Critical Inquiry and the First Year: Reconceptualizing the Aims of Transitions Pedagogies

AARON STOLLER

ABSTRACT | Most first-year seminars exist to ensure that incoming students achieve what is commonly described as "academic success." While definitions of this term vary widely, it most often means socializing students into an academic culture so that they will remain at the institution, achieve a strong GPA, and graduate on time. Most first-year seminars focus on skills that either help students prepare for performing academic tasks or help students engage in academic tasks. This article introduces an alternative framework that moves beyond academic task training and advances the idea that a first-year seminar should provide a foundation for the cultivation of critical intellectual agency. This article calls this framework critical inquiry. It defines critical inquiry as the interrogation of the disciplinary cultures and practices where knowledge is produced and the pedagogical and curricular architectures where it is reproduced. As a conceptual core for first-year seminars, critical inquiry unpacks the learning environment for students, making its hidden expectations, cultures, and structures of power and privilege visible to students. In doing so, it prepares them to critically engage with and harness the educational environment in the development of their own identities as intellectual agents.

KEYWORDS | first-year seminars, inquiry, critical constructivism, transitions pedagogies

There is broad agreement in higher education that first-year seminars exist to provide a foundation for the academic success of entering students. At the same time, there has been virtually no critical evaluation of either the concept of academic success itself or how assumptions about the concept shape approaches to first-year and transitions pedagogies.

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While definitions of academic success vary widely across institutions (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015), it is primarily defined instrumentally: students are academically successful if they achieve a high GPA and when they are certified by the institution in a timely manner. This assumption establishes a widely embraced approach to first-year pedagogies that focuses on training core academic skills for the purposes of supporting the assimilation and certification of students. Left unquestioned in this calculus are the impacts of these pedagogies on students' critical capacities, emerging intellectual identities, and views regarding the meaning of their education.

This essay intends to trouble this traditional approach to first-year and transitions pedagogies by introducing an alternative framework designed to cultivate critical intellectual agency in students. I call this framework *critical inquiry*.

Here, critical inquiry refers not to critical disciplinary projects applied to and engaged in the world *outside the academy* but to critical interrogation of the practices and values that *constitute the academy* itself. As a conceptual core for first-year pedagogies, critical inquiry is designed to unpack the deep contexts of the learning environment for students, making visible its hidden expectations, cultures, and structures of power and privilege. In doing so, it establishes a dialogical relationship between students and the university that prepares students to critically engage the learning environment of the academy as a foundation to the development of their own emerging intellectual identities. Critical inquiry builds on the scholarship of critical constructivism, which has developed over the last twenty-five years in educational theory and research, and draws together several strands in progressive educational theory, including classical pragmatism, as well as critical and feminist theories (Bentley, Garrison, & Fleury, 2003; Désautels, Garrison, & Fleury, 1998; Goodman, 2008; Jofili, Geraldo, & Watts, 1999; Kincheloe, 2005; Malott, 2010; Ross, 1992; Stears, 2009).

This essay will develop in three parts. In the first section, I will trouble the traditional approach to first-year pedagogies by distinguishing them from critical inquiry. While traditional first-year pedagogies focus on developing core academic skills, I will show why a more robust aim should be decoding the epistemologies, cultures, and practices of the disciplines that shape the pedagogical and curricular architectures of colleges and universities. In the second section, I will introduce a concept I call the *meaning gap* in order to more richly illustrate how traditional pedagogies often unwittingly train students and undermine student agency. In the final section, I will show how the meaning gap can be overcome by taking aim at the *double construction of knowledge*. The first construction is the way in which knowledge is produced in the disciplines themselves. The second construction is the way in which knowledge is

reproduced in the classroom and the curriculum. I will ultimately argue that transitions pedagogies should not focus on assimilating students to an academic culture but should establish a dialogical and critical relationship between students and the environment in which their education will be enacted. It is only by establishing such a relationship that we might begin to cultivate critical intellectual agency in our students.[1]

The Trouble with Academic Success

One of the most pervasive and uncritically accepted beliefs in the academy is that it exists for the purposes of the creation, preservation, and transmission of knowledge. This belief gives rise to a pedagogical paradigm that Garrison (1995) calls the "conduit" model in education (p. 726). The conduit model is, in brief, a conceptualization of teaching as the act of distributing decontextualized knowledge and skills from a knowledgeable instructor to an ignorant student (Garrison, 1995, p. 733). The conduit model takes disciplinary subject matter (i.e., academic content) to be the central "object" of pedagogy. It views learning as a student's ability to mentally manipulate (e.g., retain, interpret, reproduce) that object through generic, universalized skills such as reading, writing, and discussion. As Pace (2017) argues, this belief "rests on a form of magical thinking that assumes because certain words are uttered in front of a class, something meaningful has happened in the mind of students" (p. 61). Under the conduit model, students are academically successful when they are able to demonstrate the ability to retain, reproduce, and mentally manipulate the disciplinary content presented in the context of a classroom.

Most first-year programs are charged with meeting specific institutional targets relating to academic success. These include ensuring that students will remain at the institution (retention), achieve a strong grade point average (thriving), and complete their degree in a timely manner (persistence). Although research indicates that attainment of these targets is influenced by a number of psychosocial factors such as students' sense of belonging and capacity for engaging in help-seeking behaviors, it remains ultimately dependent on their ability to perform the kinds of academic tasks demanded of them by faculty inside a classroom context. As such, the majority of first-year and transitions pedagogies focus on either helping students prepare for what will take place in the classroom (e.g., study skills, time management skills, the reading of a syllabus, etc.) or offering direct instruction in the kinds of core skills (e.g., reading, writing, quantitative reasoning, library research) that will likely be deployed in the classroom. In doing so, most transitions pedagogies implicitly adopt the conduit model as the governing paradigm of education and

view their function as assimilating students to this paradigm as efficiently as possible.

To be clear, this essay does not claim that traditional first-year pedagogies of this type are somehow ineffective in achieving their stated goals. In fact, there is a significant amount of research indicating that these pedagogies have a profound and positive effect on metrics such as student GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Glass & Garrett, 1995; Hoff, Cook, & Price, 1996; Newman, 2016; Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2001). This essay, instead, claims that the stated goals of most traditional transitions pedagogies are inadequate in achieving critical forms of education.

Developing core academic skills that allow students to mentally manipulate academic content is a reasonable outcome for a first-year seminar, when its overarching goal is to foster behaviors that assimilate students to a preexisting educational system. Yet, as Eisner (2003) has argued, "the function of schools is surely not primarily to enable students to do well on tests, or even to do well in school itself" (p. 651). Instead, schooling should "enable students to become the architects of their own education so that they can invent themselves during the course of their lives" (Eisner, 2003, p. 652). Organizing first-year seminars around the performance of narrow, decontextualized academic skills largely fails to empower students in harnessing their education toward the development of their own, unique intellectual identities. It does not, for example, prepare students for the kinds of live situations that will require them to adjust their ideas about what counts as knowledge or effective argumentation within the various disciplinary contexts across the curriculum (Jolly & Kavanagh, 2009, p. 709). It also fails to critically engage students in even the most basic questions regarding their own identities as learners and knowers in the world. The traditional view of academic success is, therefore, a necessary but not sufficient condition for those who believe that a college education is about a student's authentic growth and the cultivation of critical intellectual agency.

While traditional pedagogies under the influence of the conduit model intend to change a student's *familiarity with knowledge* via the dissemination of information, critical inquiry claims that the proper aim of higher education is changing a student's *relationship to knowledge* (Désautels et al., 1998, p. 257). Accomplishing this goal requires engaging students in a process of decoding and critically evaluating the very environments in which their education will be carried out. A transitions pedagogy of this type is not intended to make a student conform to an academic culture but, instead, to establish a dialogical relationship between the two. It is only when such a dialogical, rather than a monological, relationship is established that students can begin to harness

the disciplines as frameworks and tools in the context of their own emerging questions and identities.

The Meaning Gap

Understanding the challenge critical inquiry poses to traditional transitions pedagogies requires grasping the distinction between training and education. Training is little more than behavior modification: the capacity to carry out a scripted behavior in response to an external stimulus. Dogs and horses, for example, are trained when they have their actions modified by association with humans, and when they form different sets of habits because humans are concerned with what they do (Dewey, 1980, p. 16). Students are also frequently trained in schools. A student has been trained when he is able to perform an operation in his calculus class without any understanding that *calculus* is the mathematical study of change. Alternatively, a student has been trained when she is able to translate—word by word—a Greek sentence without being able to grapple with the ambiguities and tensive cultural distances contained in the meaning of the whole. In both instances, while the students are capable of performing the academic task and will likely achieve academic success as traditionally defined, they have not yet been educated.

In order for education to occur, students must not only gain the central skills necessary to perform a set of operations, *they must also understand and be able to critically interact with the meanings of the operations they are being asked to perform.* It is only at this deeper level—the level of meaning—that we begin to make sense of our experience, as well as orient and redirect our behaviors and actions toward productive ends (Bentley et al., 2003). Helping students grip onto this subtext of meaning is much more difficult to achieve pedagogically than simply training students to perform those actions themselves. Yet it is only through the gateway of meaning that *training* is transformed into *education*.

An example may help illuminate this idea. In conducting observations of English literature classes, I frequently witness faculty members engaging students in a whole-group, close reading of a text. In these classes, the instructor will often read portions of the text aloud and then ask students a variety of questions asking them to highlight significant details in the text and draw connections between those details. When a student shares something aloud, particularly if the instructor finds it meaningful, the instructor will often nod or give some verbal acknowledgment (e.g., "Yes!" or "Please say more!").

In my observations, it is also common that both students and faculty are frustrated during the exercise of close reading. The students will scour the text, often hesitant to offer details, images, or interpretations. Generally speaking,

their responses (both as individuals and as a collective) are random in nature and show no real sense of coherence or emergent direction. Many students are often lost altogether. The faculty are often equally frustrated because students appear to be disinterested or do not appear to grasp the purpose of the exercise overall. Gutjahr (2004) describes this phenomenon in his first-year English seminars at Indiana University. He (2004, p. 50) writes that he finds students' frequent complaints about close reading practice curious because they seem to be simultaneously concerned that there is no right answer in interpreting literature and, at the same time, that there must be only one right answer in literary interpretation.

Though Gutjahr's observation is intriguing, it is not altogether surprising if one understands the difference between training and education. The problem is not that his students are bad learners but that they have not yet been included in the meanings of the very behaviors they are being asked to deploy.

In my observations, it is clear that the English faculty members leading close reading exercises have a rich sense of how to engage the text in a coherent process of inquiry. Their fluency is built not only on their ability to perform a set of technical and mental operations (e.g., analysis, interpretation, judgment, etc.) but also on how they connect those operations to a deeper paradigm of meaning about the nature of the act of close reading: that it is of value, that it opens up conceptual possibilities, and even that it is one methodological and epistemological framework among many others available. This paradigm of meaning that underpins the act of close reading for the faculty is, however, not shared by the students in the room *even as those students are asked to engage in the same set of mental and technical operations*.

The deep irony of these in-class exercises is that faculty members often believe that their encouragement (e.g., "Yes!" or "Please say more!") is a way of teaching the practice of close reading as a tool for inquiry in their field. Yet, because the students lack this deeper paradigm of meaning that connects their localized behaviors (i.e., the identification of details) to a wider paradigm of meaning (i.e., the values, assumptions, and processes of literary analysis), they experience the process of close reading completely differently than the faculty member.[2] To the instructor, it feels as though he or she is asking the students to apply the tools and frameworks of a discipline to generate mutual understanding; to the students, it feels as though they are being asked to go on a quest for the "right" answers. As a result, the students have no basis by which to evaluate the success, impact, or value of their participation in the act of close reading.

I call this gap that exists between, on one hand, a student's narrow view of an academic task and, on the other hand, a faculty member's rich understanding of the contexts of meaning that surround and ground that task the *meaning gap*.[3] The meaning gap occurs whenever and wherever a student is asked

to perform a set of academic operations (e.g., disciplinary inquiry, classroom discussion, college-level research and writing, etc.) without understanding the hidden paradigms of meaning that underlie those operations.

Failure to overcome the meaning gap can (and often does) have disastrous consequences for a student's learning and critical identity development. Minimally, students may not develop a basis for evaluating, judging, and redirecting their academic behaviors, because they understand those behaviors as nothing more than executing a series of performative operations for a teacher. More detrimentally, their lack of critical awareness often means that they never develop the ability to harness what they are learning in alternative contexts or within the framework of their own questions.

While attending to the meaning gap is crucial throughout the curriculum, I believe that it is particularly important in the context of the first year, as students begin to establish the foundational values and habits that frame the ways in which they will relate to their education. In the case of my example, while the English students may have gained some basic familiarity with the academic content of the course and accrued a cursory understanding of some of the behaviors involved in mentally manipulating its content, in the final account they have largely failed to grasp the overarching *project of literary analysis* or how that project might intersect with their own, emerging identities. While the students may have been adequately trained, they have not yet been educated.

Minding the (Meaning) Gap

Empowering and enabling a student's intellectual identity demands that we change how students *relate to knowledge*. This means that we must develop first-year and transitions pedagogies that confront and directly address the meaning gap in higher education so that students begin to understand themselves not as passive recipients of information but as emerging intellectuals. This demands shifting the central object of transitions pedagogies away from content and core skills and toward the critical contexts and subtexts that shape the cultures of knowing in the academy. To achieve this goal, critical inquiry requires finding ways to create pedagogical interventions that confront what I will call the *double construction of knowledge* in the academy.

The First Construction: Knowledge Produced in the Disciplines

The first construction is the ways in which knowledge is produced within the disciplines. Here, students must begin to understand that knowledge itself is a social construction and that the disciplines are communities of human inquirers involved in their own projects of knowledge production.

Faculty, as disciplinary practitioners, deeply understand the paradigms of knowledge production in their fields. Yet, as a result of the conduit model, students most often receive the lesson that knowledge is stable, unchangeable, and largely the property of experts, rather than a revisable social product (Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2007, p. 10).

There is, in fact, a great deal of evidence that students bring to college a very different understanding of both knowledge and its cultures of production than is held by the faculty (Levstik & Barton, 2002; Pace, 2017, p. 41; Wineburg, 2001). American high school students, for example, often enter college with a view of knowledge as something that is largely stable, unambiguous, and self-contained. Take the following comment made by a high school student regarding scientific knowledge:

> I have a lot of difficulty seeing how scientists can deal [with things we cannot see]. They [the teachers] explain it to us and we understand how [the scientists] could see that. They say: "The distance from the moon to the earth is such and such. . . . " I don't know it by heart. But how did they measure that? They don't have a measuring tape that long! I have a lot of difficulty with that. . . . And the guy who discovered it: How did he do it? It happened just like that one morning? I don't get it. I understand when it has been explained, but this guy nobody ever gave an explanation to, how did he do it? He must have been really gifted. One must necessarily be gifted, interested, intelligent. Some are more intelligent than others. (Désautels & Larochelle, 1989, p. 155)

This example is significant for two reasons. In the first instance, this experience has shaped the student's conceptualization of scientific knowledge itself. Here, the student struggles to make sense of how scientific knowledge relates to the processes of its production. As Désautels et al. (1998) argue, the student reduces the project of science "to a familiar process of literally describing what can be seen, thus ignoring its essentially relational, constructed, and contingent character" (p. 257). This student has come to understand science not as a communal, iterative, and human process of knowledge construction but as an objective act by a single observer that reveals and catalogs the underlying "true" nature of reality.

Even more problematically for critical educators is that this experience has also impacted the student's very identity as a knower. The student imagines that "scientists" are a class of persons imbued with a particular kind of gift that he does not and cannot possess. He has no sense of himself as an emerging scientist or how the process of education might enable him to become one but, instead, understands the role of a "science student" as someone who retains scientific

facts about the world. It would be reasonable to assume that the student views all education as simply the process of retaining and reproducing information *about* the world, rather than a process of gaining capacities to engage and participate *in* the world.

To combat these errors in thinking, critical inquiry demands that we introduce students to the very idea that knowledge is socially constructed, as well as how and why it is constructed. In doing so, we reveal the contingency, contextuality, and theory- and value-ladenness inherent in all knowledge claims (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 9). We also concurrently empower students' critical relationship to those knowledge claims. As students begin to understand knowledge as the subject of construction and critique, they also begin to understand themselves as persons who are legitimate participants in the process of disciplinary knowledge deconstruction and reconstruction.

Teaching for critical inquiry, therefore, first requires that we move beyond presenting decontextualized, dehumanized knowledge as the center of our pedagogies and begin to engage and teach the disciplines as collections of value-laden and human practices. We must also bring students into the practices and questions that drive our work as intellectuals, rather than simply presenting our work as a set of ordered and organized findings.

The Second Construction: Knowledge Reproduced in the Classroom

The second construction is the way in which knowing and knowledge are reproduced within the built environment of the school. Here, students must begin to understand how the classroom and curriculum are value- and power-laden constructions that are shaped by the disciplinary, cultural, and social paradigms and values of the faculty.[4] This lesson extends not only to the rules governing basic classroom interactions and standards for academic performance but also to the expectations for deploying core academic skills, such as reading, writing, and critical thinking.

While this second construction may appear superfluous to the project of critical inquiry, failure to adequately address it can be incredibly damaging to a student's emerging intellectual identity. This is because the conduit model largely obfuscates the power- and value-ladenness of the classroom itself by regulating and distributing knowledge and core skills in ways that hide the issues of power and control implicit within them (Bentley et al., 2003, p. 6). In doing so, it presents the values, expectations, and norms of the classroom as objective and value-neutral, rather than deeply shaped by disciplinary conventions and paradigms, as well as the social and cultural beliefs of the faculty.

Because these subtexts remain invisible, the conduit model robs students of conceptualizing and critically interrogating the very rules governing the ways

in which they are forced to relate the learning environment of the classroom and themselves as learners. For students whose identities and capacities do not conflict with these norms, the classroom appears to be an objective space.[5] On the other hand, those students whose cultural, social, and ethnic identities and/or neurological capacities fall outside the matrix of traditional academic norms often find their emerging intellectual identities stifled while—at the same time—being unable to conceptualize the critical dynamics in which they are being forced to participate.

A simple example may help illustrate this idea. In overseeing the first-year curriculum at my campus, I speak with many first-year students who are bewildered by the fact that they are told in one class that they are strong writers and then in their very next class are encouraged to seek writing remediation. Alternatively, I speak with students struggling because the reading strategies that served them well in a history class, for example, are no longer helpful in their philosophy class. The disjunction experienced by these students is rarely a function of their own capacities as learners but is more often a product of a misunderstanding regarding the construction of the classroom on the part of both the students and their instructors.

In these examples, the performance of core academic skills is presented to the students as being universalized and generalizable, when, in fact, their performance and evaluation are largely a product of the disciplinary conventions and preferences of the faculty (Becher, 1994; Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi, & Ashwin, 2006). Because these critical disciplinary contexts in which academic behaviors are deployed remain invisible, students often cannot effectively adjust and redirect their own behaviors in relationship to those contexts. Additionally, if and when the classroom itself becomes oppressive to their identity as learners, students are also rendered powerless to make sense of their experience or mount an effective critique.

These effects extend into even dimensions of pedagogy that might appear so mundane as to be neutral but are, in fact, deeply shaped by micro-contexts of culture and power (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Harlow, 2003; Schrodt et al., 2008). hooks (1994) argues, for example, that bourgeois class values shape both the basic modes of relatedness and the rules governing classroom discourse inside the traditional liberal arts seminar. Specifically, she (1994) argues that it is "necessary for students to assimilate bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable [in a seminar environment]. Bourgeois values in the classroom create a barrier, blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict, warding off dissent. Students are often silenced by means of their acceptance of class values that teach them to maintain order at all costs" (p. 178). As hooks illuminates, even the most basic classroom behaviors are shaped and evaluated

through interwoven disciplinary, cultural, and social expectations that remain invisible to students and the faculty but dramatically impact the possibility for learning, achievement, and critical identity development of students.

Traditional transitions pedagogies largely ignore these kinds of cultural, social, and political values encoded in university pedagogies and curricula because they assume the classroom to be either objective or, at the very least, closed to interpretation and critical appraisal. As a result, while students might learn "core" academic skills (i.e., writing, reading, discussion) in a transitions classroom, they often come to view these skills as universal, ahistorical capacities that can be deployed without regard to context. Yet it is only by accessing and understanding the critical contexts of the classroom, and, in particular, how classrooms are shaped by disciplinary values, that students can develop the fluencies necessary for basic academic performance and, more importantly, for developing their own critical identities in relationship to those contexts.

Confronting the Double Construction

The conduit model obfuscates the double construction of knowledge by presenting contingent and mutable socially constructed forms of knowledge and academic skills as both necessary and unalterable. It reformulates knowledge such that the complexities and contingencies of the social practices that produced that knowledge are concealed from students (Bentley et al., 2003). It presents core skills (e.g., academic writing and reading) as though they are universalized templates to be applied, rather than value-laden practices that are deeply related to the contexts in which they will be deployed.

Pedagogies influenced by the conduit model are further reinforced by traditional curricular architectures, which defer to what Bernstein (1972) denotes as "the ultimate mystery of the subject, only reaching very late in educational life . . . the notion that knowledge is permeable, that its orderings are provisional" (p. 57). This means that the kind of deconstruction of disciplinary and schooling practices demanded by critical inquiry typically occurs at the end of the undergraduate curriculum (if it happens at all) or is left to occur at the graduate level.

To the contrary, critical inquiry seeks to foreground the constructed nature of knowledge in the disciplines, the classroom, and the curriculum by exposing it as contingent, contextualized, and value-oriented (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 10). It involves students in examining the processes that originally led to such knowledge production, as well as the processes by which it is reproduced via curriculum (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 10). It seeks to contextualize and humanize the learning environment for students, as well as raise questions about the types of knowledge learners interact with (Stears, 2009, p. 400). It requires that

we connect disciplinary content (*what* we know) to social, personal, political, or economic values (*why* we know it); the methodological, technological, and cultural practices of its construction (*how* we came to know it); and the identities, positionalities, and contexts in which it exists and is deployed (*who* is authorized to know it).

It is only through engaging in these deeper sets of meanings that students begin to understand and develop their own critical capacities and identities. From the very beginning of their college education, students must begin to conceptualize disciplines not as collections of facts or as theoretical templates to be applied but, instead, as robust artifacts in their own evolving conceptualizations of and capacities for inquiry (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 14). Students must also begin to understand that the university itself is a collection of microcultures, each with its own set of values, expectations, and assumptions. This not only makes the learning environment more transparent but enables students to begin to understand and develop a meaningful, critical, and participatory relationship with those cultures. In the words of Rich (1979), in this way students begin to understand that education is not something *delivered* but, instead, something that must be *claimed*.

Conclusion

Because of the pervasiveness of the conduit model in American high schools, most traditional undergraduate students enter the academy with little or no understanding of the disciplinary or social contexts that ground and direct its cultures, values, and expectations. Instead, incoming students often view the classroom as a value-neutral space, the disciplines as collections of expert knowledge, and the curriculum as a pathway for certification. Traditional transitions pedagogies that focus on assimilating students to an academic culture do little to divest students of their presuppositions and may, in fact, unwittingly reproduce and reify the very same cultures of learning that disempower student agency.

As a framework for first-year pedagogies, critical inquiry seeks to do the opposite. It challenges students to critically interrogate and reinterpret the ways in which they inhabit the environment of the school. Through unmasking the value- and power-ladenness of the disciplines and the built environment of the school, critical inquiry establishes a dialogical relationship between incoming students and the environments in which their education will be enacted. It also empowers students to take a critical approach to their own learning, asking critical questions not only about what they are learning but about why and how they are learning in a particular way. Further, it helps students begin to see the disciplines as frameworks for practice that can be harnessed in the pursuit of

their own emerging questions. It shifts, in other words, not only *what* students know but also their emerging *relationship to knowledge*.

While critical inquiry might be deployed as the focus of an entire general education program, it is particularly important within the context of transitions pedagogies. This is because as students enter a new academic culture, it is profoundly important that they understand how to critically engage and harness that culture in terms of their own growth and emerging identities. This is perhaps even more important for students from minoritized, marginalized, and first-generation populations who might not have the social and cultural resources or creative confidence necessary to access and critique the invisible subtexts that lie behind the content presented in their classes.

Achieving the goals advanced by critical inquiry requires that faculty not simply include students in what we know (i.e., academic content) but introduce students to the very questions, practices, and cultures driving our work as scholars and intellectuals. It is only in this way that students can begin to understand themselves as emerging intellectuals. In the final account, critical inquiry seeks to empower students to understand themselves not as observers *of* the world but as critical participants who can harness their education *in* the world in order to change the world.

AARON STOLLER is the author of *Knowing and Learning as Creative Action* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and co-editor of *Contemporary Philosophical Proposals for the University* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). He lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he teaches at Colorado College and directs the First Year Experience program.

NOTES

1. With limited space available, I am regrettably unable to treat both the aims and methods of critical inquiry. As such, this essay will focus on the aims of critical inquiry alone. I believe that achieving critical inquiry also demands a substantial shift in the methods by which those aims are achieved. An essay focused on methodological issues relating to the concept of critical inquiry is currently under preparation.

2. For further information on how novices and experts approach and experience a process of inquiry differently, see Schön, 1983.

3. While this particular example was pulled from my observations of English literature courses, due to the pervasiveness of the conduit model in the academy, I have encountered the meaning gap in the pedagogies of every discipline I have observed.

4. Because of the deep influence of the conduit model on their beliefs about teaching, I have found that this second construction is often significantly more difficult for faculty to grasp. As stated earlier, the conduit model views teaching as a form of telling: a simple and objective distribution of information from expert to novice. As a result of this belief, faculty often struggle to grasp the idea that the classroom is a value-laden environment and that they are its primary architect.

5. Compounding the difficulty of applying critical inquiry to the built environment of the school is the fact that almost all faculty are atypical learners who excelled among their undergraduate peers. As such, faculty often have significant difficulty understanding the critical dynamics of a traditional classroom environment because they themselves benefited academically and intellectually from traditional academic norms. They often represent the "learning privileged" for whom the oppressive dynamics of the classroom remain invisible.

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