

After Words: Some Thoughts

Donna Qualley

I am struck by Kate Vieira's observation about "the entanglement of literacy with the movement of people." Movement always entails some kind of change (temporary or permanent) in location or perspective. Both literacy and composition studies are sites that are concerned with people's movements within and between places, contexts, and discourses. Vieira, of course, is focusing on the material experience of people and the literacy forms, technologies and infrastructures that enable, restrict, or complicate their physical and social passage through space and time. While a move may or may not always entail a change in physical or material location, it can certainly involve conceptual shifts in perspective. Scholars in both fields attend to the language, practices and technologies that individuals use to navigate their movements and that others use to regulate these movements, often at points of critical transition.

I am thinking about the human physics of such movements. Newton tells us that the body at rest stays at rest. And, unless acted upon by some outside force (or prompted by some exigence), the body in motion will resist speeding up, slowing down, or changing direction. Of course, human beings are subjects, not objects. They have volition, will, and desire that can shape and impact their trajectories. Unlike objects, subjects have at least partial navigational control of their speed, velocity, and pace of acceleration/de-acceleration in response to the multitude of forces—political, institutional, economic, cultural, and social—that surround them. How can we describe the directions, rhythms, and pace of these movements? What factors influence whether individuals go-with-the-flow, push back, speed up, slow down, idle, stall, retreat, or change direction? The questions concern me as a teacher. I notice when the degree of displacement that results in a slight change of position is not indicative of the amount of energy expended or the actual distance a student has traveled. The metaphor of movement reminds us, as Bruce Horner notes, that literacy has both spatial and temporal qualities.

In "Ideologies of Literacy," Horner argues that merely extending the range of literacy forms, practices, technologies that we teach or sanction is not likely to result in significant change. Little conceptual movement occurs when the ideological frameworks from our original practices and locations are left intact. But deeply ingrained ideologies are difficult to budge, despite the public's fear to the contrary. Rather than changing the ways people think or read or write (or teach), Horner's essay reminds me that these new texts, practices, and technologies probably aren't changing them enough—at least in the educational sphere. We only need recollect how writing process never really resulted in the promised paradigm shift for the field, nor did it always result in significant changes in pedagogy. (In fact, writing process could be a case study for the limitations of low-road transfer.)

The terms and theories that we continue to use (or that continue to use us) can also cause a kind of mental inertia when they cease to become troublesome. When our terms and concepts no longer function as threshold concepts, portals that enable further movement, they may keep us place

bound. How do our key words navigate and direct our thinking? Brenda Glascott's discussion reveals some of the ways in which the key terms of literacy and rhetoric frame the kinds of questions that we ask, the artifacts we study, and the methodologies we employ. We have many examples of literacy ethnographies because, as Glascott notes, literacy is difficult to disentangle from its contexts. And yet literacy also lends itself to interdisciplinary meandering in ways that rhetoric does not. Perhaps this is because, as Glascott notes, rhetoric has a more theoretically unified (and resistant?) tradition that serves a more conserving function.

Whether our orienting key term is rhetoric or literacy may also be a function of the time and place of our initial "in-doctor-ination." I have an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in composition, literacy, and learning (a program that no longer exists today at the University of New Hampshire where I studied). Although I probably was attracted to this graduate program because of the range of movement it afforded me, I suspect that the emphasis on making interdisciplinary connections in literacy helped keep my compositional key terms from becoming fixed and from fixing me squarely in one place. Cultivating an interdisciplinary perspective can engender a meta-awareness that thwarts our disciplinary assumptions from becoming naturalized; however, interdisciplinary meandering may not always ensure conceptual or ideological change. James Paul Gee observes that "bi-Discoursal people (people who have or *are in the process of mastering* two contesting or conflicting discourses) are the ultimate sources of change" (164; emphasis added). Min-Zhan Lu's 1989 literacy narrative, "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle," captures the often tumultuous experience of moving back and forth between discourses; and yet she concludes that the struggle and complexity of trying to re-orient herself kept her "from losing sight of the effort and choice involved in reading and writing with and through a discourse" (447). Lu's initial efforts to separate her discourses and keep them from interfering with each other also prevented her from using either constructively.

I have found the theories of teacher-educator Hilary Janks helpful for thinking about how to keep the connections between critical literacy and composition studies in play. Janks, whose work emerges from the highly multi-lingual contexts of South Africa, has developed a kind of ecological framework for examining the relationships between language, literacy, and power. Like key terms, different theories conceptualize these relationships in different ways, typically focusing on or foregrounding one part at a time. Janks's model describes four orientations (domination, access, diversity, and design). She emphasizes the importance of each orientation, while revealing the symbiotic and necessary interdependence between them. Attention to only one orientation without consideration of the others not only causes a serious lack or imbalance; there are, as Kate Vieira reminds us when she reprises Goody and Watt's question, real "consequences" for human beings and the material realities in which they inhabit or desire.

For each of these four orientations, Janks delineates what is lost when one of the others is missing from the equation. For example, an orientation toward *diversity* is crucial for recognizing and perhaps acquiring new ways of being and doing in the world. But as Janks notes, diversity without a theory of *domination* (power relations) can lead to a celebration of difference without an awareness of how difference is structured hierarchically in societies. Diversity without *access* to dominant discourses runs the risk of "ghettoizing" alternative literacies (and the people who use them). And

diversity without the opportunity for *design*, re-design, and reconstruction limits the potential that diversity offers for change (26). Thus, the problem of pluralization that Horner identifies might be seen as a problem where diversity (of forms, practices, and technologies), is privileged without a recognition of the other orientations or forces that come into play.

Janks's model also suggests why literacy and composition studies need to work together. While both fields address questions of power, access, and diversity, composition studies (or my preferred term, *writing studies*) ensures that a focus on design and redesign always remain part of the mix. Design enlarges our conception of writing and expands our available resources for meaning making. At the same time, Horner and Janks remind me that simply providing access to diverse practices, forms, and technologies for designing without also understanding how certain forms of design are privileged and perpetuated by the discourses of power risks simply replicating and reproducing these designs. Without conscious consideration of how these and other components interact with and upon each other, our orienting terms and ideological positionings are apt to both guide and follow us wherever we go.

Western Washington University

WORKS CITED

- Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. 4th Ed. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Glascott, Brenda. "Constructing Keywords: Rhetoric and Literacy in our History Writing." *Literacy in Composition Studies* 1.1 (2013): n. pag. Web.
- Horner, Bruce. "Ideologies of Literacy, 'Academic Literacies,' and Composition Studies." *Literacy in Composition Studies* 1.1 (2013): n. pag. Web.
- Janks, Hilary. *Literacy and Power*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print. Language, Culture, and Teaching Series.
- Lu, Min-Zhan. "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle." *College English* 49.4 (1987): 437-448. Print.
- Vieira, Kate. "On the Social Consequences of Literacy." *Literacy in Composition Studies* 1.1 (2013): n. pag. Web.