that you think best illustrate the author's character, and discuss how his character contributes to, or detracts from, the argument he makes in this essay.

2. What is the relationship between university culture and the examples from advertising and television that Edmundson offers in this essay? What point is he making, exactly, about higher education and "the cool consumer world view" (para. 9)? Find specific passages to illustrate your responses.

3. Edmundson spends a lot of time describing what he thinks is wrong with university culture, but he also makes recommendations for change. What does he want students and professors to do differently? What do his recommendations have to do with the idea of genius that he brings up at the end of the essay? How practical do you find Edmundson's suggestions? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?

Inquiring Further

4. How unique is Edmundson's complaint about the commercialization of higher education? Use your library's electronic databases (EBSCOhost, for example) to search for other writers' ideas on this issue. How does Edmundson's characterization of the problems and possible solutions compare to others you find? Where do you stand in this conversation about the commercialization of higher education?

5. How well do Edmundson's descriptions of college students align with behaviors you have seen? Look particularly at passages where he depicts student-teacher interactions in class. How do you account for the similarities and differences between what Edmundson describes and what you have seen?

6. Do an Edmundson-style analysis of the role consumer culture plays on your own campus. For example, you might consider the images and sales pitch in the brochures the admissions office sends to prospective students. Or analyze the physical layout of your campus. Edmundson claims his campus looks "like a retirement spread for the young" (para. 24). What would he conclude about your campus? What do you conclude?

Framing Conversations

7. The college students Edmundson analyzes may seem at first to have little in common with the primary and secondary school children Jonathan Kozol describes (p. 308). But both authors address the goals of education and the methods that work best to meet those goals. Write an essay in which you draw on the authors' arguments about educational goals and methods to take your own position on these issues. Feel free to draw on examples from your own educational experience in developing your argument.

8. Like Edmundson, Robert Scholes (p. 370) analyzes the cultural messages embedded in advertising. What issues does each author bring up about advertising on television and our responses to the messages we see there? Write an essay in which you compare the two authors' ideas — where would they agree and disagree? — to argue a point you would like to make about the messages we see on television. You might take notes on a television commercial or two, and include your Edmundson-style and Scholes-style analyses of the commercials as part of the evidence for your argument. Be sure to explain why this type of cultural analysis is important. In other words, anticipate an antagonistic reader who might say, "Who cares? It's just a commercial."

9. How do our educational systems work to preserve or undo class and race divisions? Draw on the ideas in Edmundson's essay and connect them to concepts in one or two essays by the following authors: bell hooks (below), Jonathan Kozol (p. 308), Noel Ignatiev (p. 512), Peggy McIntosh (p. 520), and Cynthia Selfe (p. 783). Write an essay in which you use the works to build an argument about what American education accomplishes in relation to class and race differences — and, perhaps, what you think it should accomplish. Be sure to use and analyze specific examples from the texts and, if you want, your own experiences.

Bell Hooks

From Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

bell hooks is the pen name of Gloria Watkins, a cultural critic, scholar, and prolific writer. She has taught at many schools, including Oberlin College and the City College of New York. hooks has a wide range of intellectual interests, and that is reflected in her long list of articles and books. Her book Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (revised 2000) has been very influential in the field of gender politics, and her many books on race, gender, and politics are taught frequently in both undergraduate and graduate courses. With Cornel West, hooks edited Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life (1991). She is well known for her collaborations with people from many different intellectual backgrounds, from politics to religion to activism. Her most recent project was coediting a collection of essays on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation (2007). The selection here is taken from Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (1994).

Despite her publishing success, some scholars have criticized hooks for refusing to follow the "rules" of academic publishing. For example, although she quotes and engages with numerous scholars in her writing, she does not use footnotes in her work because she believes many readers find them off-putting, and she is interested in making her ideas accessible to people outside the academy, people who may be less educated but are still very interested in the topics she explores. In this selection, she makes mention of a related writing strategy: She believes teachers and writers should foster the ability to "speak differently to diverse audiences" (para. 26), as most of us do in our daily lives. (Think for a moment about how you speak with your teachers as opposed to how you speak — or blog or e-mail — with friends.) As you read pay attention to the different levels of formality in hooks's language. Where does she sound like a scholar?
Introduction

In the weeks before the English Department at Oberlin College was about to decide whether or not I would be granted tenure, I was haunted by dreams of running away — of disappearing — yes, even of dying. These dreams were not a response to fear that I would not be granted tenure. They were a response to the reality that I would be granted tenure. I was afraid that I would be trapped in the academy forever.

Instead of feeling elated when I received tenure, I fell into a deep, life-threatening depression. Since everyone around me believed that I should be granted tenure, I was haunted by the threat of depression. Since everyone around me believed that I should be granted tenure, I was haunted by the threat of depression. Since everyone around me believed that I should be granted tenure, I was haunted by the threat of depression.
where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority.

When we entered racist, desegregated, white schools we left a world where teachers believed that to educate black children rightly would require a political commitment. Now, we were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love of school. The classroom was no longer a place of pleasure or ecstasy. School was still a political place, since we were always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never as capable as white peers, even unable to learn. Yet, the politics were no longer counter-hegemonic. We were always and only responding and reacting to white folks.

That shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination. The rare white teacher who dared to resist, who would not allow racist biases to determine how we were taught, sustained the belief that learning at its most powerful could indeed liberate. A few black teachers had joined us in the desegregation process. And, although it was more difficult, they continued to nurture black students even as their efforts were constrained by the suspicion they were favoring their own race.

Despite intensely negative experiences, I graduated from school still believing that education was enabling, that it enhanced our capacity to be free. When I began undergraduate work at Stanford University, I was entranced with the process of becoming an insurgent black intellectual. It surprised and shocked me to sit in classes where professors were not excited about teaching, where they did not seem to have a clue that education was about the practice of freedom. During college, the primary lesson was reinforced: we were to learn obedience to authority.

In graduate school the classroom became a place I hated, yet a place where I struggled to claim and maintain the right to be an independent thinker. The university and the classroom began to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility. I wrote my first book during those undergraduate years, even though it was not published until years later. I was writing; but more importantly I was preparing to become a teacher.

Accepting the teaching profession as my destiny, I was tormented by the classroom reality I had known both as an undergraduate and a graduate student. The vast majority of our professors lacked basic communication skills, they were not self-actualized, and they often used the classroom to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the unjust exercise of power. In these settings I learned a lot about the kind of teacher I did not want to become.

In graduate school I found that I was often bored in classes. The banking system of education (based on the assumption that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored, and used at a later date) did not interest me. I wanted to become a critical thinker. Yet that longing was often seen as a threat to authority. Individual white male students who were seen as "exceptional," were often allowed to chart their intellectual journeys, but the rest of us (and particularly those from marginal groups) were always expected to conform. Nonconformity on our part was viewed with suspicion, as empty gestures of defiance aimed at masking inferiority or substandard work. In those days, those of us from marginal groups who were allowed to enter prestigious, predominantly white colleges were made to feel that we were there not to learn but to prove that we were the equal of whites. We were there to prove this by showing how well we could become clones of our peers. As we constantly confronted biases, an undertone of stress diminished our learning experience.

My reaction to this stress and to the ever-present boredom and apathy that pervaded my classes was to imagine ways that teaching and the learning experience could be different. When I discovered the work of the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, my first introduction to critical pedagogy, I found a mentor and a guide, someone who understood that learning could be liberatory. With his teachings and my growing understanding of the ways in which the education I had received in all-black Southern schools had been empowering, I began to develop a blueprint for my own pedagogical practice. Already deeply engaged with feminist thinking, I had no difficulty bringing that critique to Freire's work. Significantly, I felt that this mentor and guide, whom I had never seen in the flesh, would encourage and support my challenge to his ideas if he was truly committed to education as the practice of freedom. At the same time, I used his pedagogical paradigms to critique the limitations of feminist classrooms.

During my undergraduate and graduate school years, only white women professors were involved in developing Women's Studies programs. And even though I taught my first class as a graduate student on black women writers from a feminist perspective, it was in the context of a Black Studies program. At that time, I found, white women professors were not eager to nurture any interest in feminist thinking and scholarship on the part of black female students if that interest included critical challenge. Yet their lack of interest did not discourage me from involvement with feminist ideas or participation in the feminist classroom. Those classrooms
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were the one space where pedagogical practices were interrogated, where it was assumed that the knowledge offered students would empower them to be better scholars, to live more fully in the world beyond academe. The feminist classroom was the one space where students could raise critical questions about pedagogical process. These critiques were not always encouraged or well received, but they were allowed. That small acceptance of critical interrogation was a crucial challenge inviting us as students to think seriously about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom.

When I entered my first undergraduate classroom to teach, I relied on the example of those inspired black women teachers in my grade school, on Freire’s work, and on feminist thinking about radical pedagogy. I longed passionately to teach differently from the way I had been taught since high school. The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere. Neither Freire’s work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom. The idea that learning should be exciting, sometimes even “fun,” was the subject of critical discussion by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade schools, and sometimes even high schools. But there seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education.

Excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals (I drew on the strategies my grade-school teachers used to get to know us) and interacted with according to their needs (here Freire was useful). Critical reflection on my experience as a student in unexciting classrooms enabled me not only to imagine that the classroom could be exciting but that this excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement.

But excitement about ideas was not sufficient to create an exciting learning process. As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another; in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence. Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor; any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone’s presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community. Often before this process can begin there has to be some deconstruction of the traditional notion that only the professor is responsible for classroom dynamics. That responsibility is relative to status. Indeed, the professor will always be more responsible because the larger institutional structures will always ensure that accountability for what happens in the classroom rests with the teacher. It is rare that any professor, no matter how eloquent a lecturer, can generate through his or her actions enough excitement to create an exciting classroom. Excitement is generated through collective effort.

Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community. One semester, I had a very difficult class, one that completely failed on the communal level. Throughout the term, I thought that the major drawback inhibiting the development of a learning community was that the class was scheduled in the early morning, before nine. Almost always between a third and a half of the class was not fully awake. This, coupled with the tensions of “differences,” was impossible to overcome. Every now and then we had an exciting session, but mostly it was a dull class. I came to hate this class so much that I had a tremendous fear that I would not awaken to attend it; the night before (despite alarm clocks, wake-up calls, and the experiential knowledge that I had never forgotten to attend class) I still could not sleep. Rather than making me arrive sleepy, I tended to arrive wired, full of an energy few students mirrored.

Time was just one of the factors that prevented this class from becoming a learning community. For reasons I cannot explain it was also full of “resisting” students who did not want to learn new pedagogical processes, who did not want to be in a classroom that differed in any way from the norm. To these students, transgressing boundaries was frightening. And though they were not the majority, their spirit of rigid resistance seemed always to be more powerful than any will to intellectual openness and pleasure in learning. More than any other class I had taught, this one compelled me to abandon the sense that the professor could, by sheer strength of will and desire, make the classroom an exciting, learning community.

Before this class, I considered that Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom would be a book of essays mostly directed to teachers. After the class ended, I began writing with the understanding that I was speaking to and with both students and professors. The scholarly field of writing on critical pedagogy and/or feminist pedagogy continues to be primarily a discourse engaged by white women and men. Freire, too, in conversation with me, as in much of his written work, has always acknowledged that he occupies the location of white maleness, particularly in this country. But the work of various thinkers on radical pedagogy
particularity and uniqueness of whom we are speaking to and with. In keeping with this spirit, these essays do not all sound alike. They reflect my effort to use language in ways that speak to specific contexts, as well as my desire to communicate with a diverse audience. To teach in varied communities not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write, speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself.

These essays reflect my experience of critical discussions with teachers, students, and individuals who have entered my classes to observe. Multilayered, then, these essays are meant to stand as testimony, bearing witness to education as the practice of freedom. Long before a public ever recognized me as a thinker or writer, I was recognized in the classroom by students - seen by them as a teacher who worked hard to create a dynamic learning experience for all of us. Nowadays, I am recognized more for insurgent intellectual practice. Indeed, the academic public that I encounter at my lectures always shows surprise when I speak intimately and deeply about the classroom. That public seemed particularly surprised when I said that I was working on a collection of essays about teaching. This surprise is a sad reminder of the way teaching is seen as a duller, less valuable aspect of the academic profession. This perspective on teaching is a common one. Yet it must be challenged if we are to meet the needs of our students, if we are to restore to education and the classroom excitement about ideas and the will to learn.

There is a serious crisis in education. Students often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach. More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge. We cannot address this crisis if progressive critical thinkers and social critics act as though teaching is not a subject worthy of our regard.

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn. With these essays, I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

Engaged Pedagogy

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who
also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

Throughout my years as student and professor, I have been most inspired by those teachers who have had the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning. Such teachers approach students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings, even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition. Yet the possibility of such recognition is always present.

Paulo Freire and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh are two of the "teachers" who have touched me deeply with their work. When I first began college, Freire's thought gave me the support I needed to challenge the "banking system" of education, that approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it. Early on, it was Freire's insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called "conscientization" in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classrooms with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer. Education as the practice of freedom was continually undermined by professors who were actively hostile to the notion of student participation. Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor. That notion of mutual labor was affirmed by Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of engaged Buddhism, the focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation. His philosophy was similar to Freire's emphasis on "praxis" — action and reflection upon the world in order to change it.

In his work Thich Nhat Hanh always speaks of the teacher as a healer. Like Freire, his approach to knowledge called on students to be active participants, to link awareness with practice. Whereas Freire was primarily concerned with the mind, Thich Nhat Hanh offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasized wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. His focus on a holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice enabled me to overcome years of socialization that had taught me to believe a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded one another as "whole" human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world.

During my twenty years of teaching, I have witnessed a grave sense of dis-ease among professors (irrespective of their politics) when students want us to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge. When I was an undergraduate, Women's Studies was just finding a place in the academy. Those classrooms were the one space where teachers were willing to acknowledge a connection between ideas learned in university settings and those learned in life practices. And, despite those times when students abused that freedom in the classroom by only wanting to dwell on personal experience, feminist classrooms were, on the whole, one location where I witnessed professors striving to create participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge. Nowadays, most women's studies professors are not as committed to exploring new pedagogical strategies. Despite this shift, many students still seek to enter feminist classrooms because they continue to believe that there, more than in any other place in the academy, they will have an opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom.

Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy" is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that "the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people." In the United States it is rare that anyone talks about teachers in university settings as healers. And it is even more rare to hear anyone suggest that teachers have any responsibility to be self-actualized individuals.

Learning about the work of intellectuals and academics primarily from nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction during my pre-college years, I was certain that the task for those of us who chose this vocation was to be holistically questing for self-actualization. It was the actual experience of college that disrupted this image. It was there that I was made to feel as though I was terribly naive about "the profession." I learned that far from being self-actualized, the university was seen more as a haven for those who are smart in book knowledge but who might be otherwise unfit for social interaction. Luckily, during my undergraduate years I began to make a distinction between the practice of being an intellectual/teacher and one's role as a member of the academic profession.

It was difficult to maintain fidelity to the idea of the intellectual as someone who sought to be whole — well-grounded in a context where there was little emphasis on spiritual well-being, on care of the soul. Indeed, the objectification of the teacher within bourgeois educational structures seemed to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization.

This support reinforces the dualistic separation of public and private, encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the roles of professors. The idea of the intellectual questing for a union of mind, body, and spirit had been replaced with notions that being smart meant that one was inherently emotionally
unstable and that the best in oneself emerged in one's academic work. This meant that whether academics were drug addicts, alcoholics, batterers, or sexual abusers, the only important aspect of our identity was whether or not our minds functioned, whether we were able to do our jobs in the classroom. The self was presumably emptied out the moment the threshold was crossed, leaving in place only an objective mind — free of experiences and biases. There was fear that the conditions of that self would interfere with the teaching process. Part of the luxury and privilege of the role of teacher/professor today is the absence of any requirement that we be self-actualized. Not surprisingly, professors who are not concerned with inner well-being are the most threatened by the demand on the part of students for liberatory education, for pedagogical processes that will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization.

Certainly it was naïve for me to imagine during high school that I would find spiritual and intellectual guidance in university settings from writers, thinkers, scholars. To have found this would have been to stumble across a rare treasure. I learned, along with other students, to consider myself fortunate if I found an interesting professor who talked in a compelling way. Most of my professors were not the slightest bit interested in enlightenment. More than anything they seemed enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom.

This is not to say that there were not compelling, benevolent dictators, but it is true to my memory that it was rare — absolutely, astonishingly rare — to encounter professors who were deeply committed to progressive pedagogical practices. I was dismayed by this; most of my professors were not individuals whose teaching styles I wanted to emulate.

My commitment to learning kept me attending classes. Yet, even so, because I did not conform — would not be an unquestioning, passive student — some professors treated me with contempt. I was slowly becoming estranged from education. Finding Freire in the midst of that estrangement was crucial to my survival as a student. His work offered both a way to understand the limitations of the type of education I was receiving and to discover alternative strategies for learning and teaching. It was particularly disappointing to encounter white male professors who claimed to follow Freire's model even as their pedagogical practices were mired in structures of domination, mirroring the styles of conservative professors even as they approached subjects from a more progressive standpoint.

When I first encountered Paulo Freire, I was eager to see if his style of teaching would embody the pedagogical practices he described so eloquently in his work. During the short time I studied with him, I was deeply moved by his presence, by the way in which his manner of teaching exemplified his pedagogical theory. (Not all students interested in Freire have had a similar experience.) My experience with him restored my faith in liberatory education. I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination. I needed to know that professors did not have to be dictators in the classroom.

While I wanted teaching to be my career, I believed that personal success was intimately linked with self-actualization. My passion for this quest led me to interrogate constantly the mind/body split that was so often taken to be a given. Most professors were often deeply antagonistic toward, even scornful of, any approach to learning emerging from a philosophical standpoint emphasizing the union of mind, body, and spirit, rather than the separation of these elements. Like many of the students I now teach, I was often told by powerful academics that I was misguided to seek such a perspective in the academy. Throughout my student years I felt deep inner anguish. Memory of that pain returns as I listen to students express the concern that they will not succeed in academic professions if they want to be well, if they eschew dysfunctional behavior or participation in coercive hierarchies. These students are often fearful, as I was, that there are no spaces in the academy where the will to be self-actualized can be affirmed.

This fear is present because many professors have intensely hostile responses to the vision of liberatory education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Within professorial circles, individuals often complain bitterly that students want classes to be "encounter groups." While it is utterly unreasonable for students to expect classrooms to be therapy sessions, it is appropriate for them to hope that the knowledge received in these settings will enrich and enhance them.

Currently, the students I encounter seem far more uncertain about the project of self-actualization than my peers and I were twenty years ago. They feel that there are no clear ethical guidelines shaping actions. Yet, while they despair, they are also adamant that education should be liberatory. They want and demand more from professors than my generation did. There are times when I walk into classrooms overflowing with students who feel terribly wounded in their psyches (many of them see therapists), yet I do not think that they want therapy from me. They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful. They rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences.

This demand on the students' part does not mean that they will always accept our guidance. This is one of the joys of education as the practice of freedom, for it allows students to assume responsibility for their choices. Writing about our teacher/student relationship in a piece for the Village Voice, "How to Run the Yard: Off-Line and into the Margins at Yale," one of my students, Gary Dauphin, shares the joys of working with me as well as the tensions that surfaced between us as he began to devote his time to pledging a fraternity rather than cultivating his writing:

People think academics like Gloria [my given name] are all about difference: but what I learned from her was mostly about sameness, about what I had in common as a black man to people of color; to women and gays and lesbians and the poor and anyone else who wanted in. I did some of this learning by reading but most of it came from hanging out on the fringes of...
This is Gary writing about the joy. The tension arose as we discussed his reason for wanting to join a fraternity and my disdain for that decision. Gary comments, “They represented a vision of black manhood that she abhorred, one where violence and abuse were primary ciphers of bonding and identity.” Describing his assertion of autonomy from my influence he writes, “But she must have also known the limits of even her influence on my life, the limits of books and teachers.”

Ultimately, Gary felt that the decision he had made to join a fraternity was not constructive, that I “had taught him openness” where the fraternity had encouraged one-dimensional allegiance. Our interchange both during and after this experience was an example of engaged pedagogy.

Through critical thinking — a process he learned by reading theory and actively analyzing texts — Gary experienced education as the practice of freedom. His final comments about me: “Gloria had only mentioned the yellow kitchen where she used to share her lunch with students. Pledging a fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the fraternity rooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classes and low points outside. Gloria was a safe haven... Pledging a fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the fraternity rooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classes and low points outside. Gloria was a safe haven...
Framing Conversations

7. In paragraph 6, hooks writes:

School was the place of ecstasy — pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone. Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else’s image of who and what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self, and, through ideas, reinvent myself.

Write an essay in which you place the ideas in this passage in conversation with the ideas Mary Louise Pratt sets forth about contact zones in “Arts of the Contact Zone” (p. 354). Drawing on specific passages in Pratt’s work, describe the role you think contact zones should play in education.

8. hooks’s text picks up on class issues that are also evident in Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Maid to Order” (p. 479) and Héctor Tobar’s “Americanismo: City of Peasants” (p. 533). Write an essay in which you explore the ideas about class, education, and social power that are evident in the examples and arguments of these three texts. What conclusions can you draw?

9. While hooks argues for improving educational practices along the specific lines of engaged pedagogy, she doesn’t let us forget the complex role race plays in current educational issues. Write an essay in which you imagine a conversation among bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol (below), and Peggy McIntosh (p. 520) about race relations and education in the United States and what we all — both inside and outside the classroom — ought to do about them. Draw on your own experiences as well, as you add your voice to the conversation.

Jonathan Kozol

Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid

Jonathan Kozol is an award-winning writer and lecturer who focuses on social injustice in the United States, an interest that began in the 1960s, when he taught in the Boston public school system. That first exposure to inner-city schools, to poor and undereducated youngsters, led him to investigate and write extensively about what he calls social and educational apartheid in the United States, the racial segregation that keeps many people in a cycle of poverty that he believes is nearly impossible to break. In 1967 he documented his experience in Boston in his first book, Death at an Early Age. His goal was to help readers get to know and care about his subjects deeply enough to consider the changes in social policy necessary for all Americans to realize the democratic dream. It is a strategy he has adhered to in his work since. For example, in Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America (1987), Kozol brings readers into the difficult lives of the homeless; in Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation (1995) and Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope (2000), he takes readers to an impoverished neighborhood in the South Bronx. An Internet search of Kozol’s name demonstrates how widely he is quoted and how often he appears in the media as an expert on social inequality.

The essay here, published in Harper’s in September 2005, was adapted from The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America (2005). Notice that Kozol uses many different sources to support his argument; but, in the style of magazine journalism, he does not cite them. You might keep track of all the different kinds of sources in this piece, though, to see what connections you can make between Kozol’s central argument and the voices he includes here. As a reporter, Kozol wants us to hear the voice of the schoolchild who asks, “We do not have the things you have. . . . Can you help us?” ( paras. 18–19) as well as the voice of the president insisting his educational program is “making a difference” (para. 108). Kozol makes his case in part by juxtaposing the words of the powerless and the powerful, adding context with statistics and facts that demonstrate what he believes is a profoundly unjust system of keeping the haves and have-nots separated through a variety of policies and belief systems.

You no doubt are aware that all schools in the United States are not equal. But as you read Kozol’s piece, consider how the statistics and information he includes shape what you thought you knew about this issue. How does Kozol use numbers to make his point? How does he use a reporter’s eye to help readers understand what life is like inside an underfunded, undersupported school? What visual details do you find most persuasive, and why? Where does he appeal to emotion in support of his argument, and what do you think of this strategy?

Before you read, consider what you know about the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), which plays a role in Kozol’s examination of urban school systems. Research the arguments of — and the emotions expressed by — supporters and opponents of the law so that you have a sense of the high stakes of this conversation. Also keep your own school experiences in mind. When did you first realize, for example, that some children have more than others? Kozol taps into a discussion about education that is linked to almost every other kind of social division in our country. What does he hope to illuminate? What solutions does he propose? And perhaps most important, where do you place yourself in this conversation on what it means to learn and grow as an American?