

Student Centered Teaching: Writing Through Passion ALESA in Context

Veruska CANTELLI and Flavio RIZZO

What motivated me was curiosity. The only kind of curiosity that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy; not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.

Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

A Simple Framework

This paper rotates around a simple pillar: we want to be surprised by our future selves and so should the students. An old question: does what we know limit what we can imagine? And by extension: what would be the role of such a challenge in our classroom? We are grounding our work around the specific context of the ALESA program, part of the Centre for Global Communication Strategies and Department of English Language in the College of Arts & Sciences of the University of Tokyo. ALESA was born in April 2013 as a sister program to ALESS (Mishina, 2015; Middleton, 2012), a science writing program established in 2008. Both ALESS, or Active Learning of English for Students of Science, and ALESA, Active Learning of English for Students of the Arts, are mandatory courses for all freshman students of science and the humanities, respectively. One of their common objectives is the active participation of students in the learning process, and at the center of ALESS and ALESA's work is the creation of an argumentative academic paper or essay. During the thirteen weeks of the course, students learn through a hands-on process the various steps of researching and writing an academic paper. The classes meet for one hour and forty-five minutes once a week and there are about fifteen students per class. Each

semester ALESA enrolls 600 students (with 621 students in Summer 2015).

In both ALESS and ALESA, the students' work consists in tackling their research projects through both peer review and open discussions. Central here is the idea of a collaborative effort that leads to sharing their work with others, fostering further intellectual growth. In ALESS, the students' papers and presentations are based on a simple scientific experiment that students design and carry out early in the semester. In ALESA, the students choose their topic through a process of inquiry either expanding from a list of themes provided by the professors or by finding their own research question. During the semester they are involved in writing annotated bibliographies, crafting a strong thesis statement, and practicing formal presentations.

ALESA is taught by a wide range of professors from diverse academic research fields, from social science and cultural studies to comparative literature and film studies. This diversity exposes the students to a rich range of teaching approaches all grounded by the same common goal: the writing of an academic paper in which the writer takes a clear stand and in the process discovers his/her critical voice. In our specific case, the first two weeks of the semester are spent underlining the role of curiosity and inquiry as the core of the writing process, an essential first seed for the work to come. We start with a focus on writing as a journey that begins with our sense of wonder, our omnivorous curiosity, and our non-hierarchical understanding of experience. The objective is to expose the students to the idea of "questioning"; this process is then applied to the writing itself. We motivate students to find their own voice and often this implies finding a writing structure that best allows it, beyond preconceived structures. The results of our efforts are dynamic and diverse papers that range from social inquiry to literary criticism.

ALESA brings several challenges to our work but the most crucial for us has been trying to understand, and place, the role of logical thinking in the context of writing. An important school of practice in teaching academic writing is the idea of alerting students to the dangers of generalizations, to find coherence, and to apply logical thinking. These are clearly crucial steps, especially when introducing the basics of crafting a paper, as they help the students to create a sense of clarity and order to their

work; however as teachers of composition we are reluctant to embrace an overwhelming focus on logic in teaching argumentation. Often there is a missing link between students and writing that goes far beyond the ability to apply syllogistic practices (the widely used Perdue Online Writing Lab), or the learning of “the art of explicating, analyzing, and assessing” (Paul, 1990) and that is the nourishment of passion as a tool to unlock a more complex relationship with the process of writing itself. In this paper the word passion will assume a broad sense and function, particularly the questioning and care that goes into the crafting of a paper and its implications beyond the assignment itself. Passion implies both a care for context and a re-valuing of Pindaric flights; a capacity to move abstractions, concepts, ideas and to foster inventive thinking and alternative paradigms for understanding. Central is the importance to teach the students to courageously juxtapose materials that are apparently not in dialogue, to create potential little gaps in logic as a creative path to find inventive ways to tackle their topics. In this sense this paper intends to highlight the hindrances hidden behind a disproportional valuing of logic. It will attempt to contextualize our teaching of academic writing for freshman Japanese students of the humanities, trying to place at the center considerations such as student learning experience, cultural context, and gender. The purpose of our work will be to delineate a path to teaching academic writing that is focused in the understanding and questioning of context rather than on an emphasis on logical fallacies, an old debate that we would like to place within the specific case of the ALESA program. This process is grounded in the assumption that a direct cultivation of a passionate approach to writing brings the arising of a form of intuitive wisdom. By intuitive wisdom we mean a direct insight, a rapture of sort on an issue facilitated or elicited by the reflective power of writing; an insight that breathes beyond the assignment and becomes a bridge to future engagements both within and outside the academia, and both within and beyond the topic tackled.

A crucial pointer here is to consider how for students of the humanities, once outside the university, often the core of the interaction with society is based on sharing wisdom and promoting an open and dynamic understanding of issues that is not necessarily based on giving answers (that “scientific consensus”

that seems to be so central in the latest technocratic understanding of education), but often on the simple act of raising questions and, to some extent, to become the unrewarded conscience of society (Said, 1994). The idea for the humanities is to value the intangible. If on one hand such a statement seems to suggest the lack of a concrete method, or worse an intelligibility of sort, we believe that the opposite is true: a simple pedagogical approach that brings the students' passions back at the center of the classroom is a first concrete step towards unlocking the dynamic and transforming force of intuitive wisdom to which we referred earlier. In the classroom, and beyond it, this happens both by pausing, questioning and breaking apart concepts and by encouraging a sort of guided independent approach to unpacking ideas, making sure to nourish the students' confidence in assessing themselves beyond the restrictive force of logic. We believe that the seed of wisdom is the ultimate legacy that a writing class should strive to give to first year students, a crucial passage where a subjective and empathic involvement is required and triggered. There is always a critical voice to be discovered and we need to make sure to help the students learn how to find and listen to their own. The objective is to tune in and raise the bar of their relationship with the act of writing. What we are proposing here is a shift from an over emphasis on logic to one based on attention to voice, narrative, and empathy.

Writing Through Voice

Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk's essay "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" (1999) is an outline of the theoretical foundations in the pedagogy of the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy schools and it offers a comparative analysis of the underlying implications of their philosophies. Critical thinking is often defined with terms like "rationality, evidence, coherence, accuracy, clarity and truth," as a skill that will help unmask the truth of an assertion, "the critical person is something like a critical consumer of information; he or she is driven to seek reasons and evidence. Part of this is a matter of mastering certain skills of thought: learning to diagnose invalid forms of argument, knowing how to make and defend distinctions" (Burbules and Berk 1999). However, from

the point of view of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Apple, 1996) it is not enough to evaluate the truth, clarity or logical coherence of a given argument as this would lead to an over-estimation of rationality over the nuances of context. Burbules and Berk provide a useful example to explain this critique by considering the claim that “African-Americans score lower on IQ tests.” As researchers applying a critical thinking methodology, we might start to question the truth of such a claim by looking at the evidence on which this conclusion is based. But from the point of view of critical pedagogy what seems more crucial to interrogate and unmask is “Who is making this assertion? Why are they being made at this time? Who funds such research? Who promulgates these “findings”? Are they being raised to question African-American intelligence or to demonstrate the bias of IQ tests?” regardless of the truth-value of the fact itself (Burbules and Berk, 1999). In other words critical pedagogy is at first interested in unveiling the dynamics of power relation that motivate or manipulate certain facts or evidence before embarking in an evaluation of the argument itself. This type of approach promotes an understanding of writing as a creation of narrative, a fundamental passage in the investigation of identity, construction of knowledge, and in exposing dynamics of silencing. Most of our students arrive to our mandatory academic writing course in English with little confidence in their English ability and their questioning skills, soon after their first introductory course we ask them to choose a topic to develop, under our guidance, into an academic paper. When the students propose a “research question” do they understand the value of this action? Are they aware of the “story” that writing it, or not writing it, will generate?

Shifting the focus towards a form of narrative and its role can provide a wider range of awareness in the factors at play within their work as researchers: “Narrative theory allows for a structured analysis related to defining the components of the research narrative. When researchers attend to questions of focalization, they address questions of voice—theirs and those of the participants. Thinking about characters brings attention to the role of the researchers as part of the inquiry process as well as the roles of various participants.” (Holley and Colyar, 2009) This process of inquiry can be mirrored with one in which the self becomes the object of investigation and in which pre-con-

ceived ideas and our own intimate way of categorizing information and experience can be revealed and explored. Leaning on Paul Ricoeur's work on interpretation, Andrew Wiercinski (2010) explains this mechanism as follows:

Reinterpreting that which has been transmitted to us allows us to con-struct and re-construct our story on the way to our personal identity. This interpretive process discloses the emancipatory power of narratives. However, there is also a potential of covering up when telling a story, since everything that disturbs the dynamics of the story told can likely be masked and reorganized so as to fit into the expected order. But exactly learning to meet the unexpected, the strange, and the unfamiliar highlights the central role of narratives in constituting the identity of human being. Encountering the unfamiliar and strange helps us mature as human beings and discover that our self-understanding is in constant need of being reinterpreted.

It seems more and more clear to us that one way to support this kind of engagement with writing is to place the students in touch with the role of the public intellectual, helping them to assert themselves as active contributors in their society, being that the classroom, the university, their family, or their community. These roots are established in our classroom through individual and group presentations on the function and value of writing shared with the rest of the class. It is then followed up by a correspondence between the students' personal definitions of writing and those of other writers: an excerpt from Edward Said's book *Representations of the Intellectual*, a passage by Chinua Achebe with its specific post-colonial voice, and another by E.B White in which he portrays the writer as a "custodian" or as a "secretary" to his society. The effect that this dialogue has on the students is revitalizing, they come to realize the deep meaning of writing past those that see it as a form of communication and a tool to clarify our own thoughts. What we desire to foster in our students is a relation with the "other": the reader, the classmates, the professors, the institution and society. Crucial is to give them the possibility to realize a deeper sense of care for the context in which they find themselves, while developing the fundamental

skill of specificity—the first step towards becoming “active” thinkers.

We also value the use of Pindaric flights to unlock personal connections to writing, here the reference goes to Georges Perec (1973) and its obsessive and creative questioning:

What we must question is bricks concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, our timetables, our rhythm of living. Question whatever seems to have ceased to surprise you forever. We are alive, to be sure; we breathe, no doubt about it; we walk, we open doors, we go down stairs, we sit at tables to eat, we lie down in a bed to sleep. How? Where? When? Why?

Describe the street you live in. Describe another. Compare. Make a list of the contents of your pocket, of your handbag. Query the origin, the use, and the future of every one of the objects you find. Interrogate your teaspoons. What’s under your wallpaper? (...) It matters little to me that these questions are fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at the most a pointer to a project. It matters a great deal that these questions should seem trivial and futile. That is precisely what makes them at least as essential, if not more so, than so many other questions by means of which we have tried in vain to tune in our truth.

We work with passages such as the one above to create potential intellectual short-circuits, to allow them to re-consider the very concept of familiarity (“question whatever seems to have ceased to surprise you forever”); to find new meanings and connections so that eventually they may “tune in [their] truth” to the writing process. These adventurous leaps and breaks from classic logical patterns create the backdrop for intuitions to arise. The students are divided into groups and together they try to understand Perec’s puzzling stand in the context of their task for the semester: the writing of an academic paper. The result of this juxtaposition is always exciting, the students come to understand that writing a research paper involves a level of creative thinking as well as one that is logical and analytical; this process energizes them as they seem to remove a layer of dust often accompanying mandatory classes.

Beyond Logic

As mentioned earlier, a limitation in using formal logic, when teaching academic writing and critical thinking, is the danger of reaching corners of a deductive process where true and false statements don't take in consideration context and turn the thinking process into a sterile exercise rather than a practice for understanding the potential implications of their engagement. Tom Gally (2013) meticulously explains this issue by taking the example of a classic logical deduction: "John is a bachelor. All bachelors are male. Therefore John is male." The truth-value of this apparently fluent deduction can be tainted by uncertainties and doubt when we start to question the context of its premises:

Suppose, however, that the time is April 2013 and that John is a gay man living in the state of Delaware in the United States. John has been in a committed relationship with another man, Steve, for the past fifteen years. Delaware does not allow same-sex marriage, but in July 2007, while on a vacation in Canada, which does allow same-sex marriage, John and Steve (who is a Canadian citizen) got married under the laws of Canada. That marriage is not recognized under the current laws of Delaware, where John and Steve live, but a bill has been submitted to the Delaware legislature to legalize same-sex marriage. The bill seems likely to pass, but it is not yet known when it will take effect or whether, in the bill's final form, John and Steve's Canadian marriage will be recognized in Delaware.

This addition has suddenly problematized the conclusion and its truth-value. By adding questions of origin and context (law, religion, identity) we can start to see the danger behind the formal logical process. We can determine the context in which such statement can be valued as true, "some people, such as those opposed to same-sex marriage for religious reasons, might consider "John is a bachelor" to be true" and one in which it needs to be questioned, "others, such as John and Steve and their friends, might consider it false; and others, including this writer, would be unsure" (Gally, 2013). The conclusion Tom Gally wants to make here is that "arguments in serious discourse are often

expressed through statements that cannot be assessed as being simply true or false. As a result, the tools of traditional logic, which depend on such binary truth values, are of limited use when teaching young scholars to write more effectively."

Feminist scholars have expressed some of the fiercest criticism against formal logic. When in 1990 Andrea Nye published her book *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*, a thorough feminist denunciation of formal logic as a practice of power that constantly reestablishes a hierarchy between men and women, the book received divisive and fiery reactions. While Joan Weiner (1994) calls Nye's indictments "serious and their intent so destructive," John Batali considers Nye's work as a valuable and "interesting enterprise purely from a historical point of view." (Batali, 1992) By surveying the history of logic from Parmenides to her time, Nye attempts to prove that in centuries of formal logical approaches "the connection between logic and the truth of being becomes weaker and weaker, to the point where modern logicians take it as a virtue that their systems are absolutely "formal" and totally disconnected from reality (but are nonetheless adequate means of representing that reality)." (Batali, 1992) What seems to be valuable for our discussion here is how Nye's rereading of the history of logic can reveal the way discourse translates into power and in Nye's particular analysis men's power over women. The essay by Karen J. Warren "Critical Thinking and Feminism" provides very lucid examples of this point. Warren begins her paper by explaining the meaning and function of a conceptual framework "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which explain, shape, and reflect our view of ourselves and our world." (1988) She then classifies what she calls oppressive conceptual frameworks such as "value-hierarchical thinking" that categorizes items and subjects by hierarchy and "either-or thinking," operating through a dualistic approach "in which the disjunctive terms are seen as exclusive (rather than inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary), and where higher value is attributed to one disjunct than the other." (Warren, 1988) Warren leads us to the final destination of the oppressive conceptual framework: the logic of domination: "a structure of argumentation which explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of an "inferior" group by a "superior" group.

This preamble serves as a necessary foundation to her analysis of formal logic and truth, in order to clearly illustrate that critical thinking “does not occur in a vacuum; it *always* occurs within some conceptual framework.” Warren presents the study of Donna Haraway and Sarah Hrdy on primatology as an example that unveiled a patriarchal framework behind the traditional models for primate social organization. Haraway and Hrdy discovered that the assumptions of the “male dominance hierarchies” prevented primatologists’ initial understanding from seeing that “it is usually estrous females that select mating partners and that in some species dominance is matriarchal.” (Warren, 1988) With this in mind, Warren wants to convey that logical applications of knowledge, rather than a careful evaluation of one’s own conceptual framework (the traditional primatologists assumptions on patriarchal structure of society for instance) can end up not only obscuring our way of studying a subject, but it can also lead to narratives of oppression and perpetuations of essentialist views. The myth of the neutral, objective, distant observer is thus unmasked.

Historian and intellectual Michael S. Roth (2010) takes his critique of critical thinking even further when he states that “for many students today being smart *means* being critical,” it translates into displaying a “sharpened” ability “to see through or undermine statements made by (or beliefs held by) others.” In other words the critical thinking skill is taken to a phase value of negation, or as a manifestation of one’s ability “to participate fully in the academic tribe” and thus reducing an intellectual form of engagement into an elitist and jargoned practice. Roth is worried that the focus on “exposing” may create “a class of self-satisfied debunkers or, to use a currently fashionable word on campuses, people who like to “trouble” ideas” and it will end up defeating the creation of meaning and real engagement. “Once outside the university, our students continue to score points by displaying the critical prowess for which they were rewarded in school. They wind up contributing to a cultural climate that has little tolerance for finding or making meaning, whose intellectuals and cultural commentators delight in being able to show that somebody else is not to be believed.” (Roth, 2010) Ultimately the danger is that students will continue to hide behind a skill rather than investing intellectually and emotionally with the work and

the world they encounter in and outside academia. As educators what we strive to teach our students is the capacity to connect empathically with the stories of others and one way to do so is by opening to the great realm of imagination.

A person who is insensitive to the suffering of his fellow is that way because he lacks the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than his own. History and fiction are replete with instances of correlation between indifference and the lack of imagination. Think of the aristocratic lady who was driving home to her estate one winter evening and saw through the shuttered windows of a wretched hut a boy shivering in rags. Moved by pity, she said to her coachmen 'Remark that hut, for as soon as I get home I must send warm things to that poor boy.' When she got home and sat in front of a huge, crackling fire her coachmen came to her and said, 'Madam, about the poor boy...' 'Oh, but it's nice and warm again' she replied. (Achebe, 1978)

Achebe wants us to recognize the limitations of our own context in grasping the world outside of ourselves, in particular here he presents us privilege as the nebulous thickness that prevents the aristocrat woman from imagining the suffering of the young destitute boy no longer under her eyes. In the same way the Pueblo poet Leslie Marmon Silko once said "if I can imagine it, I can understand it" (Silko, 1981), if one can converge all his/her human and intellectual investment into an abstraction of the real, one is able to reach a level of understanding that is not indifferent and aloof, but grounded, relational, and participatory. "When we learn to read or look or listen intensively, we are not just becoming adept at exposing falsehood or at uncovering yet more examples of the duplicities of culture and society. We are partially overcoming our own blindness by trying to understand something from another's artistic, philosophical, or historical point of view." (Roth, 2010) In the end through reading and writing, we want to offer our students the experience of self discovery as an understanding of the other.

"The fiction which imaginative literature offers us [...] does not enslave; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the can-

ons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins an adventure in self discover and ends in wisdom and humane conscience." (Achebe, 1978)

The Classroom's Context

Bridging the individual context and identity of the students with the larger role as social agents is extremely challenging. On one hand students need to learn that they are legitimate thinkers and writers, on the other we, as educators, must be sensitive to our position of authority in the classroom. In this sense crucial is to challenge the hierarchical understanding of our role as teachers and, by extension, the assumption that students should compete against each other. These are hidden hindrances perceived as healthy practices: they are not. Students should learn from each other on the basis of collaboration not competition. Awareness of the role of language is critical: language and ideas are equally established as the ways in which they relate to each other's work and overcome or reinforce their lack of confidence. For our particular ALESA students this emotional and intellectual journey is even more arduous as they are asked to write and speak in a foreign language. As teachers therefore, we face yet one more negotiation in our exchange and evaluation, the one between ideas and their formulations. We must not forget a simple basic point: it is very difficult to express a complex idea in a foreign language and our students are constantly faced by fear of making mistakes that leads to the convenience of remaining on the surface because of a potential lack of specific language. As educators we constantly navigate the fine line between interventions that can facilitate the growth of ideas and those that can inhibit them, but we also always need to keep at bay the potential tendency to make students mere imitators. While tackling the complexity and challenges of writing, the American poet Robert Creeley underlines in his correspondence with Charles Olson in 1980 that "form is never more than an extension of content." There is an organic relation and growth between these two driving forces (form vs. content) where ideas and their expressions evolve through a flexible, lively, and real experience that leads to the students' awakening to the enchantment of words and sentence construction. Once again it is care that seems to play a crucial

role as opposed to leaning towards a mnemonic, artificial, or forceful practice. In a paper that is still influential to this day, "Inventing the University", David Bartholomae (1986) describes the point of view from which students of first year composition course tend to write their research paper; a place in which they must *imagine* themselves as "insiders" with a "right to speak" and become performers and imitators. As teachers, Bartholomae says, it may be counterproductive to lead students "to believe that they are responsible for something new or original, unless they understand what those words mean with regard to writing." However, he says "we do have the right to expect students to be active and engaged, but that is more a matter of being continually and stylistically working against the inevitable presence of conventional language; it is not a matter of inventing a language that is new." For Bartholomae a teacher should not burden students with originality neither in language nor in ideas, he/she should be the guide of a process from which "learning, at least as it is defined in the liberal arts curriculum, becomes more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention and discovery." The classroom that Bartholomae envisions is a platform for "parody" and "mimicking" rather than a real, experienced, and grounding space of engagement. But when we assume the position that students are incapable of formulating a discourse or contributing to language, we end up creating a context in which the only legitimate way of thinking and writing is the one established by the professor, as the only real expert, and by his students as his/her imitators. Of course students should never feel pressured, but they should be encouraged to nourish eagerness to question conventional ways of thinking, speaking, and writing. If by originality then we mean a passionate, independent, individual perspective or interpretation reached through a process of inquiry and a deep personal investment, then it should always be at the center of any classroom. To say it boldly with bell hooks (1994) the students need to start learning to transgress and to go beyond given boundaries; transgressing as questioning the normative and excluding workings of pre-packaged pedagogical notions. In this sense teaching with an over attention to logical argumentation can turn out to be a hindrance especially when it comes to teaching to non-native speakers of English. To underline again the case of ALESA, we have

the specific challenge of teaching to first year Japanese students extremely young, inexperienced, with a very strict understanding of language education and communication based on the necessities of university entrance exams, and moreover prone to conformism. A basic example: we start all our classes asking the students to introduce themselves, and we always witness how the first speaker sets the tone for the others to come. If the tone is playful then playfulness follows with the others, if one student asks to be called with a nickname, the rest of the class will do the same. In this particular context heavy emphasis on pre-conceived forms of writing creates the risk of leaving no room for valuing differences; to the contrary the risk is to highlight a potential inappropriateness of behavior. But more crucially the idea is to avoid that writing becomes a sterile exercise of conformism, "learning should be seen as a qualitative change in a person's way of seeing, experiencing, understanding, conceptualizing something in the real world – rather than a quantitative change in the amount of knowledge one possesses" (Ramsden, 1998). Through this process and "real" connections we create the possibility of self-discovery. Logic here loosens its grip in favor of narrative; within this framework an excessive emphasis on logic can stop the flow of thinking and creativity, and even more dangerously, promote rigidity and distance. The risk is to bring the writing into a hybrid terrain where the students' engagement stops at the fulfillment of the assignment, and the thirst for dynamic knowledge is quenched by that quantitative feeling of having acquired a, if sterile, know-how. What we try to achieve in our ALESA classes is to bypass those forms of passive learning that too often take shape in writing classes. The student should be at the center of this process and be projected towards the shaping of a dynamic sense of knowledge that puts into a larger context the challenge of writing an academic paper. Here there is a direct bridge with our sister program, ALESS, where students are asked to tackle a scientific experiment in a creative way beyond the shortcut of writing a paper that merely compiles a list of known data, something that would turn the paper into a purely formal linguistic exercise.

"Constructivists approaches emphasize learners' actively constructing their own knowledge rather than passively receiving information transmitted to them by teachers and textbooks.

From a constructivist perspective, knowledge cannot simply be given to students: students must construct their own meaning" (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, and Simmons, 1998) This implies a crucial shift of "power," from the teacher to the students that eventually can serve as a broader point of reference in the engagement with the social sphere. In "Choosing the Margin as a space of Radical Openness" (1989) bell hooks explains the effect that a shift of focus on academic work divulged through "jargon" and aimed at an "in-crowd" has had, for example, in feminist thought; namely it undermined "feminist movements via depoliticization. Deradicalized, [feminist thought] is like every other academic discipline with the only difference being the focus on gender." A similar outcome can be easily imagined in a writing course in which students are asked to maintain the safety of scripted language and fixed ideas rather than a dialogue, or at times a clash, between who they are and the knowledge they come to encounter. The only way we can ensure they can become independent thinkers is by making them experience what this process means. As Burbules and Burke point out in their paper "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" (1999), "criticality does involve certain abilities and skills, including but not limited to the skills of Critical Thinking. These skills have a definite domain of usefulness, but learning them should include not only an appreciation for what they can do, but an appreciation for what they cannot do." In particular the fact that by extracting subjects from their context and choosing to treat them as merely exercises of discourse, we take from them their real political and social value. What Bartholomae seems to neglect in his view is that "criticality also involves the ability to think outside a framework of conventional understanding; it means to think anew, to think differently. This view of criticality goes far beyond the preoccupation with not being deceived. There might be worse things than being mistaken; there may be greater dangers in being only trivially or banally 'true.'" (Burbules and Burke, 1999)

The ability to be an original, independent, and critical thinker is not in relation to the skills of logic or academic language discourse, but on the willingness to put oneself on the line, to question conventionality, and to not be overly and blindly attached to specific ideas and their perceived ownership.

This capacity can be nourished only when we are mindful of the effect that our ideas, and the way we formulate them, can have on others. As much as we know that the academia by definition implies a level of exclusivity, we should consider that in the context of the emergence of digital writing an overly academic language may have only an apparent function of legitimacy if not accompanied by an awareness of how it can potentially function as exclusive rather than an inclusive language. As Helen Sword warns in her book *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012), we need to make sure that “Academics who are committed to using language effectively and ethically—as a tool of communication, not as an emblem of power—need first of all to acknowledge the seductive power of jargon to bamboozle, obfuscate, and impress.” For this reason in her practical manual for academic language she affirms that the kind of writers she is proposing are those who “care” for the other, their reader: “they do not deny the utility of jargon, nor do they eschew its intellectual and aesthetic pleasures. Instead, they deploy specialized language gracefully, cautiously, and meticulously, taking care to keep their readers on board.”

The focus on voice, narrative, and empathy outlined above does not end with our students. As members of the academic community we cannot but wonder to what extent the multiplication of necessities to publish (a fundamental tool for survival in the current job market) ends up watering down passion and the willingness to write because of an engaged care and urgency. If this is the case, do we bring the corollaries of such behavior into our classrooms?

As Terry Eagleton said in his recent article “The Slow Death of the University” (2015), we have to be cautious not to turn research writing into an activity “to produce for production’s sake” and remind ourselves and our students that writing is an interrogation of the world around us. The writer’s work can prove to be “responsive to the needs of society” (Eagleton, 2015) while keeping in mind that “one role of the writer today is to sound the alarm.” (White, 1969)

References

Achebe, C. (2007). The Truth of Fiction. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quayson (Eds),

- African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Oboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Apple, M. (1996). *Cultural Politics and Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bartholomae, D. (1986). Inventing the University. *Journal of Basic Writing* 5(1), 4–23.
- Batali, J. (1992). The Power of the Story [Review of the book *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic (Thinking Gender)* by Andrea Nye]. *Postmodern Culture*, 2(2) 10.1353/pmc.1992.0004.
- Burbules, C. N. and Berk, R. (1999) Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits. In Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler, (Eds.), *Critical Theories in Education*. NY: Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (2015). The Slow death of the University. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Slow-Death-of-the/228991>
- Foucault, M. (1985). *The Use of Pleasure* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Random House.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gally, T. (2013). On the Limitations of Language and Logic. *NU ideas*, 2(2), 11–17. Retrieved from http://ir.nul.nagoyau.ac.jp/jspui/bitstream/2237/21057/1/GALLY_NUIdeas_2-2.pdf
- Giroux, H. (1998). *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey Press.
- hooks, b. (1989). Choosing the Margin as a Space to Radical Openness. In *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Consortium Book Sale & Dist.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*. NY: Routledge.
- Holley, A. K. and Colyar, J. (2009) Rethinking Texts: Narrative and the Construction of Qualitative Research. *Educational Researcher*, 38(9), 680–686. Retrieved from <http://edr.sagepub.com/content/38/9/680>
- Middleton, G. (2012). The Social Role of the ALESS Program: the Place of a Science Writing Class in Undergraduate Education. *Komaba Journal of English Education*, 3, 53–64.
- Mishina, Y. (2015) Simulating the Research Laboratory: Using Science to Teach English in ALESS. *Komaba Journal of English Education*, 6, 67–83.
- Nye, A. (1990). *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic (Thinking Gender)*. NY: Routledge.
- Olson C., Creeley, R. (1985). *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley They Complete Correspondence Volume (6)*. Batterick F. G. (ed.). Boston: Black Sparrow.
- Paul, R. (1990). *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in Rapidly Changing World*. Rohnert Park, CA: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique.
- Perec, G. (1997). *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (J. Sturrock Trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 205–207.
- Ramsden, P. (1988). Studying Learning: Improving Teaching. In P. Ramsden

- (Ed.) *Improving Learning: New Perspectives*. London: Kogan Page.
- Roth, S. M. (2010). Beyond Critical Thinking. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Beyond-Critical-Thinking/63288/>
- Said, E. (1994). *Representations of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage, 83.
- Silko, L. M. (1981) *Storyteller*. Penguin Books.
- Stage, F. K., Muller, P. A., Kinzie, J., and Simmons, A. (1998). *Creating Learner Centered Classrooms: What does Theory have to Say?* George Washington Univ. Washington DC. Graduate School of Education and Human Development., ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education Washington DC.
- Sword, H. (2012). Jargonities. In *Stylish Academic Writing*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Warren, J. K. (1988). Critical Thinking and Feminism. *Informal Logic* 10(1), 31–44.
- Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-Centered Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Weiner, J. (1994) [Review of the book *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic (Thinking Gender)* by Andrea Nye]. *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*. 59(2), 678–681.
- White, B. E. (1969). The Art of the Essay No 1. Interviewed by George Plimpton and Frank Crowther. In *The Paris Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4155/the-art-of-the-essay-no-1-e-b-white>
- Wierciński, A. (2010). A Healing Toward Oneself: Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Turn in The Hermeneutics of Education. *Ethics in Progress*, 1(1), Retrieved from <http://ethicsinprogress.org/?p=242>