



## CHAPTER 1\*

# Mapping Power and Privilege in Scholarly Conversations

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## Introduction

When students are assigned annotated bibliographies and literature reviews, they are required to mimic traditional forms of scholarly writing. These assignments represent and reinforce the gatekeeping mechanisms maintained by academic discourse: undergraduate curricula that acknowledge only Standard English and argumentative formats of writing, the gauntlet of credentialing required to reach faculty status and participate in the discourse, and the peer-reviewed, pay-walled model that still governs publication. As a result, the act of producing an annotated bibliography or literature review positions students as intruders at the margins of the academy—and while students might have negative feelings about this position, they are rarely prompted to discuss or critique their experiences in a classroom setting. When an instruction librarian uses a one-shot solely to demonstrate the skills students need to construct a literature review, they are implicitly supporting and perpetuating this exclusionary model.<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Donovan and O'Donnell provide an excellent discussion of librarians' responsibility to proactively resist the status quo of scholarly publishing through information literacy instruction. See Carrie Donovan and Sara O'Donnell, "The Tyranny of Tradition: How Information Paradigms Limit Librarians' Teaching and Student Scholarship," in *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, ed. Shana Higgins and Lua Gregory (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 121–39.

This lesson uses critical and feminist pedagogical methods to create space for students and instructors to question the implicit power dynamics at work in scholarly conversations. In preparation for writing a literature review, students in a senior capstone communication studies course created maps that showed connections among a group of scholarly articles. I aimed to address the skills the course instructor wanted students to learn by encouraging a critical stance toward the very system that creates a need for such skills.

Students are often told by professors and librarians that scholarly books and articles are the most authoritative sources because they are written by experts. Freire and other critical educators might consider this an act of banking education, a scenario in which a teacher's "task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his [*sic*] narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance."<sup>1</sup> In the banking classroom, students are asked to use scholarly literature without considering the exclusionary nature of scholarly conversations—producing what Freire would call a "*submersion* of consciousness."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, this lesson plan is built on Freire's conception of problem-posing education, which resists the banking model by "striv[ing] for *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality."<sup>3</sup> Rather than presenting scholarly conversations as indisputable, decontextualized sources of authority, I designed this session to help students conceptualize the system of academic knowledge production on a large scale and engage in dialogue about the various intersecting power structures involved in upholding it.\*

## Learning Outcomes

- Analyze a journal article in order to identify major vocabulary, influential scholars, and methodological approaches for communication studies research
- Create a map of eight articles to visually demonstrate a variety of types of connections made in scholarly conversations
- Describe the significance of connections between articles
- Discuss issues of power and privilege that influence scholarly conversations

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\* For a discussion of the application of problem-posing pedagogy in first-world classrooms, see Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins, "Forces of Oppression in the Information Landscape: Free Speech and Censorship in the United States," in *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, ed. Shana Higgins and Lua Gregory (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 185–203.

## Materials

- Online tutorial videos about search strategies in WorldCat Discovery, Journal Finder, and discipline-specific databases
- Computers with Internet access for each group
- LibGuide page with links to article PDFs, Google Doc worksheet, and Google Slide article map for each group<sup>4</sup>
- Printed “Burkean parlor” passage for each student
- Printed article citation (different articles for each group)
- Printed copies of articles for each group

## Preparation

This lesson plan requires a significant amount of communication and preparation before class, but this work enables students to engage in active learning and critical dialogue throughout the entire class period. The success of this activity depends upon students being able to recognize connections between several articles, simulating the work they would do in a literature review, so it is important to choose articles that connect in a variety of ways (e.g., covering similar topics, using similar methodologies, stemming from the same germinal thinker, applying an established concept to a new context, or even openly disagreeing on ideas). For example, several of the articles were influenced by communications scholar Henry Jenkins’s ideas about user-generated content. Some articles discussed this concept in relation to online fan culture surrounding popular television shows, while others applied it to political participation through social media.

## Session Instructions

1. Before class, course instructor assigns students to watch short tutorial videos.
2. Read passage about the Burkean Parlor aloud.<sup>5</sup>
  - a. Discussion question: How would you feel if you were attending this party?<sup>†</sup>
  - b. Use student responses to transition to class introduction: *Today we’ll be practicing strategies for tapping into scholarly conversations, and*

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<sup>†</sup> Teachers using critical and feminist pedagogies encourage students to reflect on their affective experiences in order to critique social systems. This approach is congruent with metaliteracy’s focus on affective and metacognitive domains of information literacy learning. See Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson, *Metaliteracy* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2014), 86.

*we'll also discuss power issues that can make those conversations feel unwelcoming.*

3. Give each pair of students an article citation, then ask them to use the resources they learned about in the tutorial videos to find the full text. Have two pairs use the instructor computer to teach their peers how they found the full text.
4. Give each pair a paper copy of their article and direct them to peruse it with the guidance of the Google Doc worksheet.
  - a. Have each pair give a one-minute overview of their article for the class.
  - b. As students are giving overviews, make two lists on the board: one of important vocabulary, and one of important scholars.
5. Have students use Google Slides to represent several categories of connections between the articles discussed by their classmates.
  - a. Have several groups share their work and discuss the types of connections they identified between articles.
6. The final discussion can be flexible based on the issues students encountered in their work. Try to help students make connections between concrete strategies (e.g., identifying when a scholar argues against the viewpoint of another scholar) and critiques of power issues (e.g., recognizing that mainstream scholarly literature demands argumentative prose).

## Assessment

Since students produce article maps and worksheet answers throughout the class, there are a variety of opportunities for authentic assessment, both during class and after. During class, I was able to conduct informal formative assessment as the students completed their worksheets and article maps. Since Google Docs and Slides update in real time, it is easy to monitor students' work on the instructor computer (preferably with the projection screen muted). When I noticed that a group was struggling, I could quickly give them individualized assistance. Likewise, when I noticed groups making interesting observations, I could encourage students to share their ideas during the class discussion. In both cases, the technology—and the assessment it enabled—supported the session's emphasis on dialogue between students and teacher.

The work the students produce in this class session fits well with Accardi's idea of the mini-portfolio as a feminist assessment method in one-shot sessions. Mini-portfolios allow the librarian to evaluate students' work after class and provide individualized feedback. By revisiting the article maps after class and e-mailing comments to students, the librarian can engage in feminist assessment that "thwart[s] the notion that there is only one answer or one way of knowing and experiencing the world."<sup>6</sup>

## Reflections

All of my work as a teacher in the classroom is influenced by my understanding of feminist pedagogy, which has much in common with critical pedagogy. Both approaches value dialogue, shift traditional conceptions of classroom authority, and maintain a commitment to social justice. But feminist critiques point out that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* assumes a "transparent," implicitly male teacher figure<sup>7</sup>—whose personal experiences of gender, race, and sexuality do not affect his work in the classroom—as well as a student group with a collective identical experience of oppression.<sup>8</sup> Freire later acknowledged these omissions,<sup>9</sup> but when I reflected on this class session I realized that my activities could be critiqued for the same reasons: they obscured experiences based on teacher and student subject positions. For example, when we discussed the Burkean Parlor metaphor, I could have explicitly addressed my experiences with academic publishing as a middle-class, cisgender white woman and librarian. Or I could have found photos of the authors of the articles prior to class and had students discuss the visible markers of identity they noticed (potentially gender, race, and age), comparing the authors' identities to their own. Activities such as these would have foregrounded issues of subject position that are implicit to power and privilege in scholarly knowledge production. Of course, there are many factors in a one-shot session that render these activities nearly impossible. There is limited time for class activities and limited time to build rapport with students necessary for a discussion of identity issues.

Despite these limitations, critical pedagogy methods did make positive interventions in this one-shot session. In my observation, for example, these students were more willing to question the established system of scholarly conversation than students in a traditional one-shot class. When we were searching for an article in Google Scholar, one student pointed out the slogan "Stand on the Shoulders of Giants." This gave us an opportunity to discuss the implications of the imagery of scholars as giants. Another student noted that in his article, the author was critiquing the patriarchal themes in *The X-Files* and that almost all of the cited articles were written by women. Prompted by this student, I was able to briefly discuss the fact that scholarship has a patriarchal history, which is well-represented in Burke's use of male pronouns in his metaphor for scholarly conversation.

While many students in this session were able to take a critical stance toward scholarly conversations, librarians using critical and feminist pedagogies are ultimately stunted by the one-shot. With more time for this lesson, perhaps over the course of several class sessions, I could have designed the mapping activity so that students worked with articles they had already found in their research, using the maps to identify areas needing further investigation. In

addition to skills-based goals like this one, I could have encouraged students to critique their own subject positions in relation to scholarly conversations. Critical and feminist pedagogies should be challenging for students and teachers, and the one-shot removes many potentially productive places of resistance. To make room for more meaningful applications of these pedagogies, critical librarians must move toward teaching roles that allow for sustained dialogue with students.

## Final Questions

Within the confines of the library instruction classroom, how can we teach students not just to navigate traditional systems of scholarly information, but also to critique them? How can we use critical pedagogy to resist the one-shot?

## Notes

1. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1989), 57.
2. *Ibid.*, 68.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Lauren Wallis, “Article Map Template,” accessed July 19, 2015, <http://bit.ly/articlemap>.
5. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 110–11.
6. Maria Accardi, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 84–85.
7. Kathleen Weiler, “Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference,” *Harvard Educational Review* 61, no. 4 (1991): 460.
8. *Ibid.*, 453–45.
9. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 45–47.

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