice oriented scholarship over the past few decades. That is, while scholars associated with critical pedagogy’s “first wave” (Seitz 506), in particular Paulo Freire and the “Big Three”: Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren,² emphasized the potential of *transformative intellectuals* (Aronowitz and Giroux) to emancipate students from hegemony and to empower collective action against structural inequality, literacy scholars now find themselves ensconced within a decidedly *post-first-wave* era, by which I mean that much of the discourse focuses on implications of the challenge itself rather than possibilities for cultivating critical consciousness. Particularly within rhetoric and composition, this profound shift in subject and tone can be charted discursively through a corresponding move away from first-wave metaphors of *emancipation*³ toward metaphors of *entrapment*, which have been employed to recast transformative intellectuals as self-deluded pedants whose praxes are hopelessly stymied by internal contradiction. Moreover, the theme of disenchantment with first-wave critical pedagogy has become its own trope (Gallagher; Graff; Jacobs; Lynch; Miller; Peckham). Within post-first-wave rhetoric and composition, then, the progressive teacher’s challenge signifies an Alcatraz that invariably nullifies a teacher’s political goals whenever she tries to enact them.

My purpose here is not to minimize the daunting realities of promoting social action through literacy education in general, or writing instruction more specifically. However, the challenge looms so large that many rhetoric and composition scholars who claim continued solidarity with progressivism have nevertheless retreated to privatized learning objectives; i.e., rather than collective struggle against injustice, they champion *individual* students’ empowerment within the default ethos of the American Dream. As Tony Scott points

out, “Juxtaposed against the now stock character of the soapbox Freirean pushing her own politics under the pretense of doing writing education is the image of the more humble, more responsible teacher helping her students reach their *pragmatic* goals for writing—which they [sic], unlike the soapbox Freireans, recognize and respect (often as a safely privatized black box)” (27). Accordingly, most post-first-wave scholars have abandoned any realistic commitment to education in the pursuit of social justice. A handful of other scholars, unwilling to surrender entirely, have displaced progressive education onto the *extracurriculum*—using Anne Ruggles Gere’s famous term—where they perceive relative autonomy from the hegemonic taint of institutionalized education. Inspired by historical examples of progressives who kindled political action through extracurricular literacy education, scholars like Kirk Branch and Stephen Schneider nevertheless argue that formal educators cannot achieve such results within academic spaces, and so must aim for more indefinite and far humbler goals.

Although I wholeheartedly support the development of alliances with progressive community partners, I fear that this utopian longing for pedagogical spaces exempt from the challenge has two unfortunate consequences: (1) it underplays the significant obstacles that extracurricular educators have historically faced, and (2) it neglects potentially useful lessons that institutionalized teachers can learn from the progressive extracurriculum. Instead, I contend that *all* progressive educators—whether representing formal institutions or grassroots coalitions—face sizable impediments to enabling collective action against injustice, particularly in the aftermath of what Nancy Welch calls “three decades of neoliberalism’s social insecurity measures” (*Living Room* 9). However, while adopting a more expansive view of the progressive teacher’s challenge does not in and of itself make the challenge less formidable, it does open a wider door of possibilities for engaging literacy education’s progressive extracurriculum, and it offers hope informed by experience that the challenge can be negotiated productively, if not easily. There are, of course, important differences between formal and informal educational environments; yet, just as Gere reminds us of numerous historical examples in which community-based pedagogies influenced formal classrooms, I argue that socially conscientious rhetoric and composition scholars should more actively

“tap and listen to messages through the walls” (86) of the progressive extracurriculum, not merely as a refuge from the institution, but as a way to better negotiate our own manifestations of the progressive teacher’s challenge.

Setting the Traps for Progressive Pedagogy

Post-first-wave scholars emphasize the seeming contradiction of relying on institutionally endowed authority in order to question, challenge, and ultimately promote student resistance to institutional authority. Xin Liu Gale, for example, asserts that, “To this day, composition scholars and teachers are still trying to deal with the paradoxes inherent in teacher authority: the conflict between the teacher’s desire for democracy and equality in the classroom and the need for authority in teaching” (4). Drawing from Bourdieu and Passeron, she argues that an “irresolvable conflict” exists “between the progressive teachers’ desire to democratize teaching for social justice and equality and the violent dimension of teaching, which, being ‘symbolic imposition,’ demands the teacher’s authority to ensure students’ obedience and participation” (33-4). Gale further rejects the idea that teachers can exchange *institutional* authority for the authority of *expertise* or a *personal* authority driven by charisma or “better moral values” (47); these claims, she contends, are still legitimated by the institution and can mask other forms of coercive behavior. Echoing Gale, Richard Miller argues that “however tempting it may be to describe our work as teachers as being pursued in the interests of ‘liberation’ or ‘consciousness-raising’ or ‘resistance,’ the truth is that this rhetoric’s appeal is so attractive because it covers over our more primary role as functionaries of the administration’s educational arm” (18).

Fittingly, the *entrapment* metaphors that complement such arguments render teachers incapable of resolving the authority dilemma. For instance, Paul Lynch claims that “critical teachers feel trapped” by a “conundrum,” according to which they must “impose authority in order to question it (and so reestablish it)” or “forgo authority in order to avoid imposing it (and it reestablishes itself)” (729). Gerald Graff similarly perceives an “inevitable double bind” due to the impossible reconciliation of two conflicting goals, that of making “classrooms more democratic and less hierarchical” and that of bringing “political

issues out of hiding and explicitly before students' view" ("Teaching Politically" 26). Attempts to unite these goals led to "indoctrination ... disguised as educational empowerment" ("Teaching Politically" 26). The authority problem, then, binds teachers and bullies students via the false promise of emancipation.

Perceiving contradictions of *identity* that mirror the *authority* problem, Chris Gallagher maintains that first-wave critical pedagogy "functions to cast teachers and students in oppositional and seemingly immutable roles that are extremely difficult to rewrite from within that discourse, that regime of truth" (75), while Dale Jacobs perceives students as forced "into a kind of identity bind" (45). This recurring language of *traps*, *binds*, and *immutable roles* casts doubt upon the ability of critical pedagogues, and just as importantly, their students, to *move*—and, by extension, to build a *movement*—toward a more progressive world. Rather than liberating students from the shackles of hegemonic ideological discourse, first-wave critical pedagogy is portrayed as discursively pinioning students within scripted and static binary positions—teacher-hero vs. student-victim, emancipated vs. oppressed, critically vs. falsely conscious—that are "unrealistic, unattractive, and even disempowering" (Gallagher 78).

Richard Miller faults Freire above all for employing a self-fulfilling logic, according to which students either follow the teacher's script or confirm their hegemonic submission:

[Freire] doesn't linger over the fact that all this self-motivated thinking leads his students to think exactly what he would like them to think; he doesn't imagine that, possibly, his students are mouthing his pieties, silently collaborating in the production of the desired public transcript and then sneaking back home where they are free to question his lessons or force others to accept them or forget them altogether. (19)

For Miller, Freire is a pedagogical Pied Piper who takes for granted that students will adopt his politics as they cultivate authentic consciousness. Conversely, those who reject Freire's politics are the ones most lost to "false consciousness" (14), plagued by ingrained ideological self-delusion. Thus, Miller concludes, Freirean pedagogy

casts students as binary entities capable of two responses to the teacher's agenda, while first-wave critical pedagogues in general cover the traces of their symbolic imposition by silencing students or provoking manufactured consent to doctrinaire leftism.⁴ Critical teachers, then, invariably trap themselves (and students) by *imposing* social visions rather than creating dialectical opportunities for reflection and action.

For post-first-wave scholars, these paradoxes reflect a naïve desire to escape institutional tyranny, or what Miller describes as “imagining that the power dynamic in the teacher-student relationship can, under ideal conditions, be erased” (19). As Xin Liu Gale further explains, critical teachers believe they have the choice “to abandon the institutional authority that oppresses students and reproduces inequality,” and that once they have done so, “they are then free from risks of oppressing their students with their authority” (33). In these accounts, there is no room for a partial relinquishing, or de-centering, of power.⁵ Either a teacher has authority or she does not, and if she has no authority, chaos ensues. For Gale, the specter of lost authority is particularly frightening, as evidenced by her experiences teaching within the carnivalesque circumstances of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, where “hierarchy in the classroom was turned upside down, with students playing the role as managers and supervisors, telling the teacher to teach what they wanted, forbidding them to teach what they hated” (41). Gale's account of a “paralyzed educational system” (42) offers a compelling case for why teachers should not disavow institutional authority, which she calls a “necessary evil” (34); freedom can be just as paralyzing a force as oppression. However, while post-first-wave scholars raise an important point that teachers cannot level authority and create entirely democratic classrooms, their language of binds, paradoxes, and paralysis produces an unfairly extremist account of first-wave critical pedagogy. Despite emphasizing the “vast, unexplored territory—the fraught, compromised world where all of our classes are actually convened” (Miller 23), the all-or-nothing depictions proffered in post-first-wave literature fail to investigate these middle latitudes between the discursive poles.

Freire himself struggled with the question of authority and sought to forge a productive middle ground. Earlier works such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasize his idealism about breaking down distinctions between teachers and students. He states, “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (80). While retaining this goal as an ideal to strive for, in later works Freire recognizes necessary distinctions between teacher and student as well as the necessity of authority itself, which he disassociates from *authoritarianism*. Conversing with Highlander Folk School founder Myles Horton, for example, Freire observes that:

...on one hand the teacher as a teacher is not the student. The student as the student is not the teacher. I began to perceive that they are different but not necessarily antagonistic. The difference is precisely that the teacher has to teach, to *demonstrate* authority and the student has to experience freedom in relation to the teacher’s authority. I began to see that the authority of the teacher is absolutely necessary for the development of the freedom of the students, but if the authority of the teacher goes beyond the limits authority has to have in relation to the students’ freedom, then we no longer have authority. We no longer have a freedom. We have *authoritarianism*. (*We Make the Road* 61-2)

In a similar point, Henry Giroux asserts that, “On the one hand teacher voice represents a basis in authority that can provide knowledge and forms of self-understanding allowing students to develop the power of critical consciousness. At the same time, regardless of how politically or ideologically correct a teacher may be, his or her ‘voice’ may be destructive for students if it is used to silence them” (144). Clearly, first-wave critical pedagogues perceive authority as an essential component of the pedagogical process; everything depends on how teachers *use* authority. Moreover, while conceding Gale’s point that authority is inevitable, Joe Hardin highlights its differing *degrees*, arguing that such “strategies as refraining from lecturing, refusing to

adopt the magisterial air of the traditional teacher, putting the chairs in a circle, coming out from behind the desk, and allowing familiarity *do* decenter classroom power and begin a movement toward student empowerment” (95).

Certainly, one can question the extent to which such methods actually decentralize power; Jennifer Gore, for one, maintains that such practices “have no guaranteed effects” (58) on students, who might experience circular seating as disempowering when they “come more directly under the surveillance of their peers” (58). Gore further singles out Giroux for insufficiently following through on his own understanding that the critical teacher can abuse authority in the name of liberation (100). Therefore, acknowledging authority does not mean critical teachers will refrain from coercive practices. Yet, the nuanced arguments of Hardin and Gore illustrate that the power dynamics of American composition classrooms, even those led by first-wave critical pedagogues, operate somewhere between the bounds of authoritarianism and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. If we agree that real classrooms are messy places in which moments of conflict, consensus, and both hidden and open resistance all mix together, we must also agree that teachers are not affixed to one extreme or the other.

However, the implications of the trap metaphors are still more pronounced in regard to post-first-wave characterizations of students, who simultaneously appear as irreducibly complex individuals *and* as digitized masses suborned by the oppositional logic of first-wave critical pedagogy. Richard Miller maintains that different students hear Freire’s message differently, because they do not fall neatly into the categories implied by Freire’s binary. Yet, in describing his own experiences as a would-be critical teacher in graduate school, Miller depicts students in an equally reductive manner, noting his disenchantment upon seeing them either resist the politicization of the classroom or “ventriloquize sentiments they didn’t believe or understand” (11). That is, students could respond with futile resistance or manufactured, bogus consent; there appear to be no third, fourth, or fifth options. Though he insists that students in a Freirean classroom must surely go off script, expressing multiple and perhaps conflicting (if hidden) reactions to Freire’s political

agenda, Miller does not allow for a similarly textured response to his own version of Freirean teaching. In a similar contradiction, Paul Lynch stresses the impossibility of knowing “twenty or forty individual ideological ‘ecosystems’” (739), yet concurrently argues that, “In composition, we have assumed—rightly, I believe—that the ‘natural outcome of the encounter’ between coercive pedagogy and students is either sullen silence or faked acquiescence, in which what is usually public and what is usually hidden remain so” (738). In this case, students can respond to “coercive pedagogy” either by stifling themselves or feigning consent to oblige the teacher.⁶

The idea that some students might comply of their own accord, that they might *not* be hiding dissent, rarely appears as a possibility. At best, only students who are, in Graff’s words, “already disposed to that agenda” (“Teaching Politically” 26) might do so. Likewise, upon observing a critical classroom, Victor Villanueva deems the teacher unlikely “to move those who were not already predisposed to his worldview” (256). Thus, when students appear to accept the teacher’s politics, they are in fact performing consent or manifesting their ideological predispositions; conversely, dissenters are (authentically) refusing complicity with an agenda they recognize as coercive. The same students deemed falsely conscious by first-wave scholars become critically conscious in post-first-wave accounts (although students lack the power to subvert the teacher’s authority, and are thus still oppressed). Rather than respecting the complexity of real students, post-first-wavers merely flip the binary by presenting a bizarre world of student consciousness.

To be clear, post-first-wave scholars are no doubt sincere about honoring the complexity of individual students and classroom dynamics, and more importantly, enabling student learning. Why, then, do their portrayals of students contradict these intentions? To some extent, their use of binary categorizations simply reflects the constraints of academic discourse, the logistics of which require sacrificing individual complexity—i.e., to detail all possible reactions of students would be, from both a narrative and rhetorical standpoint, impractical. As Cathy Birkenstein reminds us, academic argumentation tends to proceed through “binary oppositions and other conventional polemical structures” (281). Hence, honoring the

complexities of real classrooms is an ongoing challenge that *all of us* face when we talk and write about teaching.⁷ I argue, however, that the portrayal of first-wave teachers as mired within paradox is also culpable here. Essentially, the self-perpetuating binary logic of entrapment compels a corresponding argument that students feel caught in the binds of “coercive” critical pedagogy; otherwise, the metaphors unravel. Just as we might argue that there is no teaching absent student learning, there is no pedagogical trapping absent student feelings of entrapment.

One might counter that if students do not feel trapped, it is because they have misrecognized the symbolic violence of the teaching situation. But this argument sends us right back to the poles of absolute coercion. I do not doubt that some students feel coerced in first-wave classrooms, even when the teacher strives to decentralize power, just as I do not doubt that some students feel coerced by the most avowed instrumentalists. Furthermore, some students who latch onto the ideas of progressive teachers are predisposed to do so, and others who resist are predisposed in that fashion. But numerous students in various pedagogic environments will think and act in ways that no one could successfully typecast beforehand. Some may partially agree and partially disagree. Some will find the courage to resist the teacher actively or play devil’s advocate in the process of figuring out their own views. Some students who might seem resistant at first might change their minds at a later time, or vice versa. Such unpredictable outcomes are part of what it means to deal with the layered and conflicted realities of actual classroom dynamics.

The Privatization of Post-First-Wave Pedagogies

In the previous section, I argued that post-first-wave literature in rhetoric and composition rejects first-wave liberatory optimism by characterizing the progressive teacher’s challenge as irresolvable, and that this portrayal is regularly reinforced through metaphors of entrapment. Rhetorically, however, this imagery also creates exigence for the articulation of solutions, for if you believe that teachers face pedagogical labyrinths whenever they promote social justice, you will likely seek the aid of an Ariadne figure. In this section, then, I argue that post-first-wave scholars believe they can elude entrapment by not invoking explicitly activist ideologies in classrooms; instead they

stress the importance of students' abilities to locate themselves within the classroom and to negotiate the multiple, evolving, and always convoluted discursive processes of modern institutional experience. That is, the traps are not perceived as applying to individual students' progress through institutional hurdles—including movement up the career ladder—because such goals complement the broader institutional emphasis on personal aspiration. The traps are sprung only when teachers promote collective action to subvert oppressive social relations (that the institution itself functions to maintain). However, while these learning goals seem consistent with first-wave agendas—and in some cases employ first-wave terminology—post-first-wave scholars detach them from the context of collective social action.

Chris Gallagher, for example, describes a “pedagogical progressivism” that cultivates “transformative intellectuals” through *institutional literacy*, the capacity “to read institutional discourses (and their resultant arrangements and structures) so as to speak and write back to them, thereby participating in their revision” (79). Gallagher defines *pedagogy* as a process of “reflexive inquiry” (xvi), which he finds inconsistent with the expression of a political hobbyhorse, or what he calls “teachers’ passions” (155). For Gallagher, invoking an explicitly political vision truncates dialectical reflection between teachers and students. Gallagher further delegitimizes first-wave critical pedagogy by linking it with a grandiose and unfeasible commitment to radical and instantaneous social transformation, rather than to the sober-minded, gradual pursuit of change that he affiliates with institutional literacy. Essentially, Gallagher expunges first-wave praxis from educational discourse by claiming that it is “not at heart a *pedagogical* project” (73), even though he considers pedagogy in general to be “a form of collective action” (195). But, one wonders, if a pedagogy dedicated to the establishment of collective action disables possibilities for collective action, then for what purposes are students ultimately to use institutional literacy? If seeking to help students utilize discourse for the collective establishment of a more equitable world invariably results in *imposing* the teacher’s social vision on (always) vulnerable students, how is such a movement to be established? What exactly are students supposed to transform?

In spite of linking expert users of institutional literacy with transformative intellectualism, Gallagher essentially leaves these questions of political purpose unanswered.⁸ My concern is that for most students, absent an explicit grappling with the teacher's social vision, institutional literacy will become a practice used to advance private interests to the *exclusion* of working collectively for societal change, rather than as a means for enabling *both* outcomes. This would occur not because of an inherent fault in students, but because higher education's default ethos is to privilege aspirations of individual movement toward professional success over collective movement toward a better society. If progressive educators refrain from asking students to critique this ethos—not necessarily to reject it out of hand, but at least to complicate and situate it within a larger sociocultural, material context—and students' other classes mostly do the same, then when and where is this questioning supposed to happen?⁹

Similarly, Dale Jacobs' *engaged critical pedagogy* articulates first-wave goals of helping students to "think about their locations in the cultures and discourses in which they reside"; to "recognize and negotiate their own uses of language and of the uses of language around them within specific contexts"; and ultimately to "gain a critical distance from their own circumstances so that they can locate themselves within culture, discourse, and ideology, explore their own subjectivities, and engage with other possible identities or roles" (43). However, Jacobs distinguishes himself from first-wave critical pedagogues by not "slipping into the trap of thinking that [he] know[s] exactly what students need" (60). Of course, no one should assume *exactly* what students need, but *any* teacher makes educated guesses about what students need to learn. Even in expressly instrumentalist courses, teachers assess that what students need most are concrete literacy skills to enhance their professional prospects. Jacobs too makes such decisions, and as noted above, first-wave critical pedagogues would unambiguously support many of them. Still, in discussing a specific instantiation of this pedagogy in which students read, discussed, and wrote about topics related to sports, Jacobs emphasizes his reluctance to express a social vision. Although an array of political themes emerged from students' projects, including issues of gender, patriarchy, and empowerment, Jacobs refrained from urging students to develop a more direct

response to these issues, considering any instances in which he found himself “slipping into critique” about the “complicity of all sports in the current hegemonic culture of this country” (53) to be pedagogical failings. Nevertheless, Jacobs observes that while numerous students responded well, others “were never engaged” (59). As in any other classroom, then, his decisions about what students needed proved correct for some, less so for others.

What might have occurred had Jacobs more explicitly addressed his own conflicted views about sports, especially in regard to their complicated and often problematic cultural, social, and material place in contemporary society? Are there no ways he could have done so without *imposing* his vision on students, which he characterizes as lecturing them “about how they should be critiquing the whole industry of sports” (59)? Considering Jacobs’ sincerity and conscientiousness, which are clearly evident in both his description of the class and his reasons for devising an engaged critical pedagogy, I imagine he would have navigated this tension quite effectively; if students are as diverse and multifaceted as post-first-wave scholars claim, then surely some (possibly most) students would be “engaged” by such a course. Others might not be engaged, but wouldn’t such an outcome be at least as successful as the actual course he chose to teach? It is only if we believe that students are binary entities who are either easily indoctrinated or silenced by the futility of dissent that we can imagine there being any greater danger of symbolic imposition. And yet, the specter of the *identity bind* precludes Jacobs from admitting that he might successfully incorporate his passions into the reflexive, dialectical process of an engaged critical pedagogy; that is, the reverse consciousness implied by entrapment would call into question any signs of student consent. As stated previously, the paradoxes of authority, identity, and critical consciousness imply that only students predisposed to leftist critique, or alternatively, who feign conformity to the teachers’ ideology while practicing hidden resistance, could openly express such sentiments. In fact, as I examine in the next section, if one follows the implications of these paradoxes to their logical endpoint, one concludes that the only way to politicize students is to actively *abstain* from doing so. Paradoxical problems, it appears, require paradoxical solutions.

Equilibrium Metaphors and a Corollary Paradox

Conceding that the progressive teacher's challenge cannot be overcome *directly*, scholars like Paul Lynch and Gerald Graff nevertheless seek a "way out of the double bind" (Lynch 736). Guided by metaphors of *equilibrium*, they perceive a corollary to the paradoxes of first-wave critical pedagogy, arguing that activists might achieve their goals *indirectly*, not by seeking to politicize students in discursively circumscribed ways but by striving for ideological balance. These scholars exhort movement away from the poles toward an imagined middle point on the ideological spectrum. Graff, who believes "the least effective way to radicalize students is to *try* to radicalize them," contends that teachers who perceive their jobs as "challenging" students will "tend to steer toward a devil's advocacy politics in class, opposing whatever is the dominant mindset of the students" ("Teach Politically" 26). For Graff, the goal should always be to provide ideological ballast to students' viewpoints. Of his own classroom demeanor, he states, "I find myself being a Leninist one day and a Milton Friedmanite on the next, depending on my sense of the ideological tilt of my students" (26). It is, then, only when the "assumptions of teachers of all persuasions are contested by equally powerful peers that the double bind of oppositional pedagogy can be overcome" ("Dilemma" 282). Graff urges trust that such a pedagogy might lead to progressive outcomes as students learn to "choose intelligently when the competing arguments are presented to them" (282). Essentially, teaching the conflicts is meant to actualize this ideological balance at the curricular level.

Working from Neil Postman's metaphor of the *thermostat*, Paul Lynch even more explicitly advocates a pedagogy of equilibrium. According to Postman, education should always function "to offer the counterargument, the other side of the picture" (qtd. in Lynch 734). Hence the thermostat seeks perpetually "to make visible the prevailing biases of a culture, and then, by employing whatever philosophies of education are available, to oppose them" (qtd. in Lynch 734). As interpreted by Lynch, the thermostat creates a pedagogical system of checks and balances that prevents any given cultural bias from impeding the development of young peoples' critical capacities. As with teaching the conflicts, the thermostat operates as a perpetual "anti-stance" (735), according to which teachers offer a political

counterweight to whatever viewpoint students express whether these beliefs harmonize with the teacher's own views or not. Lynch extends the metaphor's climatic imagery, asserting that teachers must reposition themselves in response to whatever "ecology that they confront" (735) in order to establish and sustain ideological "homeostasis" (734).

Lynch suggests that if progressive writing teachers re-conceived themselves as thermostats, they might stop feeling trapped by authority. Borrowing from Karen Kopelson's *performance of neutrality*, he urges the progressive teacher to practice "traditional rituals of authority not for her own sake but for the sake of subverting the assumptions that underlie those very rituals" (737). This performance, Lynch argues, would enable teachers "to deploy the thermostat without incurring defensive student resistance and without descending into a facile neutrality that simply allows student ideologies to re-coalesce" (737-8). For Lynch, this "paradoxical approach to authority" can both "address the double bind" and lead students to the teacher's "ultimate ends" (737-8). Unfortunately, he offers little reason to believe that such an outcome is likely. While recognizing that the performance of "unfamiliar or uncomfortable personae or ideologies will demand a great deal of teachers" (739), Lynch does not explain how achieving this task would produce one's desired outcomes. Apparently, if the teacher is a gifted enough performer, these outcomes should occur naturally, but this claim seems questionable at best. It is hard to imagine how progressive teachers will achieve their social goals by adopting the persona of someone not trying to achieve them.

The thermostat also lacks an ideal temperature, as it were, toward which the device always points, whether from above or below. If this is a "balance-centered" pedagogy, then at what point will a teacher know that balance has been achieved? To rephrase the question, when offering counterarguments to whatever ideological perspective happens to be in play at the moment, how will a teacher know when she has pushed students past the target, so that she must begin offering counter-counterarguments to the counterargument? Furthermore, Lynch's metaphor is incompatible with progressives' teleological sense of movement toward a desired endpoint; essentially, Lynch takes the *progress* out of progressivism. Freire, for example, speaks

of the productive tension progressives must cultivate when working both inside and outside formal institutions. Seeing this process as parallel to the dialectical tension between the present and a utopian future, he states that “a progressive teacher, a progressive thinker, a progressive politician many times has his or her left foot inside the system, the structures, and the right foot out of it.... *Here*, he or she has the present; *here*, he or she has the future. *Here* is actuality, the reality of today; *here* is utopia” (qtd. in Olson 163). This commitment to a better future also reflects psychoanalyst Victor Frankl’s concept of *logotherapy*, which centers attention “on the meaning of human existence as well as on man’s search for such a meaning” (104). Logotherapy, Frankl explains, “focuses on the future,” and thus *rejects* “homeostasis,” which Frankl calls “a tensionless state.” What a progressive needs is not balance but “rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task” (Frankl 110).

Ultimately, the escape plans suggested by equilibrium metaphors merely shackle teachers in a different bind. Still, I want to make clear that, while they refrain from invoking teachers’ passions, the various post-first-wave pedagogies I have examined here offer valuable insights for teachers who believe in a place for progressive politics in literacy education. These scholars rightfully fear imposing a social vision on students instead of enabling a dialectical process that, as Jacobs puts it, begins where students are rather than where teachers want them to go. I share these concerns, as does any teacher who seriously considers the implications of the progressive teacher’s challenge. Post-first-wave scholars also want to help students understand the power that different literacy practices enable within multiple discursive contexts and to utilize these practices to maneuver more effectively within contemporary institutional spaces. Clearly, enacting real social change will require the ability to intervene in local and global institutional systems, and thus there can be no efficacious progressive movement that does not include these learning goals. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the continuing—and in many ways increasing—inability of society to create equitable opportunities for all of its citizens, the stakes here are awfully high, and though I support the dialectical process urged by scholars like Jacobs and Gallagher, I reject the idea that such a process is made impossible by invoking a teacher’s social vision. To concede such a point is to concede the challenge all together.

Moreover, though I question whether first-wave teachers are, in practice, as guilty of enforcing oppositional logic as they are often accused, I agree that there are problematic aspects to first-wave discourse. Their metaphors of *emancipation*, which imply an opposed (and default) state of ideological captivity, invite such caricatures, whether they accurately represent classroom practices or not. Where entrapment metaphors situate teachers in Sisyphean service to institutional interests no matter how hard they proclaim ideological resistance, emancipation metaphors suggest the equally implausible idea that teachers can free themselves, or others, from institutional constraints. Nevertheless, while Freire and the Big Three are fairly criticized for, at times, practicing rhetorical self-aggrandizement—particularly through their reliance on the trope of the heroic teacher—they preserve a crucial sense of possibility in education’s power to foster a more equitable world. Hence, while we cannot avoid constraints, I urge progressive scholars to facilitate the movement that is possible within them.

Literacy Education’s Progressive Extracurriculum

I have argued so far that many post-first-wave scholars evade the progressive teacher’s challenge by seeking to empower individual students rather than collective social-change efforts. Yet, a minority of scholars who are cognizant of the progressive teacher’s challenge, but retain some hope for resistance, look instead to the progressive extracurriculum. Stephen Schneider, for instance, urges exploration of the “rich history of democratic educational practices within the United States,” including “community-based educational programs that attest directly to the relationship between education and social change” (145). Much of this scholarship has examined community schools dedicated to labor and civil rights activism, such as the Highlander Folk School, an Appalachian-based adult education center founded by Myles Horton in 1932. Kirk Branch finds inspiration in Highlander’s commitment to developing strong community networks:

Highlander explicitly sought to expand outward the practices of the communities they worked within. They specifically sought to link communities with other communities, to note that particular struggles in geographically and culturally disparate

places were in fact connected. The point, then, wasn't to provide individuals with more agency in their own lives.... Rather, the point was to create communities that understood that they could be part of a process of social change, that they could change, not just their local context, but other local, regional, and national contexts, by a determined creation of alliances that would invoke a more democratic nation and world. (152)

Illustrative of this goal, Highlander's many achievements included its central role in developing and spreading the Citizenship Schools through much of the South in the 1950s and 60s. These schools enabled thousands of African Americans to surmount literacy-based voting restrictions and to become more active in the democratic processes of their communities and the nation. For progressive teachers, the stories of Highlander and the Citizenship Schools offer encouragement in the idea that, historically, some educational environments *have* nurtured social movements.¹⁰

However, while celebrating the pedagogical and political successes of the progressive extracurriculum, Branch also emphasizes the contextual differences between grassroots and formalized literacy education, arguing that as a community-based school that celebrated its "determined independence" (187) from the system, Highlander enjoyed significant political autonomy. Consequently, for Branch, Highlander is "not a model that educators working within official institutions can enact, not the least because those institutions shape ... the discourses guiding the works of the teachers within them" (187). Invoking the progressive teacher's challenge, Branch contends that for institutionalized teachers, efforts to promote a social vision always exist alongside "the permanent obstacles in the way of achieving an activist ideal of citizen-teacher, as well as trying to figure out how to work toward that ideal anyway, even though we'll never reach it" (42). Schneider similarly distinguishes locations of formal education from their community-based counterparts, explaining that the former:

...are already articulated in hegemonic terms; that is, they are necessarily a part of the social and economic structures governing a society. While this articulation does not mean that classrooms correspond directly to capitalist work formations, it

does mean that formal classrooms and the educational practices that attend them are seldom capable of directly threatening the dominant social order. As a result, counterhegemonic education must be built within nonformal educational institutions such as adult education centers and union halls. These institutions are, in turn, central to the development of competing ideologies capable of supporting broader struggles for social change. (145-6)

Schneider disassociates informal education from the implications of political, economic, and cultural hegemony. Indeed, it is the informal makeup of extracurricular locations like Highlander and the Citizenship Schools that creates possibilities for what Schneider calls the counterhegemonic work of “organic pedagogies” (158). Hence, both Branch and Schneider argue that the progressive teacher’s challenge does not pertain to grassroots education. By contrast, while neither scholar rejects outright the idea of progressive education within academic spaces, they believe such work is inherently limited in its capacity to bring about social change. Despite drawing inspiration from the progressive extracurriculum’s role in catalyzing social-justice movements, both scholars are reticent to elicit specific lessons for institutionalized teachers.

I want to emphasize that within a post-first-wave era dominated by concerns over the apparent intractability of the progressive teacher’s challenge, this turn to the extracurriculum represents a crucially positive direction for progressive scholarship. Branch, in fact, explicitly grapples with entrapment, wondering whether progressive teachers really are caught within paradoxes from which there is “no escape, no movement, no way out” (188). Finally, however, he rejects the trap-tropes for manifesting their own “conceptual snare.... *Trap* becomes too heavy-handed, too conspiratorial, too unidimensional” (189). He prefers instead the metaphor of the *trickster*, who fights institutional processes that would determine what is “thinkable” in legitimate discourse and what is not, perceiving the “inherent indeterminacy of those boundaries” as the “gaps within which scholars and teachers can operate, if not independently, at least perhaps other than in the specific interests of the systems for which they are employed” (198). The trickster, then, recognizes constraints inherent within the institution but is not rendered immobile by them.

While I do not mean to reject the trickster metaphor outright—in some institutional circumstances, teachers may have little choice but to face the progressive teacher’s challenge in peripheral ways that skirt the regulatory eyes of overseers—I fear that it does not make room for the collective-change work that Branch and Schneider observe in the progressive extracurriculum. As Lewis Hyde, whose book *Trickster Makes this World* provides the source for Branch’s metaphor, explains, “the trickster belongs to the periphery, not to the center. If trickster were ever to get into power, he would stop being trickster” (13). By definition, the trickster remains mostly alone and on the margins, ill-positioned to forge collective resistance to oppression.¹¹ I thus argue that the image of the solitary trickster places too much emphasis on constraints and not enough on possible movement within these constraints.

Moreover, Branch and Schneider overemphasize the differences between formal and informal sites of literacy education, particularly regarding the implications of the progressive teacher’s challenge. Highlander itself, though never sanctioned as an accredited, degree-granting institution, faced strong institutional impediments, including “official harassment in the form of investigations by congressional committees, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Tennessee state legislature, surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, well-publicized diatribes by the governor of Georgia and the attorney general of Arkansas, and ultimately the revocation of the folk school’s charter and the confiscation of its property by Tennessee state officials” (Glen 278-9). In part because of its looming closure,¹² in 1961 the school transferred facilitation of the Citizenship Schools to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which maintained the program until 1970. That is, Highlander and its allies found ways to sustain their extracurricular sites of progressive literacy education in spite of the very concrete institutional and ideological constraints they faced.

If anything, extracurricular literacy educators have historically faced *greater* obstacles than contemporary institutional teachers, such as the constant threats of physical violence that loomed over anyone supporting integration within the Jim Crow South. For years Highlander represented one of the few Southern locations

where people of different races openly sat, ate, learned, and lived together, and as a result the school remained continually “on the radar of leading white supremacists” (Charron 267). Moreover, the Citizenship Schools, which were often established in Klan territory, were purposefully set up not to look like schools, in part to avoid tipping off local white populations about their true intent (Charron 248-9). And not just Highlander itself but anyone connected to the school faced the possibility of personal and professional persecution to a degree that few institutional teachers today need fear. Highlander historian John Glen notes that over many years staff “endured threats, beatings, gunshots, arson, attacks from the American Legion, the Grundy County Crusaders, and the KKK, and a more or less constant barrage of denunciations from southern industrialists, politicians, and newsmen” (278). Septima Clark, for example, who joined Highlander’s staff part-time in 1955 while also working as a school teacher in Charleston, was condemned by conservative South Carolina newspapers that “linked [Clark] to Highlander as they blasted the school and excoriated Horton as a ‘champion of integration.’ People began to suspect that Clark was a communist” (Charron 242). The Charleston school board eventually forced Clark out of her job, which ironically led her to take a full-time position at Highlander. Clark was also arrested during a government raid at Highlander in 1959; finding herself in the back of a police car on a “dark mountain road” (Charron 270), she wondered—like hundreds of other civil rights activists during those years—whether she would live “to see the daylight or not” (qtd. in Charron 270).

These examples demonstrate that the progressive teacher’s challenge is not tied to formal education but to chronic structural inequalities and dominant ideologies within society itself; *all* social-justice oriented educators face variations of the challenge. I argue, then, that if we begin to see the work of progressive education in a more expansive framework, rather than drawing sharp boundaries between formal and informal, institutional and communal, academic and nonacademic—i.e., if we perceive the extracurricular as intimately connected to the curricular, and vice versa—then we might also perceive greater possibilities for adapting the lessons of the progressive extracurriculum than are suggested by the trickster. I appreciate Branch’s struggle to confront the progressive teacher’s challenge pragmatically rather than appealing to utopian

emancipation tropes, but I want to push his rejection of the traps further. Highlander in particular offers evocative lessons for teachers in formal locations. I agree that progressives cannot *recreate* Highlander inside the academy, but they can nevertheless adapt key aspects of its praxis in order to negotiate the constraints of their own pedagogical contexts more effectively.

“You Got to Move”

Early in his career, Myles Horton came to understand that the best way to solve community problems is for solutions to come from the people themselves, and this concept became fundamental to Highlander’s educational theory. In his autobiography *The Long Haul*, Horton says of his role in the workshops that defined the school’s praxis, “You don’t have to know the answers. The answers come from the people, and when they don’t have any answers, then you have another role, and you find resources” (23). He likewise stresses learning from the people, helping them “value group experiences” (57) as well as putting participants in positions to make decisions. Workshops were run as democratically as possible, with facilitators and students sitting in circles (presaging composition’s own process movement) and defining issues through storytelling and dialogue, followed by collective brainstorming to develop solutions to identified problems. Yet, while the goal was for students to define and solve whatever problems had brought them to Highlander, facilitators played essential roles in enabling successful workshops. The key, Horton argues, is to build a proper “tension between where people are and where they can be,” a dialectical process of “making people uncomfortable” by “pushing them, trying to help them grow” (132). The danger, Horton warns, is that “If you ever lose track of where people are in the process, then you have no relationship to them and there’s nothing you can do” (132). To enable a student’s growth, one must vigilantly address “the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’ at the same time” (131). Horton thus emphasizes students’ capacities for movement, but he urges teachers to remain vigilant about the possibility of losing students along the way.¹³

In facilitating students’ movement between where they are and can be, Horton was guided by certain key principles, many of which could help activists confront the progressive teacher’s challenge both inside and outside the academy. In this essay’s final section, I want to

address a couple of these principles and offer preliminary ideas for how rhetoric and composition teachers might incorporate them into their praxes.¹⁴ One such principle is that we cannot expect students to act on the *teacher's* anger, but only their *own*. As Horton states of his early days at Highlander, "I had to learn that my anger didn't communicate to people what I wanted to communicate.... It wasn't easy to get to the place where I didn't scare people away with my determination to change a system that I believed to be wrong and unjust, but I tried my best to avoid sounding like an evangelist" (80). Such an ethos, though difficult to maintain for politically tenacious teachers, might go a long way toward addressing the implications of the authority issue, which has been such a key focus of post-first-wave scholarship. Horton does not suggest that authority can or should be relinquished, but he insists that teachers remember at all times to engage the values, beliefs, and political viewpoints that students bring to the classroom. Indeed, progressive compositionists might do well to follow the advice of a related metaphor from Horton, who resolved to transform his anger "into a slow burning fire, instead of a consuming fire" (80). He explains, "You don't want the fire to go out ... and if it ever gets weak, you stoke it, but you don't want it to burn you up" (80), and it is through this philosophy that the title of his autobiography emerged. This image of a slow burning fire demonstrates the difference between invoking a social vision and imposing it.

Horton also consistently prioritized education over mobilization, registering concerns about the authenticity of students' critical consciousness. He resisted settling for the appearance that students had learned the curriculum of a particular workshop if they could not articulate this learning in their own words, and some Highlander activities were designed to prevent the "coerced" professions of solidarity that post-first-wave scholars associate with Freire and the Big Three. Horton even had a tendency to facilitate workshops in a manner that partially resembles Lynch's thermostat. In one noteworthy example, he challenged participants at a college-student workshop to justify the ethics of civil disobedience. As distilled from a transcript by Kirk Branch, Horton assumed the role of a civil rights supporter "who believes that 'all progress comes through orderly development, and that law, not spiritual law, not natural law but civil criminal law as we think of law on our law books,

and our courts, that law is a part of that, through which change is made” (qtd. in Branch 149-50). In an extended exchange, Branch explains, Horton challenged “students to defend both their tactics and their philosophies of law and justice” (150). Branch concludes that the “exuberance and thinking expressed in the interchange, the combination of obvious engagement and challenging intellectual development represent a sort of ideal for many teachers who run discussions in their own classrooms” (150-1). Indeed, I can imagine many post-first-wave scholars supporting such practices. But a crucial distinction from Lynch’s thermostat is that Horton used this method as a means of rhetorical invention to advance the workshop’s larger political goals, which included both honing students’ capacities to express their convictions and preparing them for the difficult and dangerous work that lay ahead.

Highlander workshops required facilitators to maintain a pedagogical humility that, reflecting the school’s commitment to student-centered learning, accentuated student knowledge and resources. Fundamentally, Highlander promoted *respect*—respect that teachers have for students, that students have for teachers and for each other, and that both teachers and students have for the process of exchanging and developing knowledge together. Of course, adopting Highlander’s pedagogical principles will neither obviate the teacher’s authority nor guarantee students’ contentment with her methods. But I propose that literacy educators who are determined to confront the progressive teacher’s challenge should conceptualize their agenda as serving multiple learning goals: that students imagine their capacity to be active citizens in a participatory democracy; that they feel a sense of power and responsibility to act in concert with allies against perceived injustice; that, as confident users of multiple literacy practices, they can adapt their messages to a variety of rhetorical and discursive contexts; *and* that they have successful careers (preferably ones consistent with their sense of social conscience). Maintaining such a mixture of objectives might enable progressive teachers to resist the idea that they are, in Miller’s phrase, merely “functionaries of the administration’s educational arm” (18), while simultaneously avoiding the illusory pursuit of institutional emancipation.

There are certainly limitations to how Highlander can be adapted to confront the progressive teacher's challenge within formal contexts. Skeptics might argue, for example, that the authority paradox will inevitably call into question any perceived movement students make between where they are and where the teacher believes they can or should be; such critiques, acting as conceptual prison guards, might lead me (in conceptual handcuffs) back to the poles of activist discourse, trapped anew by the supremacy of the challenge. I freely admit, then, that it will be difficult to persuade scholars convinced of the foolhardiness of progressive pedagogies—though one wonders if anything could move the staunchest critics. Moreover, distinguishing characteristics of Highlander must be acknowledged beyond the fact that the school was not a mainstream institution. Horton emphasized Highlander's identification with "people who are economically and socially disadvantaged" (*Myles Horton Reader* 4). Clearly, even the most marginalized faculty, as well as the great majority of college students, do not face the economic and social hardships of laborers seeking unionization in the 1930s and 40s, African Americans seeking enfranchisement in the 1950s and 60s, or rural Appalachian populations fighting strip mining and toxic-waste dumping in the 1970s and 80s.

Finally, among the many criticisms lodged against first-wave critical pedagogy has been that "American Freireistas" (Villanueva) improperly displaced Freire's ideas from the contexts in which he practiced them. I recognize that in adapting Highlander's praxis for formal institutions, I must inevitably distort it to some degree. But just as Freire urged American progressives to revise his ideas for their own institutional, geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances (Shor and Freire), I propose a similar revision of Highlander. Horton, though refusing to reduce the school to a single model or method, considered Highlander above all an idea that extended beyond a geographical location or the beliefs of its founder (Glen 208). According to this idea, literacy education should enable everyone to participate actively in a just and democratic society. I urge progressives to envision how this idea, which has had profound historical impact on local and national efforts to create social change, might inform their own practices as they stare down the progressive teacher's challenge. Ultimately, perhaps the most important lesson to draw from the progressive extracurriculum is that, while remaining

mindful of their locally specific constraints, socially conscientious teachers can and should forge communities of like-minded individuals both inside and outside the academy, because in order to create what Horton called “a kind of *world, in which we need to live*” (qtd. in Branch 18, italics in original), progressives must find ways to get into power.

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Notes

- 1 I would like to thank James Holstun, Robert Cosgrove, Stephen Parks, and the editors of *Reflections* for their help during the process of developing this essay.
- 2 Although Ann George alternately identifies the “Big Three” as Freire, Giroux, and Shor (93), Freire is more often portrayed as critical pedagogy’s “ur-theorist” (Greenbaum; Gale), and thus as a “mentor” (Bizzell 60) to the others.
- 3 Along with other terms such as “empowering,” “engaged,” and “radical,” “liberatory” and “emancipatory” have operated as virtual synonyms for the “critical” of critical pedagogy (George).
- 4 Within post-first-wave scholarship, Freire’s responsibility for the opposition of false and critical consciousness is decidedly in the eye of the beholder. Gerald Graff backs Miller’s reading, arguing that in Freire’s most frequently read works, he “never considers the unpleasant possibility that what ‘the people’ authentically prefer might conflict with the pedagogy of the oppressed” (“Teaching Politically” 28). Others, however, defend Freire. Dale Jacobs, for example, places blame squarely on the Big Three for distorting Freire’s message. According to Jacobs (see also Peckham), “Freire insists that teachers not impose their positions on students because such imposition is antithetical to dialogue” (44).
- 5 Questions about authority and the de-centralization of power in rhetoric and composition transcend progressive pedagogies, as the authority issue has recurrently appeared in disciplinary scholarship (e.g. Delpit; Mortensen and Kirsch; White). Interestingly, these incarnations of the authority question also lead to a sense of confinement or impasse. Vanderstaay et al. call this tendency the “prison house of power” in composition (W263).
- 6 Miller and Lynch also waver in regard to teachers’ abilities to read the genuine attitudes and intentions of students. As Lynch puts it, teachers “are simply unable to coerce assent” (738), while Miller claims that “we will never know, in any absolute sense, if

the work our students do is ‘authentic’ or if that work reflects their achieved level of ‘consciousness’” (19). Hence, we cannot force students to accept our worldviews, and even if students seem to express agreement, we will never know their true beliefs. And yet, both authors claim the ability to determine whether students are “faking” acquiescence or privately resisting the teacher’s political agenda.

- 7 In claiming that post-first-wave scholars indulge in the same binary oppositions for which they accuse first-wave scholars, I inevitably open myself up to an equivalent critique. Indeed, the scholars whom I collectively name “post-first-wave” could fairly claim that in grouping them together as I have here, I have not honored the uniqueness and full complexity of each individual, that I have merely digitized them in opposition to first-wave scholars. As Irvin Peckham observes, academic protocol “seems to demand simplifying one’s predecessors’ stances” (147). But I do not seek to portray myself as somehow above the binaries—as if to reach this utopian discursive space means one has attained intellectual paradise while others (one’s unfortunate binary counterparts, of course) remain mired in binary inferno—let’s call it even and hope to meet in dialectical purgatory. Rather than seeking to enlist (or entrap) myself in an endless parade of accusations about who is performing binary thinking upon whom, I merely hope to point out that just as we have little difficulty perceiving the complex, multi-faceted dynamics of our own classrooms (even if we struggle to articulate this complexity in academic discourse), we would all do well to recognize that similar complexity is present in the classrooms of our colleagues, even those whose pedagogical methods we reject.
- 8 While his book *Radical Departures* seeks to de-center teachers’ passions from pedagogical activity, focusing instead on mutualistic processes of dialectical inquiry between teachers and students, Gallagher’s examples of pedagogical progressivism at work are curious in their focus on teacher-led, teacher-defined projects that respond to various administrative and other institutional pressures, including the difficulties of teachers working cross-institutionally through local National Writing Project sites.

- 9 Considering the complexity of each student, I do not claim that everyone would end up using institutional literacy merely to serve individual career goals. Nevertheless, because of the pressures most students are under to do exactly this, such outcomes seem likely for the majority.
- 10 The Citizenship Schools represent part of an activist tradition—one that began long before the abolition of slavery—that Theresa Perry calls the *African American philosophy of education*. This philosophy, Perry explains, constitutes a “continually articulated belief system ... that stands in opposition to the dominant society’s notions about the intellectual capacity of African Americans, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school, and the power of their intellect” (49). These efforts have historically included both the demand for public schools run by African Americans and the situating of pedagogical spaces outside formal education. For example, following Reconstruction, and in the face of systemic Southern white efforts to deny access to politics by denying access to literacy (Moses 82), African American communities throughout the South raised funds to build and control public schools and to teach literacy in extracurricular sites (Anderson).
- 11 It would be unfortunate to send students the message that activism is work best accomplished by individuals lurking on the margins, searching for gaps within overbearing processes that inexorably serve the status quo. Nancy Welch, another scholar who squarely faces the implications of the progressive teacher’s challenge, laments that when her students enter the public sphere, they do so “much too much on their own” (“Living Room: Teaching Public Writing” 486). In order for progressives to teach the ethos of community change in good conscience, they must work where they can to forge similar community networks as they seek to reconstruct the constraints of their own institutional contexts (Parks).
- 12 After a years-long fight culminated in the revocation of Highlander’s charter in 1961, the school reopened as the Highlander Research and Education Center later that year.

- 13 Regarding his duties as an educator, Horton uses his own metaphor of the *two eyes*: “I like to think that I have two eyes that I don’t have to use the same way. When I do educational work with a group of people, I try to see with one eye where those people are as they perceive themselves to be ... and if I can get hold of that with one eye, that’s where I start. You have to start where people are, not from some abstraction or where you are or someone else is” (*Long Haul* 131). Conversely, Horton kept his second eye trained on where people might end up: “Now my other eye is not such a problem, because I already have in mind a philosophy of where I’d like to see people moving. It’s not a clear blueprint for the future but movement toward goals they don’t conceive of at that time” (*Long Haul* 131). In previous drafts of this essay, I suggested that Horton’s metaphor offers progressives an effective pedagogical hybrid to avoid the problematic metaphors of emancipation and entrapment. However, some readers expressed befuddlement at the physiological implausibility of Horton’s metaphor, in which the two eyes maintain a distinct perceptual focus. While the eyes Horton speaks of are better thought of as “inner” eyes of the mind, I do not want the metaphor to impede my larger point about the necessity of negotiating a path between where students are and where they can be, and therefore I have chosen not to emphasize Horton’s two-eyed theory here.
- 14 Because literature on the progressive teacher’s challenge tends to center on formal classrooms, I direct my suggestions toward these locations. However, I believe these principles are relevant for various circumstances, including interactions with colleagues and allies both within and across disciplines, as well as with university staff and administrators, and of course with community-based organizations.

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