

# **Irony Crossings:**

## *Outsiders and Insiders on the Borders of Education*

Mark Williams and Gladys García

### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes how students write academic essays by crossing discursively between home and academic cultures. Relying on ethnographic research and close readings of student texts, this paper argues that students can travel from ‘outside’ to ‘inside’ the conventions of analytic writing by cultivating an ironic awareness, a critical knowledge of how to engage diverse subject matter and multiple readers. Faculty must also develop a humble irony that honors the hybrid expressions that students compose, and faculty must be able to articulate the discursive features and values of academic writing, as we work with students on the borderlands of academic and home cultures.

### **Resumen – Cruces irónicos: forasteros e iniciados en las fronteras de la educación**

Este trabajo analiza las maneras en que los estudiantes escriben ensayos académicos, cruzando discursivamente entre el hogar y las culturas académicas. Basándose en la investigación etnográfica y en atentas lecturas de los textos estudiantiles, se afirma que los estudiantes pueden transitar de “fuera” hacia “dentro” de las convenciones de escritura analítica, mediante el cultivo de una conciencia irónica, un conocimiento crítico de cómo involucrar temas diversos con múltiples lectores. La Facultad también debe desarrollar una ironía humilde que haga honor a las expresiones híbridas que integran a alumnos y a profesores, quienes deben ser capaces de articular los rasgos discursivos y

los valores de la escritura académica, ya que trabajamos con los estudiantes en las fronteras de las culturas académicas y del hogar.

**Mark T. Williams.** U.S. citizen, earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Arizona. He is an associate professor of English at California State University Long Beach (CSULB), where he has served as Composition Program Coordinator. A former news reporter in Mexico City and Brownsville, Texas, he has published articles and book chapters on rhetorical history, composition practice, and writing assessment.

**Gladys García.** A native of Spain, is a U.S. citizen who earned an MA in English from Louisiana State University. She is a senior lecturer at CSULB, where she has taught composition, ESL, and literature courses in the departments of Chicano/Latino Studies and English. Childhood experiences in Spain and Cuba inspire her ongoing interest in foreign languages, and she has published and produced educational materials on language acquisition for teacher and student use.

First-year university students must demonstrate proficient written compositions to advance through majors and eventually graduate. Students new to CSULB are also expected to analyze ideas, question common clichés and assumptions about culture, and evaluate claims about knowledge (*Composition*, 2001). Because just 28% of undergraduates identify as “White,” and nearly 50% are the first in their families to attend a university (“Fall” 2011), many of them could be described as “outsiders” to higher education, as some scholars have defined similar students (Shaughnessy 1977, 234; White and Lowenthal, 2011, 285-287). When reading our students’ essays, faculty at CSULB frequently see a range of ironies that may suggest outsider status, such as when one writer condemns the errors that high school students make in writing while making similar mistakes of his own. Ostensibly unable to question his own prose, the student has perhaps not developed the analytic perspectives common among academic insiders.

We begin with this example not to criticize but to historicize: the student essay is among hundreds we have analyzed from multiple composition courses the last seven years. Aiming to instruct writing skills that help students move towards academic “insiders”, we question how culture may influence the hybrid languages developing in homes and schools. While recent scholarship informs our purposes (Shaughnessy, 1997; Anzoldua, 1987; Gee, 2001; Bizzell, 2000), we rely in part on Vico, who examined texts and myths from many cultures to speculate how language changes over time. Vico claimed in 1723 that each civilization passes through recu-

ring cycles, the last of which functions largely through irony, through the “reflective” power of language (1961, 408). Scholars adapt Vico’s work to identify reflective, self-conscious patterns in history, culture, and cognition (H. White, 1973; Geertz, 1983; Markova, 2003).

Vico’s ideas are salient for student writing because his cross-cultural analysis partly explains borderlands culture, and his irony relates to the meta-critical thinking expected from university students (Gee, 2001; Bizzell, 2002). Students living in homes where English is not the dominant language face particular challenges. For instance, Antonio Burciaga reflects on his childhood to detail the “ironies” of growing up “within, between and sometimes outside of two cultures” (1993, 5). Similarly, Lauro Zavala reads the “ironic” patterns of texts that constitute culture “between two locations”, and he asserts the value of critically assessing the myths that uphold cultural identities (1997, 9-11).

Many ironies emerge from the poly-vocal populace of our campus in Los Angeles County, where 40% of residents speak Spanish at home (“U.S. Census” 2010), and where multiple languages create what one journalist calls an “alphabet soup” (Simmons, 2003). The linguistic diversity of our students may contribute to categories of insiders and outsiders: the State of California mandates that CSUs accept applicants who graduated in the top third of their high school class, but 50% of freshmen test into “remedial” or developmental reading and writing courses. These students demonstrate relatively weak skills with the linear structure of academic English—the thesis-driven essays, concise and coherent paragraphs, and summative conclusions. Of course, there are many possible causes of relatively poor academic performance, and no college placement test is perfect. Nevertheless, nationwide studies show that non-White, first-generation students have lower graduation rates than their Anglo counterparts (Ishitani, 2006; Tinto and Pusser, 2008). Reflecting on the status of these students, we wonder how culture, language, and identity may affect their performance. As John White and Patrick Lowenthal assert, many minority students may understandably cling to their home languages and may experience college as a “foreign environment”. Many students may equate academic discourse with “acting White” and a denial of their own cultural identity, so they may resist, misunderstand, and/or reject academic English—a process that can end in “students remaining outsiders to and often dropouts from” college (2011, 285-287).

We are struck with the irony that students feel like outsiders in a university to which they have earned entrance—an irony enhanced by the fact that

a powerful faculty organization argued 37 years ago that students should be able to use “their own” language when writing on campus (“Students’ Right to Their Own Language”, 1975). Interviewing dozens of undergraduates and analyzing hundreds of essays from multiple composition courses during a multi-year span, we two faculty have encouraged students to develop experiences from home while crossing into the more analytic prose of academic culture. We authors—one foreign born and one the first in his family to earn a graduate degree—are keenly aware of how many students may perceive our campus and our curricula as foreign. Mindful of Vico’s call to study the histories of institutions, we note how the image of “outsiders” dates to the 1960s, when open-admission policies allowed relatively underprepared students to enroll in college. By the mid 1970s, Mina Shaughnessy identified “basic writers” as those whom faculty deemed as “outsiders” (1977, 234). Patricia Bizzell extended this work to remind faculty to reconsider the off-campus circumstances that may influence basic writers, or “outlanders.” Faculty should reassess how their “outlandishness” can be partly explained as a conflict between their home dialects and academic English as well as between their world views and our own (1992, 164-166). David Bartholomae later argued that basic writers need to imagine themselves as “within” academic discourse; they need to move from “outside” to “inside” by taking risks with their syntax and by resisting clichéd interpretations of culture (1997, 590-594).

The *insider/outsider* distinction may evoke static conceptions of language and learning that educators are trying to revise (Blake, 1996; Boyd, 1991; Lyon, 1992). Paulo Freire, for instance, asserts that everyone is already “inside” a given society, and we can potentially find agency to transform our marginal places through an active, critical consciousness that unveils and intervenes in the world (1994, 55-57). Still, contrasts of “insiders” and “outsiders” are common in research on student writing performance (Farris, 2002; Kutz, 1986; Rossen-Knill and Lynch, 2000). In fact, James Gee argues that a basic writer aims to be an “*insider*” to the academy, but his or her language is often insufficiently analytic and thus remains “*outsider*” (2001, 529; emphasis his). Importantly, Gee contends that academic insiders use language as “meta-knowledge” to question culture and thus exemplify the Socratic idea that unexamined lives are not worth living (530). Proficient students elaborate clichéd ideas about culture and extend their expressions beyond the commonplace. Such cultural questioning is perhaps more difficult for minority students given anti-immigrant sentiment in California and elsewhere. The State of Arizona, for example, recently barred ethnic studies courses in high schools because they ostensibly promote “resentment towards white people” (Lacey, 2001).

Consequently, while students bring diverse cultural strengths to our campus, our analysis suggests that significant numbers of them remain outsiders on campus in several ways: as minority, first-generation basic writers who seem reluctant to question cultural mores as expected in college culture, as well as student writers who rely on clichés and do not develop the analytic prose that faculty nationwide have for decades deemed as proficient (“Writing”, 1995). Borrowing Zavala’s words about reading texts to discover a productive “double-voicedness” in the borderlands (1997, 11-12), we analyze student work to discern a range of insider, outsider, and in-between written voices. This research informs what Kenneth Burke calls a “humble irony” (1945, 514). This kind of irony may correct some of the potentially corruptive, skeptical ironies that Vico identifies, such as mockery and sarcasm, as well as a rigid, overly critical awareness that does not explore probabilities through rhetorical invention (1994, 149; 1990, 14-19). Echoing Vico, Burke contrasts a “romantic irony” that some people may deploy when defining themselves as superior to others with a humble irony emerges when a person “needs” the other, “is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within*” (1945, 514; [emphasis his]). Such a perspective comes from an appreciation of language itself, which admits an “alchemic center” where identities might recombine in new relationships (1945, xix).

A variant of humble irony may help us reflect on how to assist students who travel from outsider to insider in the academy, to discover an alchemy that may motivate them to more effectively convey their multiple voices. Our research methods invite such poly-vocality: as teachers who participate in students’ writing processes by commenting on their drafts, asking questions, and encouraging revision, mixed perspectives emerge in our work –as they do in similar educational research (Bishop, 1999; Cushman, 1998).

## The Irony

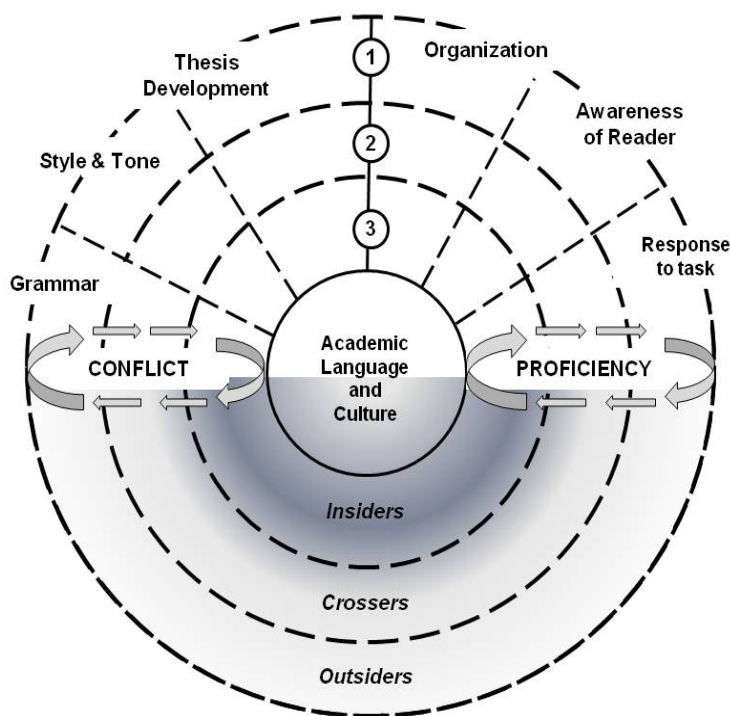
### *of Cultural Questioning*

Vico sees irony at work in dialectic, as when Socrates exploits oppositions of thesis and antithesis (1961, 167). The Socratic dictum that an unexamined life is not worth living extends from individual to cultural critique in the academy. For instance, Victor Villanueva describes the “cultures of conflict” when working with students of color (1996, 169). He also realizes that his *insider* status is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by his race. Having found success as an academic, “complete assimilation is denied –the Hispanic English professor. One can’t get more culturally assimilated and still remain other” (1993, xiii-xiv).

Such critical examinations of self by faculty may help students understand the challenges and rewards of education, yet faculty sometimes criticize student performance too frequently while ironically not interrogating salient elements of our own academic cultures. For instance, when a professor from a local university recently lamented decreased state funding for education and urged faculty and students to advocate for more taxpayer support, one professor on our campus noted how increased class size makes teaching difficult. While praising a student’s work, he quickly censured the rest: “I’ve never received so many poor papers”, the professor wrote on a college listserv. “I keep hearing that the GPA of incoming students is increasing, but I’m not seeing evidence of improvement in the classroom”. The professor aptly points out the irony of increased GPAs among apparently poorly prepared high school students, but he makes no reference to the constraints students face –insufficiently funded high schools, multiple native languages, the need to earn income while not in school. Still, as an academic insider, the professor enacts the Socratic ideal: “Maybe it’s time to document what’s going on in the university rather than repeating” university clichés about student success.

While one email message is by no means representative of all faculty attitudes about students, the missive does convey what Burke might define as “romantic irony”, as the perspective of a superior spectator. People who adopt this perspective assume themselves “*outside of and superior to*” others (1945, 514; [emphasis his]). Now certainly, faculty must enforce academic quality, and doctors of philosophy are intellectually distinct from undergraduates. However, some elements of romantic irony, and the elitist attitude it may portend, perhaps reinforce students’ sense of being outsiders. Humble irony, in contrast, makes way for understanding how “all voices, or personalities” affect one another (1945, 512).

Small examples of such humble irony appear in a semester-ending paper of an Asian American student. Referring to Gee’s contention that academic language is dominant and can be unjustly evoked to censure students, the junior-level writer asserts that faculty frequently “focus on superficial features of language” to exclude students. Grammar errors, odd word choice, and other surface-level concerns justify faculty’s rejection of the inarticulate other. The student writer cites the “irony” of public universities, which are established to help all qualified high school graduates, but faculty focus on the elements of writing that mark students as outsiders. While we accept some of the student’s contentions, he ironically does not admit how, without academic standards, a university degree may in some sense be meaningless –how his own progress towards a degree depends in part on differentiating himself through language from those who do not earn degrees.



The previous examples are meant to convey the range of ironies that students and faculty encounter at the borders of education –at the boundaries marked by assessment and evaluation. Humble irony requires all participants to reflect on the perspectives of others; students must try to understand faculty expectations, and faculty must try to understand student language, as we forge a more productive frontier of leaning. One part of such reflection calls for a rubric, or image, by which we can provisionally locate student writing. We use the rubric to characterize student writers who may be crossing into the more critical terrain of academic culture and to invite fellow teachers to reconsider the values and viewpoints that underwrite our position within the academy.

We offer this rubric in the spirit of humble irony –as a means for us to better understand what students are attempting to express, and to acknowledge that without students, we have no profession. Theoretically, the rubric derives from Burke; he offers an image of a solid earthly surface, where divisive ideas congeal then give way to a molten core, an “alchemic center” where language and identity can recombine in “consubstantial” relationships (1945, pp. xix). We can potentially identify with others, but the ironic, consubstantial grounds of rhetoric admit division as well (1955, 22). These boundaries of unity and separation emerge each time we assess student writing: some writing locates students within our communities, and some writing keeps them out.

For example, the inner-most circle of the rubric, “academic language and culture”, is bounded by *insiders*. These proficient writers tend to demonstrate an awareness of readers’ expectations, provide clear, critical theses, and partly reconcile ambiguity and conflict through the irony that Burke evokes. Student prose in the next category, *crossers*, marks where writers begin to elaborate on their clichés by defining their own and others’ assumptions. They generally show some awareness of readers’ expectations and recognize –but do not reconcile– conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity. The exterior sphere of the rubric suggests *outsiders*. Student writers in this category usually rely on stereotypical responses and clichés and miss defining their own and others’ assumptions. They also tend to misunderstand or reject critical questions, show little awareness of readers’ expectations, and avoid contradiction and ambiguity.

We are not here implying static categories of student writing or hard links between learning styles and language forms. To be sure, the two smaller circles marked “conflict” and “proficiency” on both sides of the rubric’s center suggests the recursive or looping nature of writing –how



students will encounter varying levels of tension and success in virtually each piece of prose. Many students in fact produce passages in each essay that demonstrate some elements of *outsiders*, *crossers*, and *insiders*. Their developing ability to traverse these boundaries underscores the transformative powers that language allows.

We next offer a quick review of irony before presenting a few samples of student prose that correspond with *outsiders*, *crossers*, and *insiders*. This analysis of student writing also prompts us to reconsider the relatively safe terrain we occupy –how as *insiders* we may take for granted the cultural dissonance and difficulty students might encounter when entering our classrooms. We end by suggesting how Zavala’s ideas about liminality coalesce with Burke’s humble irony in a stance for students and teachers to perhaps understand each other more fully. This view was expressed millennia ago when Cicero asked readers to invent ideas before judging them (1942, 313-315), to discover more about our worlds before critiquing them. Vico elaborates Cicero’s ideas when contending that students need to explore multiple points of view to invent copious perspectives about contemporary issues –before making judgments about the questions at hand (1990, 14-15).

## A Range

### *of Ironies*

Irony obviously predates Vico, as one of the first extant appearances occurs in Plato’s *Republic*, where Socrates mocks another speaker’s dialectical method (1993, 18-19). For our purposes, Peter Oesterreich limits the term to three connotations, which all fit within Vico’s reflective category: as a trope, whereby a phrase conveys meaning though oppositions, such as condemning through praise; as a “specific lifestyle” of a person such as Socrates, who frequently feigned ignorance while uncovering fallacious reasoning among others; and as an “infinite irony” of the Romantics, who exhibit hyperbolic self critique, skeptical appraisals of knowledge claims, and ethical relativism (2001, 404-405). We see these three kinds of irony in ubiquitous tropes of performers such as Culture Clash, and in smart people masquerading as dumb, such as Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*. One feature of these ironic groups is their ability to simultaneously be insider and outside of their own cultures. Stewart pretends to be a credible journalist, but his satirical treatment of ostensibly credible news reporting on CNN, FOX, and other networks has the power of an articulate outsider who rightly mocks those deemed credible by the mainstream.

While not addressing examples of contemporary media, Zavala's analysis of literary texts exposes the irony available to readers of potentially any cultural artifact. Zavala relies on ideas of heteroglossia, or "the simultaneous presence of opposing voices in a single discourse" (1997, 13), to explore the work of Borges, Fuentes, and others. In these texts, authors deconstruct myths that ostensibly uphold ideas about nationality. Zavala enacts the Socratic ideal by identifying how writers question taken-for-granted yet powerful ideas. Zavala argues that irony is more than a sarcastic opposition to commonplace cultural viewpoints:

...irony is an act of simultaneous destruction and recreation... of questioning our conventional perceptions of the world and" our understanding of how language works (1997, 11).

We believe our students exhibit a range of these productively ironic abilities in their writing. For instance, one student in a senior-level literacy course recalled how her parents spoke virtually no English, a fact she found "not only burdensome but embarrassing". Recounting in her narrative a visit to the classics section in the library as an elementary-school student, she encountered no texts written by Latinos, a fact that—in retrospect—partly erased or challenged her sense of adolescent self. "I did not see anything of myself in the library", she wrote. "At that point, I unconsciously accepted the idea that in order to be accepted as an insider I must assimilate into the Anglo literacy by shedding my culture. I saw my parents' environment as stifling [and] my decision to shed my cultural identity was a result of my fear of being dubbed a phony within my new academic discourse, i.e., new identity".

As readers of this student writing, we honestly do not know if she is pretending to be critical, as Gee might suggest. We do, however, see the liminality that Zavala identifies in literary texts: the student is willing to question the cultural influences that partly constituted her developing identity as a student and as a person. As a means of better understanding the languages that students deploy in our academic culture, we next pair additional examples of their writing with the rubric.

## *Outsiders*

### *Caught in Unelaborated Commonplaces*

As we note above, the outermost edge of the rubric corresponds with what we see as *outsider* prose, which can be identified by relatively frequent grammatical and/or syntactical errors that obscure meaning. More significantly, perhaps, outsiders do not demonstrate an awareness of reader expectations.

In another example, when a professor allowed a struggling first-year student to earn extra credit by writing additional essays, the student admitted celebrating Cinco de Mayo without knowing what the date commemorates. This student, who visits Mexico frequently with her Mexican-born parents, expresses little more than the “fun” of walking down Olvera Street in Los Angeles. Perhaps because of she has forgotten—or never learned—the history of Mexico, she has difficulty expressing critical thought about her experiences; the “fun” walk was “filled with lots of Mexican traditions which gave me the feeling like I was in Mexico”. The student does not explore the irony of acknowledging how California *was* Mexico. Or, in another example, when writing in her journal, an Hispanic student advises high school seniors to enroll in college “because it will change your life”. The academic demands of college, however, “are no different than those of high school”. This last statement suggests that the student is not thinking critically—is not elaborating how a life-challenging college experience is any different from high school. Such ostensibly facile expression is a marker of outsiders, as defined by Shaughnessy and Bartholomae, and as could be noted in our rubric.

The student who wrote about Cinco de Mayo could be provisionally located in the outer edges of the rubric above; her thesis is marginally developed, she does not account for reader’s expectations—a marker of Burke’s humble irony—and she does not elaborate clichés. In contrast, the student who wrote about faculty unethically focusing on superficial elements of language to mark students as deficient, appears to be crossing towards a more critical, academic discourse. The student’s writing is well organized, grammatically sound, and features an overall ironic style or tone.

Another Hispanic student crosses the conflicting terrain between home and college when she chooses to write about her father’s violent drunkenness. Initially unwilling or unable to define him as an alcoholic, the student arrives at this definition after a first draft, but she ironically ends with an

unresolved contradiction characteristic of *outsiders*: she now sees herself as “a mature, independent, and very intolerant person of abuse”.

This student should be praised for exploring a dysfunctional domestic situation. She nonetheless ends her work with unresolved syntactic contradictions that mark much of her writing as *outside* acceptable prose. *Outsiders* also generally do not realize the need to define their commonplaces because these phrases carry their own explanatory force—as Bartholomae suggests with “lack of pride” and “original sin” (1997, 592). The writers do not generally compare how their beliefs might be constructed differently by others; do not relate their examples to other examples; do not cite voices in opposition to their own; do not locate an identifiable point of view in discourse. Moreover, the students have difficulty identifying with ideas presented outside of what might be called their own zones of cultural comfort. These are versions of a naïve irony.

Another Hispanic student, the first member in her family to attend college, praises her parents for helping her attend a university while also admitting the unknown terrain found here. “My parents have supported and guided my path throughout my education”, she writes, “even though they were not sure what exactly it entailed”. Most of her experiences on campus will be novel because she does “not have the fortune to have someone show me the steps to take”. Her writing has clichés, but she defines a point of view that admits the unknown. She also acknowledges ambiguity: her parents “were not sure what exactly [college] entailed”, but she was encouraged to attend school nonetheless. She is simultaneously affirming her home environment while also acknowledging how she is entering into a relatively unknown academic culture. Conflicts remain unresolved, but she can be encouraged to define some of the ambiguity that attends to these tensions. We could support her elaboration of values from home that may help her negotiate the conflicts she encounters on campus.

Humble irony prompts us to mention how insiders, too, sometimes exhibit relatively unelaborated ideas about significant issues. A different professor, responding to the letter of lament cited above, asked other faculty to ponder what constitutes “critical thinking”. Faculty responses, which we will explore below, ironically remain at odds. Perhaps not unlike the student, faculty can take for granted the fundamental elements that constitute our culture. Like the students, we can work to better elaborate our ideas; the markers of insider status should be exposed so that students might learn them and join us if they choose.

## **Crossing**

### *into Critical and Elaborated Discourse*

The middle sphere of the rubric suggests the prose of *crossers*, writers who begin to question commonplaces, and who organize and support previously undefined and unelaborated clichés. They respond to assignments by exploring some probable relationships among multiple causes and effects, by comparing apt realms of experience, and by citing sources with increasing deftness to locate their analysis in conversation with others. Their writing nonetheless remains marked by a tendency to under-analyze, by not adequately supporting an idea, and by not defining or locating a point of view that suggests some of the cultural dimensions informing their perspectives. They also seem frozen by an increasingly sensitive rhetorical consciousness: aware of readers' expectations, they are unsure how to engage them.

For example, one Latina student exemplifies difficulty with readers' expectations when reflecting on how she wrote a paper for her peers to review first. The assignment required her to describe an event or experience that had changed her life. She recounted working at a store and how, over time, she realized that many North Americans are "self-centered" and overly influenced by "greed and corruption." She later wrote in her journal that she did not want to offend her peers with these characterizations, so she stopped examining these potentially offensive views. Her reluctance is understandable. Nonetheless, she can be encouraged to realize that her critiques can be valued; many readers would certainly accept her critique of the harried, sometimes abrasive quest for more money to buy more stuff—particularly if the student underscored the irony of such values.

She also explains how her fellow employees and customers were frequently "extremely inconsiderate" when demonstrating their materialist values, and she recounts how she eventually understood that she "did not want to be a product of that type of society"—a materialist, U.S. society. She is here writing against commonly accepted assumptions, but she can do more to relate her own experiences with what she sees happening around her. She could compare the work-site to values perhaps enacted in her home. Moreover, she ironically does not admit the fact that as an English-speaking student at an American university, she is and continues to further become a product of the dominant culture. She defines herself in opposition to U.S. culture without yet realizing a productive place for herself within this society. A skilled teacher might encourage her to imagine a more nurturing workplace by reading about and citing sources that

document such environments, might challenge her to define an oppositional perspective that need not offend. The student could, for instance, appeal to readers who may have experienced similarly material attitudes. She could imagine how others, seemingly *outside* her world, in fact populate it too, as might one at home in humble irony.

## Becoming *Insiders*

### *to Academic Culture*

The inner most section of the rubric, *insiders*, is populated by students who are able to define cultural contradictions succinctly, compare relevant experiences when exploring these contradictions, and express with effectiveness the sometimes competing belief sets of home and school in part through an ironic consciousness that admits the influence of others. This is a kind of humble irony. Gloria Anzaldúa offers a professional version of such a stance when she defines her experience on the Mexico-United States border to critique the affects of the political boundary. Borders are set “to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (1987, 3 [her emphasis]).

There are small examples of *insider* writing in virtually all student texts we read. The following example offers perhaps the most sustained version of insider writing for a first-year, Asian American student. He first analyzes two arguments about school prayer to later write an argument against the commonplace appeal to God in U.S. culture. This stance puts him in direct opposition to many readers. He develops this oppositional view by first analyzing a controversy about the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Defining the patriotism resulting from the attacks of September 11, the student writes how some citizens responded to the violence in New York and Washington through bigotry, and he goes on to argue that Americans turned to religious views to justify the war in Iraq. Recalling how one California man successfully challenged the Pledge before the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, the student later states why many people accept its recitation. “With most of this nation believing in one God or another, it is no wonder why the Pledge has not been protested: the majority of the public are comfortable with the Pledge as it is”. He argues that the U.S. Supreme Court should consider historical facts when reviewing the Circuit Court’s decision. “The Founding Fathers hoped the nation could be a place where every man and woman could live in peace”. Noting how the government has nonetheless traditionally relied on religious values for expedient ends, the student contends that politicians exploit

religion “because it gives the impression that they have a set of values, morals, and beliefs. While I agree with the power of this tactic, I do not believe it gives the power to force us to believe in God”.

The student then historicizes the reference to divinity in the Pledge, noting how the phrase was inserted during the Eisenhower administration to reinforce differences between the U.S. and the “Godless” communist nations. He goes on to briefly define his own atheism. We see *insider* passages here because the student clearly defines a contentious issue and he critiques the commonplace by developing relevant historical sources. He notes the irony of America as a “place” initially defined as free from religious constraint, but this place nonetheless remains significantly bound by religious dictates. Most importantly for us, the student seems to cultivate the “humble irony” that Burke defines as fundamental to rhetorical consciousness. He admits how religion fosters both good-will and bigotry among those around him, and he cites the power of the Pledge to *both* unite *and* divide people –what Burke defines as a consubstantial stance.

*Insiders* can admit and express the irony of being at once with and against others. They can admit and express the irony of being at once with and against others. One strand of Burke’s “consubstantial” stance may explain such work. *Insiders* can build a place for themselves in language that admits contradiction, can be at once with and against others. In an interview with Anzaldúa, Andrea Lunsford quotes her as recalling how she learned the contradictory “territories” of her ethnic community and the world of the academy (1998, 8). Villanueva also enacts this stance to explain his simultaneously *outsider* and *insider* status as a professor (1993, xiii-xiv). Bartholomae too acknowledges how *insider* discourse is “not the world but a way of talking about the world” (1997, 593). This discursive balance is perhaps *beyond* most basic writers, but we end with some suggestions for perhaps working towards this molten, ironic stance in the classroom.

## ***Crossing from Outside***

### *to Inside Through Writing*

We end by suggesting some ways that faculty might address students’ needs, all the while humbly aware that we need students. When teachers encounter writing from *outsiders* to academic culture, we might help them cross into more effective composition by considering what Eleanor Kutz’s calls “interlanguage”. Kutz develops this category when detailing how students frequently produce awkward and convoluted syntax as they encounter

“new or stressful discourse demands” (1986, 392-393). She argues that we can build on the verbal abilities students bring to the classroom as well as on their earlier success when they progress through increasingly difficult texts and tasks. Moreover, when Bizzell details the “hybrid” writing that emerges in the “blurred” borders between academic and home discourses (2000, 7), she recalls an earlier essay in which she contended that we can encourage students to develop their own hybrid discourses. Such language would include “variant forms of English”, surprising references to cultural sources, and irony among other elements (1999, 7).

We can encourage students to see irony and hybridity at work among successful writers from cultural backgrounds similar to their own. We can also encourage students to take more risks—particularly in the drafting stage, when we introduce the rubric to them to suggest how their writing remains *outside* the expectations that college readers have. We can see clichés as productive points for further elaboration, as Farris contends. Students can complicate their clichés, amplify the pat statements with reference to their own and others’ experience as well as to ideas encountered in texts. We can remind future students that they too may encounter ironies and ambiguities that may not be immediately resolved, but such intellectual conflicts mark the very terrain that academic writers must traverse.

The optimal result would be student writers who can express their outsider identity as an insider, a persona that can more effectively acknowledge the culturally plural nature of knowledge. Such positions are inherently hybrid, and productively liminal, because humbly ironic faculty can realize that values expressed by others help create the discursive terrain we encounter on and off campus. The shifting borders of education call for faculty to hear students’ multiple voices as clearly as we hope they might hear our own. These aims suggest a need for additional training of faculty to raise their awareness of how students articulate their emerging insider status through interlanguage and hybrid prose. A community of multicultural instructors, sensitized perhaps by the molten rubric we offer above, might more effectively guide students inside academic discourse by nurturing the perspectives that first form outside of our campus domains.

## References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinners/Aunt Lute.
- Bartholomae, D. (1997). “Inventing the University”, in: Victor Villanueva Jr. (ed), *Cross-Talk in Composition Theory: A Reader*. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE.



- Bishop, W. (1999). *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bizzell, P. (1992). *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*. Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press.
- Bizzell, P. (2000). "Basic Writing and the Issue of Correctness, or, What to Do with 'Mixed' Forms of Academic Discourse", *Journal of Basic Writing*, 19(1), 4-12.
- Bizzell, P. (1999). "Hybrid Academic Discourses: What, Why, How", in: *Composition Studies*, 27(2), 7-21.
- Blake, F. (1996). "Identify, Community, and the Curriculum: A Call for Multiculturalism in the Classroom", in: *Journal of Developmental Education* 2(2), 1-7.
- Boyd, R. (1991). "Imitate Me; Don't Imitate Me: Mimeticism in David Bartholomae's 'Inventing the University' ", in: *JAC* 11.2 (1991): 335-346.
- Burciaga, J. A. (1993). *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo*. Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions, Capra Press.
- Burke, K. (1945). *A Grammar of Motives*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Burke, K. (1955). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. New York: George Braziller.
- Cicero. (1942). *De Oratore*. Trans. E.W. Sutton. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Composition Faculty Handbook*. (2001). Eds. Bill Gilbert et al. California State University Long Beach.
- Cushman, E. (1998) *The Struggle and the Tools Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- "Fall Semester Ethnicity Breakdown" (2011). CSULB Demographics. n.d. Web. 30 June.
- Farris, C. (2002). "Too Cool for School? Composition as Cultural Studies and Reflective Practice." In *Preparing College Teachers of Writing*. Betty P Pytlík and Sarah Liggett, (eds), Oxford: Oxford UP, 97-107.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gee, J. P. (2001). "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction and What is Literacy?", in: Ellen Cushman, Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry Kroll, and Mike Rose, (eds), *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*, New York: Bedford St.Martin's.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2006). "Studying Attrition and Degree Completion Behavior among First-Generation College Students in the United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 77(5), 861-885.
- Kutz, E. (1986). "Between Students' Language and Academic Discourse: Interlanguage as Middle Ground." *College English* 48(4), 385-396.
- Lacey, M. (2001). "Rift in Arizona as Latino Class Is Found Illegal", in: *The New York Times*. January 7. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/us/08ethnic.html>
- Lunsford, A. (1998). "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality", in: *JAC* 18(1), 1-27.
- Lyon, A. (1992). "Re-Presenting Communities: Teaching Turbulence." *Rhetoric Review* 10(2), 279-290.

- Markova, I. (2003). *Dialogicality and Social Representations: the Dynamics of Mind*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- Oesterreich, P. L. (2001). "Irony", in: *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*. Thomas O. Sloane, (ed), Oxford: Oxford UP, 404-406.
- Plato. (1993). *The Republic of Plato*. London: Folio Society.
- Rossen-Knill, D. and K. Lynch. (2000). "A Method for Describing Basic Writers and Their Writing: Lessons from a Pilot Study", in: *JBW* 19(2), 93-117.
- Shaughnessy, M. P. (1997). *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Simmons, A. M. (2004). "A Melting Pot That's Brimming With Alphabet Soup", in: *Los Angeles Times* 1 July, final ed.: B2.
- "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (1975). Committee on CCCC Language Statement *College English* 36(6), 709-726.
- Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2008). *Moving from Theory to Action: Building a Model of Institutional Action for Student Success*. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Web. 23 June, 2011.
- "U.S. Census U.S. Census Bureau Releases First Set of 5-Year American Community Survey Estimates". (2010). U.S. Census Bureau. Web. 30 June, 2011.
- Villanueva V., Jr. (ed). (1997). *Cross-Talk in Composition Theory: A Reader*. Urbana: NCTE.
- Villanueva, V., Jr. (1993). *Bootstraps: from and American Academic of Color*. Urbana: NCTE.
- Villanueva, V., Jr. (1996). "On Colonies, Canons, and Ellis Cose's The Rage of a Privileged Class", in: *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition* 16(1), 159-169.
- Vico, G. (1961). *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Vico, G. (1996). *The Art of Rhetoric (Institutiones Oratoriae, 1711-1741)*. Trans. Giogrio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Vico, G. (1990). *On the Study Methods of Our Time*. Trans. Elio Gianturco. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- White, J. W., and P. R. Lowenthal. (2011). "Minority College Students and Tacit 'Codes of Power': Developing Academic Discourses and Identities", in: *The Review of Higher Education*. 34.2 Winter 2011: 283-318.
- "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement CCCC Committee on Assessment". (1995), in: *College Communication and Composition* 46(3), 430-437.
- Zavala, L. (1997). "Towards a Dialogical Theory of Cultural Liminality: Contemporary Writing and Cultural Identity in Mexico", in: *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1: 9-22.

**Recibido: 8 de agosto de 2011    Aprobado: 4 de junio de 2013**