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.

In this selection, she makes mention of a related...
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 relieved, thrilled, proud, I felt “guilty” about my “real” feelings and could not share them with anyone. The lecture circuit took me to sunny California and the New Age world of my sister’s house in Laguna Beach where I was able to chill out for a month. When I shared my feelings with my sister (she’s a therapist), she reassured me that they were entirely appropriate because, she said, “You never wanted to be a teacher. Since we were little, all you ever wanted to do was write.” She was right. It was always assumed by everyone else that I would become a teacher. In the apartheid South, black girls from working-class backgrounds had three career choices. We could marry. We could work as maids. We could become schoolteachers.

And since, according to the sexist thinking of the time, men did not really desire “smart” women, it was assumed that signs of intelligence sealed one’s fate. From grade school on, I was destined to become a teacher.

But the dream of becoming a writer was always present within me. From childhood, I believed that I would teach and write. Writing would be the serious work, teaching would be the not-so-serious-I-need-to-make-a-living “job.” Writing, I believed then, was all about private longing and personal glory, but teaching was about service, giving back to one’s community. For black folks teaching — educating — was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle. Indeed, my all-black grade schools became the location where I experienced learning as revolution.

Almost all our teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers — black folks who used our “minds.” We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial. Within these segregated schools, black children who were deemed exceptional, gifted, were given special care. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race. My teachers were on a mission.

To fulfill that mission, my teachers made sure they “knew” us. They knew our parents, our economic status, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters, and brothers. My effort and ability to learn were always contextualized within the framework of generational family experience. Certain behaviors, gestures, habits of being were traced back.

Attending school then was sheer joy. I loved being a student. I loved learning. 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.

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the mes-
ianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized
teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowl-
edge 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
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 between education as the practice of freedom and edu-

Hook's Teaching to Transgress: The Practice of Education as the Practice of Freedom

Acquiring the teaching profession as my destiny, I was tormented by
the classroom reality I had known both as an undergraduate and a gradu-
ate student. The vast majority of our professors lacked basic commu-
nication skills, they were not self-actualized, and they often used the classroom
to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the unjust exer-
cise of power. In those 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 bank-
ing system of education (based on the assumption that memorizing infor-
mation 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
to there to prove this by showing how well we could become clones of our
peers. As we constantly confronted biases, an undercurrent of stress dimin-
ished 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 learn-
ing 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 encour-
ge 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 peda-
gogical 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 fem-
ist ideas or participation in the feminist classroom. Those classrooms
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
(I use this term to include critical and/or feminist perspectives) has in recent years truly included a recognition of differences — those determined by class, race, sexual practice, nationality, and so on. Yet this movement forward does not seem to coincide with any significant increase in black or other nonwhite voices joining discussions about radical pedagogical practices.

My pedagogical practices have emerged from the mutually illuminating interplay of anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies. This complex and unique blending of multiple perspectives has been an engaging and powerful standpoint from which to work. Expanding beyond boundaries, it has made it possible for me to imagine and enact pedagogical practices that engage directly both the concern for interrogating biases in curricula that reinscribe systems of domination (such as racism and sexism) while simultaneously providing new ways to teach diverse groups of students.

In this book I want to share insights, strategies, and critical reflections on pedagogical practice. I intend these essays to be an intervention — countering the devaluation of teaching even as they address the urgent need for changes in teaching practices. They are meant to serve as constructive commentary. Hopeful and exuberant, they convey the pleasure and joy I experience teaching; these essays are celebratory! To emphasize that the pleasure of teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the classroom experience.

Each essay addresses common themes that surface again and again in discussions of pedagogy, offering ways to rethink teaching practices and constructive strategies to enhance learning. Written separately for a variety of contexts there is unavoidably some degree of overlap; ideas are repeated, key phrases used again and again. Even though I share strategies, these works do not offer blueprints for ways to make the classroom an exciting place for learning. To do so would undermine the insistence that engaged pedagogy recognize each classroom as different, that strategies must constantly be changed, invented, reconceptualized to address each new teaching experience.

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom. To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage "audiences," to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning.

Just as the way we perform changes, so should our sense of "voice." In our everyday lives we speak differently to diverse audiences. We communicate best by choosing that way of speaking that is informed by the 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 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 think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom. To embrace 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.

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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, batters, 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 for me 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
her life. I lived like that for a while, shuttling between high points in
my classes and low points outside. Gloria was a safe haven. . . . Pleading a
fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the
yellow kitchen where she used to share her lunch with students in need of
various forms of sustenance.

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 frater­
nity 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
entire episode once after it was over, and this to tell me simply that there
are many kinds of choices, many kinds of logic. I could make those events
mean whatever I wanted as long as I was honest." I have quoted his writing
at length because it is testimony affirming engaged pedagogy. It means
that my voice is not the only account of what happens in the classroom.

Engaged pedagogy necessarily values student expression. In her essay,
"Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in Liberatory Education: A Femi­
nist Poststructuralist Perspective," Mimi Orner employs a Foucauldian
framework to suggest that

regulatory and punitive means and uses of the confession bring to mind cur­
ricular and pedagogical practices which call for students to publicly reveal,
even confess, information about their lives and cultures in the presence of
authority figures such as teachers.

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones
who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek sim­
ply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of
learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by
the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulner­
able while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect stu­
dents to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to
share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my class­
rooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to
share in any way that I would not share. When professors bring narratives
of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility
that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often pro­
ductive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to
academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and
enhance our understanding of academic material. But most professors
must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in
mind, body, and spirit.

Reading Rhetorically
1. hooks includes many personal anecdotes and insights in this selection.
Use a pen or highlighter to bracket all the places where she makes use of
personal experiences. Discuss with your classmates the relationship
between these personal experiences and the larger point she is making
about education. What do you notice about the structure of the work?
What conclusions can you draw about effective strategies for using per­
sonal experiences in scholarly writing?

2. Who is hooks's audience? How can you tell? Be prepared to explain to the
class (by pointing to specific passages in the text) whether or not you see
yourself as her intended audience and the effect on you as a reader of
being or not being part of her intended audience.

3. Circle a number of the key phrases hooks uses in this work — for example,
"banking system of education" (para. 13), "engaged pedagogy" (para. 14),
and "self-actualization" (para. 35) — and list them on the class chalk­
board. Working in small groups, develop a clear definition and explana­
tion of one phrase and present them to the rest of the class.

Inquiring Further
4. In paragraph 14 and elsewhere, hooks refers to the work of Brazilian
scholar Paulo Freire and his notion of critical pedagogy. Look at two or
three of the official Web sites devoted to Freire's work, including the Insti­
tuto Paulo Freire (http://www.paulofreire.org/) and the Paulo Freire Insti­
tute at UCLA (http://www.paulofreireinstitute.org/). Be prepared to share
with the class several key ideas you learn about Freire and his followers
from the sites. How has this additional information helped you under­
stand the appeal of Freire's work to hooks?

5. Prepare a summary of hooks's key points, including the concept of edu­
cation as "the practice of freedom" (para. 8). Discuss hooks's ideas with two
K-12 teachers or two professors on your campus who train K-12 teachers.
What do they think about her ideas, given their understanding of local edu­
cational structures and issues? Discuss your findings with your class.

6. In the second section here, "Engaged Pedagogy," hooks refers several
times to "the union of mind, body, and spirit" when she talks about her
educational ideal. In small groups, discuss the implications of this kind
of spiritual language. What are the advantages of applying spirituality
to teaching and learning situations? What are the disadvantages? You
might compare experiences your classmates have had in public and
parochial schools before you draw conclusions about hooks's language
and claims.
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 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 *Amusing 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?

Many Americans who live far from our major cities and who have no firsthand knowledge of the realities to be found in urban public schools seem to have the rather vague and general impression that the great extremes of racial isolation that were matters of grave national significance some thirty-five or forty years ago have gradually but steadily diminished in more recent years. The truth, unhappily, is that the trend,