

## TEACHING BEYOND THE PALE: INTERDISCIPLINARY IMPROVISATIONS

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A category which rarely shows up in the standardized publications on curriculum assessments is the one to which I refer in my title, “beyond the pale.” The expression, implying something extraordinary or more than expected, could carry both negative and positive connotations. Figuratively, “pale” has been used since 1400 to mean “a limit, boundary, restriction; a defense, a safeguard. Sometimes used with direct reference to the literal sense, as in to break or leap the pale, to go beyond...” As of 1560, it came to signify a “a district or territory within determined bounds” (OED, 2057). Colloquially, “beyond the pale might mean to exceed one’s hopes and aspirations by managing to reach a new goal, one previously thought to be impossible. On the other hand, it might equally be applied to something about which we can no longer have any hope. This program is “beyond the pale.”

It can no longer serve to meet our expectations.

I chose this expression (or maybe it chose me), because what have traditionally been seen as insurmountable obstacles to teaching set goals in our Critical Thinking and Writing Intensive program, have become stepping stones to new and more intriguing goals. And while the ultimate assessment of what we are engaged in cultivating remains to be seen, for the moment, teaching from beyond the pale seems an accurate description of our current experiments. We are working with a thoroughly hybrid cultural and linguistic community of students and faculty. The term is both accurate and totally out of place on a standard assessment form.

Indeed, the American University of Paris classroom has become a metaphorical setting matching the expression “beyond the pale,” where possibilities for expanding the horizons of teaching “traditional” critical analysis and composition or “native” essay writing have materialized in the form of 18 flesh and blood students with 18 different nationalities, and as many as 30 different languages, since many students were raised speaking more than one and often more than two languages. With such a setting, the range of innovations on a theme (i.e., teaching critical analysis and the ideal English essay), boggles the mind. All of a sudden, the goal of writing the ideal English essay seems like a goal worth putting on the back burner. Thinking about language itself, and the evolution of English becomes foregrounded.

Nonetheless, the excitement about the resplendent linguistic diversity we might cultivate in this small space is constantly checked by our need to place our harvest in line with more generalized standards of quality control. Universities are, after all, tied to somewhat standardized assessments cultures. In particular, our University must consider how to assess its student learning progress and one set of standards by which we might judge appears in *Assessment of Student Learning: Options and Resources*, published by

the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.<sup>1</sup> The expression “beyond the pale” does not show up once in this document. Should this imply that we are allowing some form of linguistically modified student to graduate, sacrificing pure English in the name of dangerous hybrids? Our own nascent Assessments Planning and Development program must pose that question seriously. Or, are we beginning to realize our potential as a laboratory setting in the emergence of the world-wide phenomenon of “Englishes,” which might allow us to contribute more concretely to dialogue in this area, such as the dialogues introduced in the works of Alastair Pennycook and Suresh Canagarajah, to name only two?<sup>2</sup>

Our classroom, and by extension, our University and its student body, is characterized as being **in** Paris France (or Europe), but **of** the American system. As a result, both implied and stated expectations to be measured and assessed, are already being derived from two conflicting sets of cultural values. The current impasse of French-US relations underscores the conflict between the cultural expectations of our setting (France)*versus* our mission (an American education). Adding to that conflict the fact that we have a world population introduces a third set of values. Until recently, that addition of a third set constituted a concern about the relation of periphery to center. That is to say, that population was seen as facing many obstacles in their struggle to perform competitively in the classroom. They were the periphery population. Slowly, though organically, our periphery population has become a majority, which is to suggest that our periphery has become our center. This is the catalyst for all forms of innovative change.

I want to explore two aspects of our new, organic configuration. Firstly, what role should the current growth of a “world” or “European” English play in our classroom, particularly considering the impasse of which I spoke earlier, the American-Europe divide?<sup>3</sup> Should we be teaching American, if our system is linked to the title of our University, the **American** University of Paris? Secondly, is the widely ranging disciplinary orientation of our critical analysis and composition faculty a blessing or a curse? Looking at recent improvisations in our classrooms, in terms of faculty development, interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches and student outputs assessments, I

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<sup>1</sup> (Philadelphia: 2002). This paper was originally delivered at a Conference for the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies, July 23-25, 2003 at the California State University, Fullerton, in a panel entitled *The Spaces of Babel: Linguistic Diversity at the American University of Paris*, with Brian Brazeau.

<sup>2</sup> Suresh Canagarajah's publications include *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students*, (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor), 2002; and *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*, (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh), 2002. Alastair Pennycook's writings include *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*, (London: Longman), 1994; and *English and Discourses of Colonialism*, (Routledge) 1998. I specifically allude to these two authors because; 1) my references to the notions of periphery and center are inspired by Alastair Pennycook's keynote address at the Hellenic Association of English Studies Conference, May of 2002; and 2) because I will devote the bulk of this paper to an analysis of how Suresh Canagarajah's concepts, as developed in *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students* compare to some of the current pedagogic practices of our University.

<sup>3</sup> Several round tables on this subject were held in 2002 around this subject, with both students and faculty, as well as interested participants from the French system, in particular, around the article by Bernard Vincent, *From Dead Latin to Dead English: On the Lethal Effects of Linguistic Universalism*, (<http://www.u-grenoble3.fr/ciesma/ateliers/a4/art4-9.html>) March 2001, wherein issues of World English and Englishes is taken up. We hope to continue this practice as a University-wide practice.

would suggest that, by creating alternative spaces such as the FirstBridge classroom and an interdisciplinary critical analysis course, both of which enhance the activities and ideologies of the traditional English Composition classroom, but which operate “beyond the pale,” we have indeed carved out a laboratory for exploring these questions. I will align some of our innovations with research results elaborated by Suresh Canagarajah in Chapter 6 of his book *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students*.<sup>4</sup> With appropriate development and exchange, we hope to emerge from our linguistically diverse and interdisciplinary closet in order, eventually, to offer advice on the improvisational tactics our system is producing.

One of our primary aims has been in raising awareness amongst faculty from all Departments, of the need to consider the intellectual value of reflecting on how students express through language and to encourage other faculty to become more pro-active in their dialogues with students on this issue. Since language is not restricted to one or even two to three languages, one important side effect of this work has been the unraveling of the myth that only the native-level speaker can perform well in our system, or that only the native speaker has entitlement. Blending awareness of cultural and linguistic difference with awareness of different disciplinary perspectives on language can take us more quickly in the directions we want to go. My introduction to improvisational tactics here, is meant to stress not only students outcomes, but changing attitudes amongst faculty as well.

Nonetheless, the catalyst for such innovations has been the slowly evolving student population, which I will characterize throughout as periphery becoming center. It is a slow-acting catalyst. There is no widespread acceptance of a world English or “Englishes” as of today, in our institution or University-approved curricular programs. We are all caught in a double bind. We recognize that the goal of teaching students to write and think at the level of native proficiency is important. We also recognize the enormous difficulty of such a goal and the extent to which it ghettoizes a **majority** of our population, particularly students who use this obstacle as a crutch. Going “beyond the pale” requires thinking more creatively about what is happening to the English language as well as the concept of critical thinking in the wake of the Internet, even if your provisional goal is to teach a “pure English.”

To this end, our program is currently divided along traditional lines, an Intensive English Program for the linguistically-challenged and an EN program, designed to engage students critical and literary analysis/writing at the once unquestioned “native” level of Anglo-American English. We have both expected ourselves to bring all students up to the level of native English and despaired of being able to do so. Nonetheless, not only has our

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter 6, entitled *Issues of Community*, will be my focus, since it served as the reading for our Spring 2003 Faculty Workshop with Suresh Canagarajah. I will retain the *very* problematic distinction between native/non-native throughout, because; 1) it has been discussed at length by faculty participating in Round Tables on linguistic issues at the University; 2) despite my own concerns with the inadequacies of the terms, I don’t have solutions, or to treat them would be the subject of another paper; and 3) they have long been unquestioned terms in the teaching of standard English language or Intensive English programs. As for my reference to a “we” who are involved in improvisations, I will retain the plural, even though of the initiatives about which I will speak are specific to my own teaching, but communication with other faculty and the group nature of the FirstBridge enterprise as made me begin thinking more in terms of how my teaching practices can become more integrated with the practices of other faculty members, and it seems to me that all of us are involved in improvisations of sorts, though cannot yet speak of an institution-wide move in these directions.

Department long depended on the mythical dividing line (and the subsequent myth that crossing that line implies acquisition of a native proficiency), but the rest of the faculty members in our University have traditionally taken it for granted that our Department's myths were true. We would bring the students across that border to the Promised Land. Just as we perpetuated that myth, so other Departments believed in it, thus releasing them from any burdens of noticing differences in their student's use of English and understandably excusing them from any responsibility for evaluating their students on the basis of language proficiency.

While our program remains intact, and our extra-Departmental faculty still depend upon that program to carry the burden of meeting goals of proficiency, a culture of intellectual curiosity around linguistic inquiry has blossomed around the program and its effects are beginning to be felt in the IEP and EN classrooms. Last Spring, with Suresh Canagarajah as visiting Mellon Fellow, and director of a workshop for faculty from all disciplines, we began to look for ways of communicating this need for more intellectual inquiry about linguistic diversity across our curriculum. The central purpose of the Workshop was to analyze how faculty from different disciplines comment on student writing, with the aim of cultivating a more analytical, interpretive approach, rather than police and enforce "correct" modes of expression. Despite that central purpose, another marginal exchange developed during discussion which showed the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue about the use and value of language analysis.

In stressing the importance of viewing language as more than a mere medium of expression, Suresh Canagarajah raised the example of nuclear physicist Alan D. Sokal's controversial experiment in a 1995 publication of the journal *Social Text*.<sup>5</sup> The "interdisciplinary" article on the relation of the hard sciences to the Humanities, was published in the journal after having been peer-reviewed. It was then denounced by Dr. Sokal himself, as a hoax. His critique, to be expanded later in the book, *Intellectual Impostures*, was that scholars from Humanities disciplines, particularly from Contemporary French Thought, use scientific language inaccurately, and for personal prestige, with no respect for nor understanding of theories which ground such language. Raising the specter of this controversy led to a discussion between faculty from the Math and Science Department and various Humanities disciplines, where Contemporary French Thought is an important subject of study.

For example, while I tended to view Sokal's experiment as a barbaric attack on the Humanities, my Science/Math colleague viewed it as a form of instruction for Humanities scholars. Since I have been incorporating the controversy into my Advanced Critical Writing and Analysis (EN 130) class from the time that Sokal's first article came out in 1995, I was happy to find myself engaged in a sustained (and intermittently continuing) discussion about Alan D. Sokal with someone from the Math/Science disciplines. Questions concerning how different discourse communities interact, a subject to which I will turn in the second half of this paper, became centralized.

What began as a workshop on "Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students" also created a space for increased discussion of how different disciplines understand the use of linguistic and rhetorical expression in the advancement of their specific goals. For my purposes, the exchange made clear that disciplinary discourse and cultural difference must be thought together, particularly with respect to faculty discussion, in capitalizing on a multilingual student community. Nonetheless, for our University, there is much more to be accomplished in those directions.

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<sup>5</sup> For complete information on this article and its aftermath, I refer you to *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science*, Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, (Profile Books: London), 1998.

Indeed, when I spoke in my title of interdisciplinary *improvisations*, I was referring specifically to the improvisational way in which dialogues such as the one I just described, have taken place, to stress the extent to which working to define multi-linguistic and interdisciplinary issues in our University can help us in realizing some of our potential that may well take us beyond the pale of standard ESL or Critical Writing instruction. Nevertheless, the basic purpose of the workshop was to consider “issues of community” as articulated in Chapter 6 of Suresh Canagarajah’s *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students*, through close analysis of one student paper by a handful of professors from different Departments. I want to outline how staging this workshop helped to think more critically about my own teaching methods and the pedagogic principles of programs with which I am actively involved. I also want to consider more closely, how certain of my teaching practices mirror some of the practices described by Canagarajah.

My focus here will be on how our burgeoning multilingual population, which as I mentioned before, amounts to an organic evolution of the periphery student profile becoming more centralized, has allowed for exploration into ways of creating safe houses and discourse communities, as discussed in the chapter. While Canagarajah’s discussion of these concepts seems not to assume a “periphery at the center” (he is usually researching populations where there is a clear dominant *versus* marginal culture), this important phenomenon at AUP, of having a periphery at the center, has caused one of our most systematic pedagogic innovations at AUP, FisrtBridge, to yield the most food for thought in terms of the creation of safe houses.

As defined by Canagarajah, following his earlier work, safe houses are “sites that are relatively free from surveillance, especially by authority figures, perhaps because these [safe houses] are considered nonofficial or extrapedagogical by them [students].”<sup>6</sup> Canagarajah goes on to speak of how various forms of student “underlife” behaviour or “surreptitious activity” on the part of the students in the classroom, particularly linguistically challenged students, can be seedbeds for creating safe houses. His claim is that the traditional professional response of suppressing such activity needs to be re-evaluated since safe houses ultimately can be used to “help in developing literacy.”

Since my claim is that our University improvisations are taking us “beyond the pale,” it will come as no surprise that our experiments in the FirstBridge program, now entering its third year, were originally unconscious attempts to legitimize the in-class safe house, an enterprise with some positive results and some risks to date. Our entering Freshman class is expected to participate in the mandatory FirstBridge program, and judging from the statistics of this year’s entering class, we are indeed working with a periphery at the center.

According to a survey administered to students at Orientation, we have 42 students who consider themselves native speakers, as opposed to 78 whose native language is not English.<sup>7</sup> For those 78 students, we have 26 different languages represented. While many of those students consider themselves fluent in English, we can nonetheless see the emergence of a population which depends more strongly on the use of

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<sup>6</sup> All quotations in this section follow sequentially and are based on a Chapter 6, *Issues of Community*, in *Critical Writing and Multilingual Students*, (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor) 2002, pages 161-210.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., results of informal survey, shown at the end of this paper. These results are obtained through an *informal* survey, and while they are roughly accurate, more needs to be done in terms of statistical analysis, to argue a case for consistent movement in the direction of periphery becoming center.

a World or European English, rather than the Queen's English or American. These students are participating together, and no consideration of their English proficiency is given when deciding their placement in the program. They place themselves, according to their interests.

The FirstBridge groups, which results from their self-placements, are groups of 20-24 students, who possess different levels of language proficiency in English. Modeled on the idea of the team-taught learning community, one group of 20 students take 2 courses from two different disciplines. The courses are paired together, with bi-weekly class meetings for each, and a weekly reflective seminar, where the students are broken into two groups, each group being taught by one of the participating faculty members. The purpose of the reflective seminar is to analyze and find ways of linking the discourses of the paired classes. The *aim* of the program is to produce an exercise in discipline-based interdisciplinarity. I am only interested here in the relation of the program to the concept of the safe house and multi-lingual challenges, though further information on the general program, including an in-depth evaluation of the first year, can be found on the AUP website ([www.aup.fr](http://www.aup.fr)).

In keeping with what I maintain has been our main catalyst for innovation, i.e., our periphery becoming our center, the creation of FirstBridge has allowed us to put cultural, linguistic and disciplinary *rigidities* on the back burner in order to privilege or put into full play, the diverse community of students with which we are dealing. The classrooms where we teach them might be considered as a laboratory space. FirstBridge does not compromise other curricular spaces where placement according to proficiencies of various types are important. Rather, FirstBridge has provided for an intriguing classroom space, wherein any number of safe houses might be formed in response to the varying skills levels, no matter which skill might be in question.

Indeed, the class might be considered as a safe house in and of itself, with respect to the rest of the University. Students have an in-group status, which is not power-ridden, and they gain that status simply by being members of the class. Their need for a safe house, in this instance, is based solely on the fact that they are newcomers, thus linguistic difference as a motivation for safe-housing is temporarily suspended. One must stress that Canagarajah conceives of safe houses as constructions that come about as a result of specific needs, one of the most recurrent being the need to compensate for lack of proficiency in the central language of the course. Creating an environment where all students have needs reduces the difference between the linguistically challenged, and those who are challenged in other ways.

Within the class itself, safe houses are then constructed on the basis of; 1) shared linguistic or cultural base; 2) shared disciplinary base; and 3) exchange of skills needs or compensation for lack of certain necessary skills such as language proficiency. In the case of the latter, a student who does not "own the English language" may very well form a safe house with someone who speaks English well but lacks skills possessed by the first student. Since all types of skills are needed to participate in the class, students begin to acquire them by farming out their own talents in exchange for help in other skills areas. Though I would prefer to speak in terms of intellectual acquisitions rather than skills, I will remain with the concept of skills, as this allows one to think across a broader disciplinary range.

In the FirstBridge classroom, safe houses thus function as institutionally sanctioned entities, which is a way of reconsidering or empowering student underlife behavior, not in order to have such behavior as a goal, but rather, to learn more about how it can be used in learning to teach better in our current University environment. Using underlife behavior as a principle for organizing the classroom activity allows one to profit from analyzing the kinds of choices students make in their learning process as a result of their participation in a safe house.

At least two difficulties immediately ensue, and one must “stay the course” in order to grapple with them. To sanction “underlife behavior” is to negate its subversive value, *as far as the students are concerned*. To claim that subversive practices will become organizing principles for a course easily alienates faculty members who do not want to operate “beyond the pale” and for whom even a momentary sacrifice of the rigors of their discipline is inadmissible to them. Admittedly, some disciplines and some pedagogic attitudes are perhaps better adapted to this kind of experimentation. Greater negotiation between faculty members of different disciplines on the pros and cons of safe houses within the classroom at the level of General Education, is still a positive outcome of the experiment, and potentially leads to deeper communication between the disciplines, and between faculty members who may differ on what constitutes good pedagogy.

To foreground *how* a student learns in the classroom, at the possible expense of *what* they learn, is a difficult request to make of a faculty member who has spent years “covering the material”.<sup>8</sup> It must be said, though, that shifting the priorities radically, as the pedagogical methodology of the FirstBridge classroom suggests, does uncover radical aspects of student underlife behavior and the benefits of exploring those radical aspects further are tangible, especially since the student learning which results from these experiences finds its way into other classrooms. This is notably the case with writing intensive classrooms, where students no longer feel that they have been marginalized because of their lack of language proficiency. The Writing intensive class becomes just another class they should take, as opposed to being considered as the non-English ghetto.

Another difficulty is that if, according to students, the subversive nature of underlife behavior is negated, when it is sanctioned, then the classroom space becomes interpreted as one in which “nothing is going to happen” and the work they do for the course “will not matter”. While this is an unfortunate interpretation, it is more importantly, a challenge to be overcome in looking for new ways to teach. Since I ultimately view FirstBridge as a laboratory for exploring new ways of teaching, it can be regarded somewhat perversely as a positive outcome, since it teaches me a lot about what students understand academic “work” to be. My own privileging of the FirstBridge as a learning experience for faculty over students is no doubt to be distinguished from the views of my colleagues, and thus, the concern for how students interpret the space remains a problem to be solved.

It is in this case that being able to “teach beyond the pale” is crucial and where I would argue that involving faculty members from the widest range of disciplinary backgrounds enriches the number of improvisational tactics that might be developed to find ways out of the impasse of student misinterpretation of the our goals. Teaching outside a “rewards and punishments” system, to which Freud refers in his essay “On Disillusionment”, requires that one replace one set of goals and expectations with an equally valuable, or possibly, more valuable alternative.<sup>9</sup> *Teaching* this substitution of values is not easy.

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<sup>8</sup> All quotations in the next two paragraphs are actual comments which have come up in my past two years of teaching FirstBridge. They must be considered here as generalizations based on my experience of teaching during that time, or even anticipations of the kinds of comments that might be made in criticism of this kind of teaching. This paper must also be considered as an honest attempt to survey the intentions of teaching practices in which I have been engaged, despite the fact that in practice, there are still issues to be discussed and refinements to be made.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, *On disillusionment*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth), 1957, 274-288.

Again, to do so, you must go “beyond the pale.” Getting the students to understand that you are not sacrificing ultimate goals, but rather, allowing students to reflect on their own relation to those ultimate goals is the first challenge. As an example specific to my central concern here, the relation of our improvisations to an enhancement of classes in the English Program, the FirstBridge classroom can begin to work in tandem with the English language classroom, such as we experience it at the American University of Paris. The FirstBridge class suspends the unquestioned goal of learning or teaching “native-level” by allowing time to reflect on it as a value. This reflective work leads to a re-evaluation of those spaces where standards are taught rather than questioned, and where safe houses are not institutionally sanctioned. The English language classroom becomes a renegotiated space as a result. Performing to perfection in a standard or pure English, while not rejected as a goal in FirstBridge, is coupled with a legitimized self-reflection on that goal. Excellence in academic English, while not de-valORIZED, is somewhat demythologized, with respect to the native/non-native divide.<sup>10</sup>

The shift of expectations is to encourage students to, in Prior’s terms as evoked by Canagarajah, participate in their academic community in a mode of “deep participation” as opposed to in modes of “passing” or “provisional display.”<sup>11</sup> Rather than a student’s blindly accepting a certain level of excellence in academic English, and then working to fit him or herself into the molds required in order to master this language, that student might be encouraged to think more creatively about his or her own relation to excellence of expression, such that it can become an independent goal to achieve this excellence. This latter attitude would be considered a form of “deep participation” by the student. The teaching/learning process which can bring about this kind of “deep participation” on the part of the student ultimately produces a much richer reflection on linguistic diversity itself, on a University-wide scale.

Canagarajah characterizes deep participation as a “form of centripetal participation marked by rich access to, and engagement in, practices.” This is opposed to Procedural Display, (a student’s way of “aligning oneself to the position of the mentor collaborating” but does not result in the development of an independent position), or Passing, (“an assurance of achieving success in terms of credit hours, even though no learning may occur”). The latter is similar to working within Freud’s “rewards and punishments” set of expectations mentioned earlier, though Freud’s reasons for introducing such a set of expectations would be the subject of an entirely different paper. I introduce Freud here, simply in order to stress that concepts concerning successful teaching and learning processes are articulated quite differently from discipline to discipline.

In short, the FirstBridge classroom is an alternative space we have created for ourselves in order to encourage student awareness of constructs such as “safe houses,” which are potential building blocks to a process of collaborative learning that is derived from the student’s own cultural and linguistic point of departure.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the goals

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<sup>10</sup> My discussion of the way language is taught in the FirstBridge classroom follows most closely my own attitudes about how to teach language, and do not necessarily reflect what happens in every FirstBridge classroom. This discussion is to be taken as my own interpretation of the FirstBridge concept and ways in which it might be developed.

<sup>11</sup> Again, these terms are taken from Chapter 6 of Canagarajah’s *Critical Writing and Multilingual Students*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press) 2002, pages 161-210.

<sup>12</sup> To date, there are few explicit attempts to cultivate practices, such as they have been articulated by Suresh Canagarajah, though I have appended a copy of a handout I recently distributed a faculty workshop on FirstBridge teaching, which outlines my comments in

of both center and periphery students do not get replaced, they simply get re-positioned more strongly in relation to all members of the class, since all members are encouraged to build their learning process from their own linguistic and cultural points of departure. The shift in goals ultimately provides the grounds for cultivating “deep participation” attitudes in a larger number of students.

Lest one fear that our improvisations lead purely to the sanctioning of underlife behavior, we must look, as a final consideration, at another alternative space created for the English language classroom, the Advanced Critical Writing and Analysis classroom, hereafter EN 130, which focuses on how what Canagarajah refers to as “discourse communities” get constructed. This course, developed by myself and others in the department in 1996, in response to dialogues between various departments, is not a University requirement, but rather, serves as an option for a departmental requirement for Communications, Economics, International Business Administration and Computer Science.<sup>13</sup> These departments all require 9 rather than 6 credits in English language classes, and they maintain that the last 3 credits may be gained through participation in this course. The course, while retaining many aspects of a University sanctioned English language course, also works to examine the conditions for the development of discourse communities in a self-reflexive way.

Discourse communities are defined by Canagarajah in Chapter 6 of his book, cited above. His definition is in response to what he sees as a static concept of discourse community elaborated by John Swales. In Swales’ terms, a discourse community is characterized as; 1) having broadly agreed upon common goals; 2) intercommunicative mechanisms for feedback and information; 3) use and possession of one or more genre of communication; 4) has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of discourse expertise. Pointing to Prior’s innovations on this static model, wherein Prior argues that an established discourse community, as defined by Swales, is only acceptable as long as it doesn’t require that members “leave their own histories at the doorstep,” Canagarajah insists on stressing the power-ridden nature of discourse communities. Membership in a discourse community must be learned through various forms of acceptance by others. Ideally, that acceptance should not depend upon the *periphery population’s relinquishing of their own culture and specificities*. This is so especially since our linguistically peripheral students now outnumber our students who were raised in the official language of the University. In the traditional academic setting, acceptance can take the form of teacher approval, placement, or respect from his or her peers for discussion points made by a particular student in the class. Canagarajah invokes Foucault’s “fraternities of discourse” when indicating that typically, discourse communities see themselves as retaining power through exclusion rather than inclusion.

Granted, exclusionary practices for the academic discourse community make it easy for traditional concepts of the English language classroom to remain prominent, since point 4 in my rendering of Swales’ model (I have retained only parts of

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this paper. More needs to be done in this direction, even if the final upshot of such cultivation is to generate discussion on other methodologies than the ones I propose.

<sup>13</sup> Though I was not involved in the original negotiations for acceptance of this course, I was the one charged with developing and teaching it, and have been the only professor to teach it since its inception. With this scenario, I have had a free hand in developing a laboratory space for designing a course which answers to the rigors of our department in terms of the teaching of critical analysis, and which also answers to the demands of the other departments for a course where textual analysis is more closely concerned with texts emerging from the disciplines requesting that the course be designed.

his model which relate directly to my points), a point not questioned by Prior and developed in different directions by Canagarajah, requires that discourse community members have a threshold level of discourse expertise, in this case, total competency in standard or pure English, along with an eventual command of the various genres belonging to the texts to be mastered in the English language classroom.

Yet, simply by shifting the expectations, such that the threshold level of expertise becomes *part of the intellectual inquiry in the classroom*, we go “beyond the pale” of University-wide expectations and also beyond a position where student learning can be assessed in a simple manner. But this shifting process also allows for exploration of what kinds of discourse communities can be constructed and places more emphasis on how students learn and how the periphery (in terms of the English language) can remain competitive with the center.

To foreground analysis of how discourse communities get constructed, the EN 130 classroom is characterized as one where; 1) readings from different disciplines allow for greater flexibility in the types of genres that must be mastered and which particular demands for expertise in specific discourses might be made. For example, a student who is a graduating senior in Economics speaks from a different perspective than a Junior Communications major, so while they can expect certain grounds for communication with each other, those grounds are ultimately more flexible than the grounds for communication within a mono-disciplinary EN course, which is taught from the context of the Western literary tradition; 2) Professorial authority is replaced by the need to define a common vocabulary and seek greater consensus in our interpretations of a common body of texts. The professor’s authority to date is only from the perspective of being a trained reader and analyzer of texts but everyone in the class has a certain level of expertise as readers of texts and; 3) a modified form of Straussian reading enables students to bring their own cultural, linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds into play, but requires that they confront and negotiate with other voices, both established, such as in the case of Hannah Arendt, Leni Reifensahl or Thomas Friedman, as well as voices “in the making,” such as their classmate whose expertise in Economics far outweighs their own, or their classmate, who is able to speak about Japan from a unique perspective, because they have grown up in Japan. While students must grapple with sophisticated texts, the subjects chosen allow them to bring “their own histories” into play in classroom discussion. The discourse community constructed, depends very much on those histories in the final analysis.

Professorial authority, against which underlife or subversive activity is usually pitted, or through which “passing” as a dominant mode of participation can succeed, is taken away from students in the pedagogical precepts of the EN 130 class. While the professor may contribute to the building of the discourse community, she cannot own it, because it depends heavily on the cultural, linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds of the students involved. Students are also denied a dominant disciplinary discourse and since the texts chosen also center on modes of discourse themselves, the students’ work remains self-reflexive all semester.

In short, the only mode of participation that is truly successful in the EN 130 course is the form of “deep participation” to which I referred earlier in my discussion of the FirstBridge classroom. While uniform participation of this type is not achieved every semester, the percentage of students who learn to develop an independent position within this discourse community, and who carry that independence into other classroom work, is greater than I have observed in my more traditionally structured classes, where expertise in a particular discourse, including linguistic ability and cultural bias (i.e., Western tradition),

are unevenly divided, with the professor possessing the highest level of expertise from a disciplinary perspective.<sup>14</sup>

For better or for worse, this is brief sketch of the kinds of alternative spaces or improvisational activities which have taken some of us at AUP “beyond the pale” with respect to our teaching and intellectual curiosity about the multilingual capital of our student population. Thanks to our evolution, which has taken us from being an American University with a major Anglophonic population, to a University *in* Europe but *of* the American system, where our students possess a more internationalized relation to the English language, we have been well positioned to move in these directions, though there is probably no University-wide acceptance of the positions I have outlined here. Yet, despite the rigors of our traditional curriculum, allowing for a shift in expectations through the creation of alternative classroom spaces, has engaged us not only in creative improvisational responses to linguistic evolution, it has also made us realize the importance of interdisciplinary studies in the cultivation of meaningful negotiations between faculty members, towards successful integration of traditional and innovative goals. With the added possibility of increased exchange with those outside our University, we hope to deepen our understanding and mastery of how one profits from a periphery moving to the center.

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<sup>14</sup> Keep in mind that this class is part of the EN sequence, and thus, high standards of academic English expression are maintained. While the question of linguistic difference cannot be fully addressed here, the recent pilot program in FrenchBridge, drafted under the auspices of the ALAFAC Committee, which I co-chaired last year, is a program designed to address the issue of linguistic difference more precisely and might eventually be seen as complement to the goals of the EN130 class.