

A Critical Approach to Overcoming Resistance to Academic Writing and Building Confidence in Third Level Students.

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Abstract.

This paper proposes an integrative writing strategy for incoming students in higher education and will take a tripartite approach encompassing the key aspects of resistance, confidence, and critical consciousness in higher education. Writing is central to the development and use of critical thinking in higher education, the challenge for us as educators is to overcome resistance from students to academic writing and build student confidence in their ability to engage in writing as a vehicle for reflection and interpretation. This can lead students to perceive a need for change in their world, their relationship, and attitudes, and to seek to change the attitudes of others, thus fostering the critical consciousness central to the pathway for progression from inequity to democracy in the classroom.

Keywords: Academic Writing; Confidence; Critical Consciousness; Critical Literacy; Resistance.

1. Introduction.

Academic Writing is a key factor in academic success, yet the uniform writing style required for scholarly legitimisation systematically excludes cohorts of students from achieving academic success. Students are often disoriented by the language of academia, particularly those entering higher education from positions of academic, social, or economic disadvantage, and alienated by the prospect of appropriating the metalanguage of academic discourse in their writing. Weber (1994) observes that an essential element of social transformation is learning how to put one's social reality into words using the '*codes and cultures of the dominant spheres*' of society (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.354) to decode their social conditions, however, this

argument presupposes that academic writing is a linear process, moreover it assumes that all students have the same literacy privileges and prior academic writing experiences.

Lunsford (1997) argues that by the time many students reach college they have learned to resent and therefore resist their vulnerability as an academic writer. Academic writing for those entering higher education from positions of academic, social, or economic disadvantage has thus come to represent a trap. Unlike spoken language which encompasses the richness of non-verbal and vernacular expression, academic writing is '*a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws*' (Shaughnessy, 1977, p.6). It is therefore not surprising that such students are resistant to the structures of academic writing, already weighted by the disadvantages of poor training for an educational system founded on systemic inequity, inequities tied powerfully to parental wealth, education, ethnicity and race, and intergenerational persistence of education.

As student diversity has increased in academia, the needs and expectations of third level students have changed but the structures of academic writing remain immutable. In Ireland, one in six students are dropping out of their courses in the first year with an overall non-progression rate of 15% and research identifies the first year of study as the year in which the highest rate of attrition occurs (Higher Education Authority, 2017). Research further shows almost one-in-five students (19%) from DEIS schools (designated disadvantaged schools) do not progress beyond first year (Higher Education Authority, 2018) and this paper highlights student confidence as a critical factor influencing these attrition rates in third level students.

A key aspect of developing equity in academic structures of writing is exploring the ideological underpinnings of academic writing and creating space within academic structures wherein students and teachers critique the system and suggest ways of subverting the negative effects of neoliberal reforms through dialogic, culturally responsive, empowering pedagogies. Critical literacy offers a pathway to such empowerment, a way for students to create bridges between what they read and the world, to apprehend subjectivity and objectivity in their dialectical relationship and, in doing so, learn to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of their experience as historically constructed within specific power relations, developing critical consciousness. Critical literacy entails a process of naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it (New London Group, 1996). A critical literacy approach to education recognizes

the power of language in shaping thought and social transformation, and academic classrooms present a powerful space for young people to develop critical literacies and become critically conscious citizens.

Academic writing represents a promising opportunity to rewrite cultural discourse and develop critical consciousness in third-level students, providing students with tools both to critically analyse the power structures that underpin societal conditions and to become more actively engaged in challenging oppressive societal conditions. A critical literacy approach gives learners the skills and knowledge to critically consume and produce academic structures of writing as they work with educators to examine relevant texts and interrogate the underlying power structures. Morrell (2008) argues that learners then need to be empowered to create and disseminate their own, more authentically representative writing. By applying a critical literacy lens to academic structures of writing, students are positioned to interrogate oppressive structures, develop writing skills and dispositions that lead to a sense of agency, and take actions to author worlds with liberative possibilities as critically conscious citizens.

Writing is essential for academic success. However, as Bartholomae (2003) has shown, slavish imitation of academic discourse is a potent source of confusion in writing, with academic discourse itself sometimes seen as an obstacle to critical consciousness. Academic discourse can thus only escape being judged as jargon that students must imitate and perpetuate if learning academic discourse can give access to real knowledge (Freire, 1973). Freire asserts that *'in a situation of knowing, teacher and student must take on the role of conscious subjects, mediated by the knowable object that they seek to know'* (1973, p.101). Academic discourse must be taught and learned so as to foster this type of learning environment if its teaching and learning are to foster critical consciousness. Equity in higher education therefore requires a commitment from us as educators to challenge the discourse of conformity and develop an engaged pedagogy. As hooks (1997) emphasises, critical literacy is essential to the future of equality in education because the lack of reading, writing and critical skills serves to exclude many women and men from critical consciousness, and resistance to academic discourse further excludes many from the political process and the labour market. Hooks thus regards literacy as more than being able to read and write, it allows people, particularly those who are marginalized and discriminated against in society, to acquire critical consciousness. My conceptual framework draws primarily on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks. This paper will argue that a critical approach to writing and the embracing of diverse perspectives is what's needed in higher education if we are to overcome inequity in

the classroom.

2. Resistance.

Resistance is a systematic response for many students who are crossing the bridge to third level education. Years of adhering to a didactic teaching model has resulted in learners unable or unwilling to engage in the process of critical thinking; that is, to analyse and evaluate lecture material and foster meaningful connections between theory and practice. This has a secondary effect on their ability to engage with academic writing which for many students is a cognitive skill disconnected from their social context. A critical approach to academic writing then can make a profound difference to students' capacity to connect the narrative of their social context with the structures of academic writing. Through development of critical literacy young people can gain an understanding of the ways in which power is conferred and accessed in terms of wealth, education, and representation, and the impacts of structural inequity on their individual lives as students, consumers, and citizens (Morrell, 2008).

Max Weber's description of the iron cage of rationality, Heidegger's analysis of science technology and Foucault's regimes of truth all depict the hegemony of scientific and technological ways of thinking within social reality and the consequent delegitimization of ways of thinking and knowing that do not fit this model. What is problematic about this approach is that it leaves little room for genuine agency on the part of students. Cognitive development presupposes a level of personal and intellectual agency and *'very little of current education is designed to help students to recognize their past conception on the basis of new experience and to develop personally generated insights and paradigms, even though these learning processes may reflect higher stages of development'* (Diamond, 1988, p.139). The educated mind is fundamentally one with a capacity for free thinking, a freedom which is often obstructed by the structures of academic writing; indeed, Hooks observes this struggle in her own writing:

"It has been hardest to integrate black vernacular in writing, particularly for academic journals. When I first began to incorporate black vernacular in critical essays, editors would send the work back to me in standard English. Student frustration is directed against the inability of methodology, analysis, and abstract writing (usually blamed on the material and often justifiably so) to make the work connect to their efforts to live more fully, to transform society, to live a politics of feminism". (1994, p.167)

What is needed to foster this intellectual freedom is an *'other space'* (Foucault, 1986), a space

created free from the competitive curricula of the modern education system and informed by tolerance of the connection between lived experience and academic discourse. This tolerance is tempered by the way '*in which elements of accommodation and resistance exist in an unsteady state of tension*' (Giroux, 1983, p.151) in higher education, representing a site of significant social struggle in the quest for change.

The current domination of standardization in higher education positions student development as a process of adjustment and accommodation. Accommodation (Giroux, 1983) is the process by which students learn to accept conventions without necessarily questioning how those conventions privilege some forms of knowledge at the expense of others. Opposition refers to student behaviour which disrupts the accepted pathways of progression for learning. Distinguishing between opposition and resistance, Giroux argues that resistance '*contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation*' (1983, pp. 108-09). The challenge for us as educators is to reframe this resistance dialogically and create conditions for dialogue that support rather than silence the epistemological curiosity of the learner.

In our society, the dominant language and culture informs every school practice, from the use of academic language to the medium of instruction to other school activities (Giroux, 1983) and disadvantaged students suffer most in this subtractive environment, particularly language minority students. Subtractive education refers to curriculum policies, processes, or practices that remove students' culture or language from classroom contexts as a resource for learning or as a source of personal affirmation. What is problematic about schooling in this subtractive context is that minority students are put at a disadvantage because their first language and cultural norms are not recognized. Subtractive schooling is a form of schooling that systematically strips students from minoritized groups of their language, culture, and academic wellbeing with the intention of assimilating students into the dominant language and culture. As a result, they are inaccurately defined as students who already know the dominant language, not as students who are still learning it (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981) meaning they are assessed in the dominant language with results invariably indicating lower levels of achievement (Dooly, Vallejo & Unamuno, 2009). Ultimately, they may be labelled remedial, creating a sense of learned helplessness that lowers expectations and undermines opportunities for academic growth.

Language and cultural differences thus result in minority students' real strengths or capabilities

remain underestimated, this misjudgement is reflected for instance in the low academic achievement and high dropout rates among minority students (Bear-Nicholas, 2009). Moreover, teachers' and career advisers' low expectations of minority students often translates into inadequate advice, which Craven et al. (2005) identifies as a critical social justice issue, contributing further to an intergenerational legacy of trauma and disadvantage that inhibits educational progress for many minority students in the present. In addition, the process of adjustment and adaptation to the school environment means that minority students are much less likely to use their first language, and more likely to assimilate into the dominant language and culture (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1979), another subtractive process which deeply undermines student self-efficacy and confidence. In this context, academic structures of writing operate as a form of structural violence wherein '*violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as un-equal life chances*' (Galtung, 1969, p. 171) presenting students with an exclusionary curriculum that perpetuates current inequality. The Irish education system has much to learn from the experiences of indigenous students (Brown 2019; Bear-Nicholas 2009), and the policies of subtractive education that have created a legacy of educational failure, social and cultural harm, if we are to become an inclusive, integrated society.

Collective resistance, achieved through dialogic pedagogies that build on understandings of resistance and power, can cultivate theoretical and material spaces where a cycle of praxis can enhance possibilities for social justice and capitalize on the potential for solidarity and collective agency among students and teachers (Gorlewski, 2011). In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks investigates the classroom as a source of constraint but also a potential source of liberation. She argues that teachers' use of control and power over students dulls the students' enthusiasm and teaches obedience to authority, '*confining each student to a rote assembly-line approach to learning*' and advocates that universities encourage students and teachers to transgress. hooks describes teaching as '*a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged*' (1994, p.12) in providing a progressive, holistic education. Resistance thus constitutes a critical moment in the classroom; it has the potential to facilitate an engaged pedagogy focused on a deeper understanding of how power in schools works and how this power both reflects and reproduces dominant narratives in society.

3. Confidence.

A key issue to be addressed in relation to academic structures of writing is student confidence, particularly in first year students. Students may enter third level discouraged by previous experience or a lack of experience, a lack of knowledge or expectations which leads to student isolation and insecurity. This insecurity is often related to the habitus and social capital of students and reflects the profound influence of habitus on social and academic integration into higher education. Reay (2015) researched the experiences of working-class university graduates and found their recollections of university marked by a sense of their own inadequacy, anxiety and insecurity. Notably, these are the antithesis of the emotional assets arising from dominant-class backgrounds: entitlement, confidence, and security (Reay, 2015). bell hooks, reflecting on the difference between students at Stanford and Harlem observed:

“The first thing I noticed was that my students were equally brilliant in the Harlem setting as they were when I taught at Yale or Oberlin but their senses of what the meaning of that brilliance was and what they could do with it, their sense of agency was profoundly different. You know when students came to Yale, they came there knowing that they are the best and the brightest and they think that they have a certain kind of future ahead for them and they in a sense are opened to embracing that future. It has nothing to do with the level of knowledge. It has more to do with their sense of entitlement about having a future and when I see among my really brilliant students in Harlem, many of whom have very difficult lives, they work, they have children, is that they don't have that sense of entitlement, they don't have that imagination into a future of agency and as such, I think many professors do not try to give them the gift of critical thinking”. (1997, p.2)

Confidence is a belief in oneself, the conviction that one has the ability to meet life's challenges and to succeed, and the willingness to act accordingly. Being confident requires a realistic sense of one's capabilities and feeling secure in that knowledge, however, much of that security comes from the social structures, societal norms and access to resources that constitute the socio-cultural environment of the learner. Bourdieu draws on three theoretical tools, namely cultural capital, field and habitus, to explain how the environment in which people are raised and their conditions of cultural and material existence, shape their attitudes, their means of interpreting the world and their capacity to engage in academic discourse. Bourdieu defines capital as any resource that holds symbolic value within a field and therefore acts as a currency that actors take with them to the field. He identifies three types of capital; economic, cultural, and social

capital. Economic capital is regarded as '*immediately and directly convertible into money*' (1986, p.245); cultural capital refers mainly to the products of education, whether these are visible in individuals (accent, vocabulary, behaviour), connected to objects like qualifications or connected to institutions, like schools and universities, and social capital relates to an individual's established social connections or networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu describes field as a socially structured space in which individuals play out their engagements with each other. The concept of the field is closely linked to that of capital - capital functions in relation to field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). Therefore, within a field, individuals hold unequal positions and experience unequal trajectories based upon the volume and composition of their portfolio of capital (Wacquant, 1998). Habitus refers to a set of values, practices and norms which people assimilate as part of who they are and how they operate. Bourdieu explains habitus as: '*systems of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*' (1971, p. 83).

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital help us, as educators, to make sense of the concept of higher education institutions as sites of struggle for socially and economically disadvantaged students. Research tells us that working-class students interpret their struggles at university as personal inferiority rather than as disadvantage (Mallman, 2017). They do not have equal access to what Skeggs (1997) refers to as techniques of selfhood required by the dominant symbolic in the field in which they are engaged. Mallman employs the term '*inherent vice*' to describe the process in which individuals and institutions are disposed to viewing lower levels of cultural capital in working-class students as an indication of their '*natural*' inferiority, rather than as disadvantages of inheritable, symbolic resources (2017, p.3). In particular, this relates to a lack of confidence in their linguistic competence and ability to articulate their ideas clearly in written form (Aries & Seder, 2005). Clarence (2011) argues that there is a gap between what faculty think students need to do to develop as competent writers and thinkers and what these faculty are doing to help students achieve this goal. The structures of academic writing thus operate as an inhibiting factor in creating equity in higher education, leading to feelings of inadequacy among socio-economically disadvantaged students amid '*paralytic suspicion that they somehow weren't good enough*' (Friedman 2015, p.12). Valenzuela (1999) argues that schools subtract resources from working-class students, particularly minority students, in two ways: firstly, by dismissing their definition of education and secondly, through assimilationist policies and practices that minimize their culture and language, eroding the students' social capital (Valenzuela, 1999). It is then, the responsibility of higher education institutions to counter

this diminishment of academic self-efficacy in student by understanding and equipping working-class students with the necessary resources, rather than relying on students to have been born into the right habitus or viewing students' struggles as a fault in their natural capability.

Freire links the acquisition of formal education to the ability to see one's world as the object of reflection and change. In Freire's opinion, education can foster the act of entering into one's world. Many students now come to college in need of this kind of fostering education. Lunsford (1979) has contributed to our understanding of where students are, intellectually, with a comparative study of essays by inexperienced or unprepared students whom she refers to as '*basic writers*' and skilled academic writers. She concludes:

"The basic writers I have been quoting, then, seem to represent the egocentric stage of cognitive development and the conventional stage of moral development, to conceptualize and generalize with great difficulty, and, most of all, to lack confidence".

(Lunsford, 1979, p.134)

According to Lunsford, the basic writers display this egocentric stage of cognitive development by their frequent use of the personal pronoun and of evidence drawn from personal experience. Their conventional stage of moral development is apparent in their reliance, when asked to make a judgment, on maxims received uncritically from authority (Lunsford, p.136). Their inability to conceptualize seems to be a function of their personal focus, in that they rarely try to reason out connections between their personal experiences and the lives of others. Lunsford observes that they lack confidence when they describe themselves primarily as victims of social forces and divulge many personal fears and anxieties. Although Lunsford asserts that the '*basic writers*' prose is more vital, more engaging, and truer to their own experience than the impersonal, disengaged prose often produced by more skilled students' she believes that '*the real challenge lies in helping our students become more proficient at abstracting and conceptualizing and hence at producing acceptable academic discourse, without losing the directness many of them now possess*' (Lunsford, 1979, p.137).

Lunsford's observation can be meaningfully reinterpreted in light of Freire's analysis of levels of consciousness and Bourdieu's concept of habitus with the basic writers displaying a lack of critical consciousness or an awareness of the social construction of their reality. The basic writers cling to a personal perspective because '*they feel more part of their world than transformers of the world*' (Lunsford, 1979, p.137). They rely on maxims because they have been subject to what Freire refers to as a '*banking education*' (1970, p.77), in which knowledge

has been deposited by authorities in their passive minds. It is unlikely that the vivid sense of a surrounding world that Lunsford values in the basic writers' essays can be preserved if, as educators, we see abstracting and conceptualizing as the skills necessary to produce academic discourse. Instead of making the necessary movement to critical consciousness of their world, such students are more likely to leave their directedness aside in an attempt to identify with apparently higher levels of cognitive development and belletristic achievement.

As Ivanić (1998) observes *'each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demand of a new context'* (p.181). If writing is an act of identity, then academic writing is not just about conveying content but also about the representation of self in a new and unfamiliar context. In their writing, students align themselves with socio-culturally shaped subject positions, and thereby play their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses (Ivanić, 1998). Although subtractive schooling, as discussed earlier, has apparently facilitated students' integration into mainstream education, its invisible power forces students not only to adjust and adapt, but also to bear the heft of constructing new identities to adjust to the school environment and the dominant culture (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017). For marginalised students, changes first take place in their language identity, as they use and adapt to a new language perspective which in turn engenders change in cultural values associated with languages. Adopting a new language and cultural identity leads to changes in the social relationships that shape the formation of identities. Thus, minority students are affected by the school environment in expressing and defining their identity in terms of language, culture, and social relations. Language is a constitutive force that offers a selective view of reality and oneself, and the practices inscribed in academic structures of writing invariably reinforce the dominant narrative and existing structures of power in the classroom.

The pedagogical goal then is to give students some control over the process to which they are submitting themselves by providing a broader and more holistic framework in addressing structures of educational provision that offers compassionate as well as educational support. We need to move beyond the deficit model of disadvantage, a constructed narrative with negative implications, which has been the basis of most policy intervention in educational inequality, to a more enlightened approach to educational inclusion and equality that recognizes the complex levels of disadvantage and associated crises of confidence experienced by marginalised communities (Dorrity & Maxwell, 2011, p.144) in engaging with academic structures of writing. Educational institutions need to respect, recognize, and include diversity in their enrolment policies, curriculum, and pedagogy, and facilitate professional development

for educators to enhance awareness of diversity issues and to disseminate effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment. It is critical to acknowledge that standardised approaches may not meet the needs of all and respond with a range of appropriate supports to tackle persistent educational inequality.

4. Critical Consciousness.

Critical consciousness focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. Critical consciousness thus functions as a socio-political educative tool that engages students in questioning the nature of their historical and social situation which Freire addresses as '*reading the world*' (1973). Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to recognize and analyze political, economic and social forces shaping society and to take action against them. Freire understood that inequality is sustained when the people most affected are unable to decode their social conditions. He thus proposed a cycle of critical consciousness development that involved gaining knowledge about the systems and structures that create and sustain inequity (critical analysis), developing a sense of power or capability (sense of agency), and ultimately committing to take action against oppressive conditions (critical action). This awakening of critical awareness is at the heart of a liberatory education and moving students along a continuum from absolutist knowing towards the level of contextual knowing (Baxter-Magolda, 1992) is necessary for students to be able to engage in critical consciousness in their thinking and writing, indeed research has suggested that critical consciousness can be a gateway to academic motivation and achievement for marginalized students (El-Amin, 2017).

Contemporary research has found that critical consciousness not only expands young people's commitment to challenging pervasive injustice (Ginwright, 2010) but also increases academic achievement and engagement (Carter, 2008). In particular, education programming designed to foster critical consciousness has been shown to increase academic engagement and achievement (Dee & Penner, 2016) and enrolment in higher education (Rogers and Terriquez, 2013). In explaining these relationships, research has suggested that critical consciousness of oppressive social forces can replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for one's challenges, in theoretical accord with Mallman's concept of inherent vice, with a sense of engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice and educational equality (Diemer, Rapa, park & Perry, 2014) reflective of the transformative possibilities of committing to critical consciousness

development.

Freire stresses the suppression of critical consciousness as the defining characteristic of oppression (1973), therefore, whilst the concept is most often applied to oppressed communities, it is, in fact, relevant to anyone living in a state of false consciousness. In *Education and Critical Consciousness*, Freire describes the development of critical consciousness as a five-part model. The first stage is a '*semi-transitive state*', in which individuals are pre-occupied entirely with survival. The next stage in the model of progression is that of '*transitivity of consciousness*', which at this point individuals are able to reflect on themselves and their roles and responsibilities, thus allowing them to dialogue with others and with society at large. In communicating with others, people are initially in the third stage, a state of '*naïve transitivity*', which can be most commonly characterized by an oversimplification of problems, both personal and social. If an individual does progress further in the model, he or she will reach the level of '*critical transitivity*', which results in a more in-depth analysis of problems and an increase in agency. It is worth noting, however, that this progression is not automatic and may never be achieved if learners are not supported in establishing meaningful social relations through which knowledge production and exchange can be facilitated and fortified over time (Gonzalez, Wyman & O'Connor 2011). If an individual does not progress beyond this level, the result will be that of moving into a '*fanaticized consciousness*'; a reactionary state wrought by sectarianism, a narrow-minded adherence to a particular viewpoint. In the final stage, an individual ultimately moves into the state of '*critical consciousness*'; the awakening of critical awareness resulting from educational efforts and favourable historical conditions (Freire, 1973, p.237).

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn if we believe in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects the diverse socio-cultural environments of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions for such education to take place. By introducing frameworks and language for analysing inequity we can harness the connection between critical consciousness and academic achievement enabling students to move from seeing academic writing as a structure of oppression to one of visibility and liberation. Clark and Ivanić (1997) advocate a critical approach to academic writing that recognizes the possibilities for selfhood that exist in the sociocultural context of writing in both the broader context of society and the more immediate context of a particular act of writing:

“Writers create a representation of self through the discourses they enter – this representation in turn has tangible effects both on the text produced and on the writer’s identity. This means that the actual act of writing has material effects on those who write – on the person and the stance they take in the world, their identity. Conversely, their stance in the world affects the texts they can and cannot shape”. (Clark and Ivanić, 1997, p.136)

The material effects of writing thus facilitate new ways of taking action in the social and cultural contexts students inhabit as they move towards a critically conscious engagement with their environment that acknowledges the ways in which selves as well as texts are socially constructed (Lunsford 1992).

As Freire observes, human nature is dialogic, and we create and recreate ourselves through authentic dialogue and the integration of curriculum and consciousness. Freire uses the term critical consciousness in his analysis of the current model of education which he refers to as a banking model of education (1970). Central to Freire's work is the belief that societal and individual liberation are interdependent. The focus of education is to generate a new social order by changing the structures of society and liberating the individual from a false consciousness which is unaware of the structural and historical forces which have formed her/him. Such change requires dialogue and engagement in society with the help of a facilitator who guides and questions instead of providing answers and directions for the learner. Freire described the true function of education as radical conscientization and called for a problem-posing approach to education as opposed to the more traditional banking form of education which involves stripping phenomena of their spatial and temporal context, thus preventing the oppressed from obtaining a truer understanding of the wider context of contingency to which the phenomenon in question relates (Freire, 1970). For example, concrete data is presented by oppressors a-historically, and outside of its structural relationships that are, by definition, connected and relevant to the data in question. In this way, banking prevents abstract theorising and an ability to obtain a deeper, truer, and more nuanced picture of reality. Comber (2014) argues that countering this banking method of education involves at least three principles for action; respecting student resistance and exploring minority culture constructions of literacy and language use, problematising classroom and public texts, and repositioning students as researchers of language, thus providing an engaged pedagogy that embraces resistance as a site of change and growth.

5. Conclusion.

Current academic structures of writing are reflective of the broader absence in education policy of a critical engagement with context and how it impacts both the present and the future. Engaging students in the structures of academic writing requires a realistic appropriation of how such structures serve to reinforce or reproduce existing power relations and remove students' agency for their own learning. By embracing our students' diverse experiences with writing and designing writing assignments that offer students clear insight into learning goals, transparent evaluation criteria, and possibilities for approaching the writing process, we can help move students to deepen their understanding of course material in a way that facilitates critical engagement with the questions and concepts that structure academic discourse in our myriad disciplines. This paper does not offer a single solution but rather myriad possibilities for addressing inequity and the impact of this inequity on structures of writing, thus facilitating pathways for change and growth.

Firstly, a key aspect of overcoming resistance to the structures of academic writing is to connect academic writing in a meaningful way to the social context or lived experience of the student and focusing on writing tasks which require students to engage in some form of integrative, critical, or original thinking. Examples include asking students to apply a concept learned in class to their past experience, relate knowledge learned in another class to previous knowledge, support claim with evidence, or evaluate an argument or policy (Anderson et al., p. 207). This critical approach to writing empowers learners by fostering inclusivity and respect for their socio-cultural perspective. As educators, we need to guard against class discussions where the dominance of a majority perspective silences or resists the expression of minority views. In a series of studies of undergraduate life undertaken by Levine and Cureton (1998), findings revealed that 54% of students feel uncomfortable expressing unpopular or controversial opinions. Educators need to do more to bring about a class atmosphere where students are comfortable voicing a diversity of viewpoints and where they feel safe to question, critique, and disagree. With regard to writing, there is a need to include a greater number of writing assignments in course evaluation that require students to demonstrate synthesis of material, evaluation of arguments, deduction of conclusions, and so on. Facilitating this process not only encourages students to think and reflect on social inequalities and injustice, it also consolidates the importance of not just '*reading the world*' but '*writing the world*' to effect change (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.13).

Secondly, student confidence can be fostered through interactive writing processes such as sharing drafts, freewriting (Elbow, 1981), a regular writing routine, engaging with a critical friend and peer review. Finding that peers can exert a substantial influence on students' confidence, and that positive emotional climates occur when students develop friendships, Fassinger (2000) recommends that instructors might consider developing more writing assignments using study groups or learning partners. Anderson, Anson, Gonyea & Paine (2015) found that writing assignments engage students in deeper learning when they *'involve the student writers communicating orally or in writing with one or more persons at some point between receiving an assignment and submitting the final draft'* (2015, p. 206). Institutional support can be provided through feedback sessions and guidance to counter the imbalance of unequal capital in students' habitus. Clear writing expectations that provide students with clarity, focus and an accurate understanding of what they are being asked to do in an assignment coupled with transparent criteria for evaluation will help to alleviate student resistance and foster confidence in their ability to complete the required assessment. Confidence issues typically arise in relation to metalanguage which students find exclusionary so encouraging students to read to familiarize themselves with the metalanguage of their field is critical. Writing workshops focusing on the microstructures of writing will also help to develop student confidence in their ability to articulate their arguments with accuracy, clarity, and conviction.

Finally, if institutions are truly committed to achieving the widely professed educational objective of instilling critical writing skills in students, then these interventions need to be introduced upon entry to third level and sustained throughout their academic study if they are to effect long term change. Furthermore, institutions need to actively support and guide staff in teaching reform efforts. Seminars, workshops, and training sessions should be a regular component of an institution's ongoing professional development programme for staff. We live in a society wherein pedagogical practices have been effectively colonised by economic imperatives. In the new managerialist approach to education there is little room for such initiatives and until the goals of education stop being tied to the market economy there is likely to be little change. However, the difficulties of colonisation also invite resistance. The mobilization of communicative reason and action is the counter to colonisation, through such reasoned communication participants agree to allow the better argument to guide action oriented towards improving social conditions. The better argument is that students who learn to think critically about the world, and question received ideas, will be able to participate as confident subjects in the creation of a more democratic society, rather than submit to a banking model of education that objectifies them and

alienates them from their potentiality.

Monolithic national cultures like Ireland have been challenged by the influx of new cultural groups, the breaking up of larger polities and the belated recognition of existing but suppressed cultural groups. This presents a significant challenge to not only what we teach, but how we teach it, in modern education. Said (1983) observes that:

“When our students are taught such things as ‘the humanities’ they are almost always taught that these classic texts embody, express, represent what is best in our, that is, the only tradition. Moreover, they are taught that such fields as the humanities and such subfields as ‘literature’ exist in a relatively neutral political element, that they are to be appreciated and venerated, that they define the limits of what is acceptable, appropriate and legitimate as far as culture is concerned”. (p.21).

However, as Husen (1999) notes, education is, by its very nature ethnocentric. It is therefore always political, undermining the notion of the apolitical sphere of the classroom and highlighting the importance of teaching with intent. The cultivation of tolerance in our students is instrumental in their movement forward as critically conscious citizens, for as Freire observes *‘it is through the exercise of tolerance that I discover the rich possibility of doing things and learning different things with different people. Being tolerant is not a question of being naïve. On the contrary, it is a duty to be tolerant, an ethical duty, a historical duty, a political duty’* (Freire, 1996). What is needed is deliberate and sustained engagement in teaching for thinking that provides students with the opportunity to transmit their identity as learners rather than vessels to be filled with information. Environments that foster open discussion of multiple perspectives are one way in which we can create such learning conditions for our students and generate equity in the structures of academic writing and academic discourse.

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