

Unsettling a Metaphor We Teach By: A Hybrid Essay on WAC Students as “Immigrants”

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“[W]hen a man appears and names a thing, when he says this is water and water is cool, something unprecedented takes place. What the third term, man, does is not merely enter into interaction with the others— though he does this too— but stand apart from two of the terms and say that one ‘is’ the other. ... A is clearly not B. But were it not for this cosmic blunder, man would not be man; he would never be capable of folly and he would never be capable of truth. Unless he says that A is B, he will never *know* A or B; he will only respond to them.”

—Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* 157 (my emphasis)

“It is often possible to examine the implications of one’s own statements by taking all the metaphors and turning them into the ‘X is Y’ form, and quite often writers gain a much better grip on their writing when they practice doing this.”

—Roger Sale, *On Writing* 156

THE LANGUAGE WE USE TO DESCRIBE our teaching, ourselves, and our students is not exempt from the fortunate “cosmic blunder” that Walker Percy describes in my first epigraph. We understand one thing not only in terms of another, but also by renaming it; our acts of metaphorical renaming are, as Percy puts it, “mistakes” (65) that nevertheless allow us to understand. If we take Roger Sale’s sound old piece of advice (in my second epigraph) and examine how some of our more pervasive metaphors about writing instruction work, we might indeed make the implications of our language available for closer scrutiny and better control.

Some of the most ingrained metaphors for writing instruction—developmental, medical, economic, and religious among them—have in fact been examined in recent decades. For instance, several scholars have paid attention to how metaphors define literacy (Scribner), shape our understanding of texts (Bowden), give us insight into acts of composing (Tobin), and structure our experience of composition textbooks (Kail) as well as the field of writing instruction (Reynolds). Although Strenski has examined military and monastic metaphors for teaching that indirectly shape how we see students, less attention has been paid to the more direct metaphorical construction of students. This is particularly true of WAC students. In one of the more conscious attempts to conceptualize a productive identity for WAC students, Michelle Sidler has argued for a notion of students as “citizen-experts” (49). Sidler’s metaphor profitably hearkens to the classical tradition of the citizen as public rhetor, but because it is a *metaphor* it immediately reminds me (as all metaphors do) of its limitations, e.g., of how some students—despite being “citizens” in one sense—are literally not U.S. citizens in another sense.

In addition, Sidler’s metaphor brings to mind a larger constellation of immigration metaphors that I see at work in recent and current writing pedagogy, particularly in the subtle construction of WAC students as immigrants. Although these immigration metaphors are often much less visible than the one Sidler offers, they are nevertheless powerful ways of imagining identities for our students, identities that are simultaneously enabling and disabling. Concomitantly, they construct roles for teachers and shape our conceptions of what writing instruction might be. Part of their power is drawn precisely from the fact that they are less visible and so ingrained in our professional discourse that we sometimes use them tacitly and unawares.

My goal in this essay is to bring them to light in the way suggested by Roger Sale, so that I can “unsettle” them (to use another metaphor sometimes associated with immigration). My aim is not to offer an exhaustive survey of where and how these metaphors operate, and I do not argue that they should be abandoned—even if that were possible. Instead, I return to some of the earlier, “landmark” essays on WAC (so designated by Bazerman and Russell) in order to illuminate how a few of these immigration metaphors entered WAC discourse and then got consolidated in later essays through a double-sided process of conscious citation and tacit tradition. I then weigh some of the enabling and disabling implications of the metaphors.

I am speaking, here, of students as figures who are constructed as “other” in our professional discourse. And I am using the word “figure” in ways that are broadly informed by postcolonial theory. In this sense, the metaphorized figure of the student is what Edward Said might call a “system for producing certain kinds of statements”

(274). In other words, when students get named as immigrants, the metaphor inevitably draws a cluster of attributes around itself. These attributes enable us to make statements so that we can control (or, in Sale's terms, get a "grip" on) some ideas about whom it is we are teaching. And, as Percy might remind us, this act of naming leads us not only to truth but also to folly. As we will see, the metaphor of student-as-immigrant "others" and distances students even as it welcomes, assimilates, or incorporates their ways of knowing and writing.

It is important to note that two current trends give particular urgency to this cluster of immigration metaphors: the increasingly polarized public debates about U.S. immigration, and a much-needed move to "internationalize" rhetoric and writing pedagogy in the US. (For recent examples of work that sees rhetoric and writing instruction from international perspectives, see Canagarajah, Foster and Russell, Dubino, and the "Special Topic" issues of *College English* on transnational feminist rhetorics [May 2008] and on Chinese rhetoric [March 2010].) Christiane Donahue argues that this "internationalizing" trend needs to be understood more precisely, and she further notes that some of this work makes the mistake of "equating language and identity in a seamless relationship" (224). One way to unsettle that seamless relationship is, I believe, to investigate some of the international metaphors that shape our teaching, particularly the metaphor that configures students as immigrants.

To pursue this investigation, I use a hybrid academic-personal style that is intended to enact a journey of sorts, at times deliberately withholding topic sentences in order to illustrate how immigration is a disorienting experience of difference that is gradually negotiated and never fully resolved. I will move from a discussion of immigration metaphors in some early WAC scholarship, to a more general analysis of how metaphors operate. I then shift genres to a set of personal anecdotes about my own experience as an immigrant, before returning to my analysis. The personal narrative is intended to disrupt the scholarly parts of this essay, but I will attempt to draw some direct conclusions from it even as I deliberately leave other conclusions to my readers. The insights I will offer are what Kenneth Burke might call "poetically true" (144), rather than semantically true. In other words, they are not pragmatic true-or-false claims, but insights that have what he calls a "resonance" (160) that can enable perspective.

In my conclusion I will suggest some specific areas of teacher research and practice; however, my primary goal is not to recommend teaching methods or programmatic action, but to urge a heightened critical awareness of how our professional discourse works in relation to our teaching. This critical awareness can inform several

aspects of our work in WAC, especially the following: the way we imagine and write about our students; the manner in which we teach citation; an understanding of how teaching students to assimilate new knowledge into their existing knowledge can also erase important differences; an understanding of how complex a teacher or writer's authority and legitimacy are in the eyes of our students; and an ongoing awareness of the metaphoricity of teaching itself.

Immigration Metaphors in WAC Discourse

In 1987 Lucille McCarthy set out to boldly do what she said no one had done before. She decided to “follow” college students as they “progress[ed]” in what she called their “journey across the curriculum” (127). As she did so, she settled not only on one particular student's journey but also on the “metaphor of a newcomer in a foreign country,” which, she decided, was a “powerful way of looking at [an undergraduate student] as he worked to use the new languages in unfamiliar academic territories” (126). When McCarthy published her findings in a highly influential *Research in the Teaching of English* essay, later collected in Bazerman and Russell's *Landmark Essays on Writing Across the Curriculum*, she chose as her title metaphor “A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum.” Her title, of course, riffs on the title of Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel.

Four years later, Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman cited McCarthy's work in their own study of a student's travels and “socialization” (211) as a writer. This time the subject was a graduate student in Rhetoric and Composition, whom they describe as “entering a research community (and by implication, a discourse community)” (211). Significantly, they use travel metaphors very similar to McCarthy's. “Language users,” they write, “travel from one community context to another” (212), sometimes having to navigate “a difficult passage from one academic culture to another” (229–30). The student's goal is, in their words, to “master the ways of speaking, reading, and writing which are indigenous to the culture” (230) that he or she enters.

These immigration metaphors seem, if not inevitable, certainly intuitive when we think not only of Writing Across the Curriculum but also of education in general. Indeed, the rhetoric of education, perhaps especially the rhetoric of writing instruction, is saturated with metaphors of travel, acculturation, and immigration. One could cite countless examples. For instance, in an attempt to deploy Paulo Freire's pedagogy, Kyle Fiore and Nan Elsasser, like McCarthy, speak of their students as “strangers in a strange world” (207). In varied contexts, Patricia Bizzell, Vivian Zamel, and Christine Farris have employed similar language. This pervasive and foundational immigration

metaphor is a constellation of terms that often cast students into the role of travelers who undertake a one-way journey to a place in which they are imagined to settle as residents. The students undertake not just any journey, moreover, but one whose path is ascendant and whose destination often promises nothing less than a utopian transformation of the traveler's identity. The teachers, in turn, are often imagined as stable, rather than moving. They are cast into the role of what McCarthy calls "native-speaker guides who are training" the newcomers (133).

This language might not surprise us; it may not even arrest our attention. After all, education, in its broadest sense, is ultimately a process of change—for the better, we hope—and change requires movement. Indeed, the very words "curriculum" and "course" are sedimented by their semantic histories with images of running along a path. And the word "pedagogy," with its legs firmly in ideas of the pedestrian, comes from the name for the slave who led the child to school in antiquity.¹ Moreover, the very genre many of us teach, the "essay," is historically and epistemologically tied to notions of travel and exploration, and the word "educate" is related to the Latin *educere*, to lead out.

We fall so easily into this language that it's difficult to imagine how we might otherwise describe our work as writing teachers. Indeed, Berkenkotter, *et al* argue that teachers in the disciplines are "native speakers' who may have used the language in their discipline for so long that it is partially invisible to them." They therefore suggest that the teachers' "first challenge will be to appreciate just how foreign and difficult their language is for student newcomers" (153). This, I take it, is one of the pervasive starting assumptions for WAC: to teach the language of a discipline that seems almost invisible to its accustomed users. However, I want to argue that we need to excavate this assumption to a level deeper than the one suggested by Berkenkotter. The language we need to examine, the one that is partially invisible to us, is not just the actual language of the disciplines, but also the language in which we describe both how and why we teach our disciplines in the first place. I am speaking of the rhetoric of pedagogy, the terms in which we cast our assumptions about teaching. In this case, as we see, the assumptions are partly rooted in a powerful constellation of immigration metaphors.

Immigration Metaphors on Two Legs

In the rhetorical view I am adopting, metaphor is of course never simple ornamentation, a mere matter of word choice, but always a use of language that shapes ideas and

¹ See Mariolina Salvatori's *Pedagogy* for a history of this term.

actions. In their influential book *Metaphors We Live By* Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors are not simply tropes in literary discourse, but concepts inherent to all language, concepts that both partially reflect and partially shape the way we conceive of our world. To many of us, particularly in fields like English or Philosophy, this view has become commonplace in the last twenty-five years or so. Lakoff and Johnson's point, in part, is that "in allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept ... a [metaphor] can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (10). Since a metaphor is never total (not all of our students are actual immigrants, for instance), "part of a metaphorical concept does not and cannot fit" (13). Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors have both a physical and cultural basis (19), and that part of a metaphor's meaning comes from its role within a particular system of metaphors (18). The two parts—or legs—of our metaphor, student and immigrant, are linked by the word "is"; and this linking verb is "a shorthand for some set of experiences on which the metaphor is based" (20).

This is to say that we might sometimes actually experience our students as being something like immigrants whose travels have brought them to our native shores, but what interests me is how this particular metaphor works within a larger metaphorical system that is grounded in cultural assumptions. I don't know if immigration to, say, France or Australia would offer the same set of insights into this language, in part because the metaphors are to some extent cultural and not just based in the physicality of movement. When I attend to these immigration metaphors, then, I am seeing the U.S. as the adopted country.

Since I am a real immigrant to the U.S. (as are some of our students), I want to use myself in order to think about how immigration to the U.S. is inflected with all manner of assumptions about culture, language, identity, boundaries, and knowledge—assumptions that are then, via metaphor, carried over into the teaching of writing. As I will suggest, many of these assumptions are utopian in nature. They limit us as much as they enable us. But when we examine them, we might enable new ways of seeing our work. My attention, then, is drawn by these sorts of questions: What does this constellation of metaphors reveal and obscure? How might it shape our thoughts and actions? And what can we learn from the parts that cannot fit? Our answers will, of course, not take us beyond metaphor to a pure language of reflection, but they may lead us to more productive metaphors, to a fuller awareness of the risks inherent in those we already use, or to a deeper exploration of how our metaphors might affect our students.

Despite recent scholarly attention to transnational rhetorics and various global Englishes, one source of difficulty is that when we speak of language, neatly bordered

national and regional notions come to mind too readily. I believe this resonance too often gets mapped tacitly onto academic disciplines in WAC discourse. Hence, if we want not only to teach the particular language—the discourse—of a discipline but also to analyze such instruction, we start to overlay our understanding of the discipline with the map of a country. This metaphorical overlay of country onto discipline can lead us too readily to see the experts in a particular discipline as “citizens” who speak a common language and share a common culture. Accordingly, some theorists have imagined the various disciplines in anthropological terms, as somewhat monolithic, discrete “discourse communities.” For instance, Carol Berkenkotter, invoking Bizzell and Porter, asserts that experts in a discipline are “like-minded people” (211).² In critiquing and resisting this version of discourse communities, Mary Louise Pratt has drawn upon her research on travel writing in order to pose the term “contact zones” as an alternative, thus attempting to disrupt what she sees as an overly monolithic, apolitical, and tranquil notion of discourse communities.³ Many have adopted Pratt’s term. I would argue, however, that both of these terms preserve the fundamental notions of travel and immigration, rather than calling them into question.

The word “metaphor,” of course, means “to carry beyond.” In this sense, metaphor is itself grounded in notions of travel, as is the word “discourse.” In the next section of this essay, I will anchor this metaphor of immigration in an experiential, anecdotal account of real immigration, my own, in order to follow my journey as a student and teacher in a strange land. The following section is meant to interrupt the flow and tone of this essay by presenting some of the metaphorical ideas I’ve been examining about teaching writing from the other, more literal side, so to speak. In other words, these fragmentary anecdotes are intended to help me establish—in a different genre—some of the points I have been setting up thus far, points to which I will return.

I am somewhat reluctant to use myself as an example in an academic essay. This is partly a case of diffidence, partly because I am sometimes uncomfortable with the invocation of personal experience as authority in an academic essay, but mostly because my story has neither the pathos of *Angela’s Ashes* nor the depth of Willa Cather’s fiction. It is tame and middle class. My transposition to the U.S. seems seamless, my anecdotes urbane and even trivial. So they seem. But this is exactly why I wish to use them. I do so not in order to claim some sort of privileged relationship to my subject

² In composition theory we see this anthropological inflection most starkly in Stephen North’s *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*.

³ Similarly, Joseph Harris has aptly critiqued the metaphor of “community.”

matter, but to call attention to the complex experiential dimension in which one leg of the immigration metaphor is grounded.

In the following anecdotes—which are meant to be oblique, but also to offer some grounding for the metaphors I’m examining—I hope my readers will hear and *infer* some insights into how the metaphors reveal and hide these aspects of teaching:

- The complex ways in which an immigrant/student might see new knowledge, language, and identity;
- The difficulty of explaining the essence (or truth) of a place, culture, or academic field to an immigrant/student;
- The slippery difference between tacit knowledge and what needs to be taught explicitly to a newcomer/student;
- The ways in which locals/teachers simultaneously translate and domesticate “foreign” ideas by renaming them in familiar terms;
- The kinetic fickleness of authority that is not always visible to the eyes of a newcomer who might see the “native” as spokesperson for a place or body of knowledge.

One Leg of the Metaphor: Anecdotes from My Experience as an Immigrant Student and Teacher

Like many utopian tales, immigration stories usually start with the departure or the arrival. As the travel writer Jonathan Raban observes, one of the most wonderful sentences in English reads: “Having arrived in Liverpool, I took ship for the new world” (1). Yes, this is a wonderful sentence. Like Raban, I cannot read it without being stirred by the promise of utopia, the dream of personal transformation. The neat grammar of two words, “having arrived,” simply dispenses with the old life and launches the new. But it’s not so simple, of course. A story of immigration really begins long before the departure and arrival. Its grammar is such that one leaves a life in mid-sentence, and is left to parse its anticipated but unfinished structure as though it were a long series of ellipses before a new sentence one writes.

When I came, alone, to this new world from South Africa, where my family has lived for six generations, I came with English as my native language and several years of American film, television, and music in my head. Yet on the flight from New York to Boston my first day here, I could understand hardly a word anyone said. Later, I amused people at parties by speaking about the “boot” and the “cubby hole” of a car. I inadvertently offended people by calling them “homely,” by which I meant “hospitable.” I was often not understood by waiters because my pauses and inflection were

different enough to be useless. At times I am still not understood, after all these years, and I am smitten. Sometimes I am reluctant to speak in a group because my accent calls attention to me, marks me. I speak and people ask, “Do I detect an accent? You have an accent.” My reply often surprises them: “So do you.” I’ve tried to speak with an American accent. The South African actress Charlize Theron got it right (apparently by watching endless reruns of *The Love Boat*); when I try, however, all I can manage is a grotesque parody of Billy Bob Thornton in *Slingblade*. Perhaps I should hire a voice coach for formal instruction, but I doubt it will work.

In the 1980s, when I was new to this country, Americans seemed to me a cohesive group. This was partly because I wanted—and needed—they to be so, and partly because that’s how the few that I knew represented themselves. “Americans like their bacon crispy,” I was told. “We don’t say ‘in hospital’ but ‘in *the* hospital,’ “people instructed me. “That’s the way we do things in this country, Steve” became a refrain from well-intentioned people seeking to acculturate me. At the time I took their word for it, because they represented for me the culture as a whole. They were natives. Because I had taken a stand against the former South African government and its policy of *Apartheid*, they sometimes wanted to put me on display, especially when South Africa was in the news, as it often was in the 1980s. To maintain my integrity as a person and not a symbol, I shied away. As a “foreign” student I was required to pass a written and oral English proficiency test before I could assume my duties as a Teaching Assistant. As someone who already held a graduate degree in English Education at the time, this requirement astonished me; however, it surprised me less than the course I was asked to teach: Freshman Writing. There had been no such course in my South African undergraduate education. I couldn’t imagine Writing as something worthy of course credit at a university. Once I began teaching, my students used phrases like “beefed up” and “the best thing since sliced bread.” Since these clichés were new to me, I praised students for their originality.

My old American friends like to tell me I’m losing my accent after all these years. I am now convinced that university writing instruction is imperative, so much so that I did my PhD in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1990s. However, I don’t quite know when I came to this conviction—or how. When I wrote my dissertation on revision I had no idea it was in some ways autobiographical. While I was a graduate student I was cited in a *College English* article, in which the author had me say, anonymously: “Language is a great, hungry monster that continually eats away at reality” (Welch 399). I wish I *had* said that. What I actually said was: “One person’s narrative can eat up another’s.” Perhaps, however, the author was not even quoting *me*;

she was using pseudonyms in her essay, and I seem to be “James.” That’s how I first entered the discourse of my field: as James, “a political exile from a country with a long history of repression” (399). It’s hard to know if that’s really me, though; citation can be tricky. But it’s not unusual for immigrants to be renamed upon arrival, so why not call me “James”?

At the University of Pittsburgh I taught a course on Utopian Science Fiction. After completing my PhD, I taught courses titled “The History of the Essay” and “Travel Writing” at Loyola University in Baltimore. I often cite or use what I learned when I taught these classes— I’ve done so in this very essay—but it’s not the type of citation that calls attention to itself. Citation can so often be implicit. By the time Harvard University hired me in 2002, I had seldom used the word “thesis” and didn’t really believe in it; yet, there, I used it all the time—and I believed in it because it made sense in the context of that writing program. But now that the University of Massachusetts-Boston has hired me, I’ve all but discarded this word; it makes less sense in my new context.

Sometimes kind Americans will want to give me an experience or object that is “typically American.” But they can’t think of anything; and so they will ask me, as though I would know, “What’s typically American?” Since the advent of its democracy in 1994, I am hardly ever asked about South Africa anymore. Listeners almost always respond to my occasional anecdotes about a South African food or tree or idiom by translating the anecdote into American terms with the phrase “it’s like.” Their metaphors and similes sometimes, ironically, rename my experience and make it more familiar to them, but more strange to me. For instance, people assume I like cricket—which actually bores me—and that cricket is “like” baseball, which I actually enjoy. None of this bothers me too much; I would probably do the same if I were they. I’m a New York Yankee fan, even though I’ve lived in Boston (home city of the rival Red Sox) on and off for thirteen years. Why? Because when I first came to the U.S., the Yankees were the only baseball team I had heard of; and, inscrutably, I thought they were the team for which the immigrants rooted. I cannot trace the origin of this odd idea, but it has caused my neighbors to hurl abuse at me, making me feel distanced from a city I otherwise embrace.

Some Americans have lived here all their lives and understand less English than I understood on that baffling flight from New York to Boston. Not too many can tell me where they’re from: “I’m from all over,” they say—especially those who come from military families. Some of my best students at Harvard reminded me very much of the Basic Writing students I loved teaching at the University of Pittsburgh. In recent years my students have described each other’s work as “dope” and some of the course

materials as “sick.” I’m not always sure I know what they mean. I’ve lived and taught in Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Missouri. I have found that in all these places people enjoy those typically American foods, Spam and kielbasa. And some like their bacon chewy.

The Other Leg of the Metaphor: Possible Implications

As the previous section suggests, an immigrant seeking to grasp how a new language reflects the culture of his/her new home country can too easily imagine the new land in monolithic, stable terms and the locals as authorized spokespersons for it. The identities and experiences of an immigrant, in turn, are translated and assimilated in puzzling ways by the locals. As I have been suggesting, these aspects of immigration have possible implications for WAC scholarship and teaching.

For instance, Charles Bazerman describes how the “accumulated knowledge” of a field (represented by its literature) is “incorporated into the language” we teach (164). Of course there is much truth to this. But Bazerman and others sometimes write of this knowledge and this language—and the relationship between the knowledge and its language—as though all were in a fairly stable (though admittedly accumulating) arrangement into which students are initiated. On closer examination, however, the accumulated knowledge of a field might seem more unsettled than stable, and its relation to the language of that field more oblique than direct.

This is especially true if we attend to how the language of a discipline is often built on various forms of citation (citation itself being a form of immigration in which discourse is moved). The travel question here is: What happens when discourse comes from elsewhere, when the very language to which we are acculturating newcomers is, itself, an immigrant of sorts? In some fields, especially in some of the humanities and social sciences, voices from outside the home field continually disrupt the homogeneity on the inside to a considerable degree, making it more difficult to represent and teach discipline-specific discourse to newcomers.

Here I’m building on a point Deborah Brandt makes in *Literacy as Involvement*, where she argues that WAC instruction has sometimes overemphasized discourse. “Understanding language alone,” she insists, “cannot be a way in to membership in a social group” (120) because such membership has to do with other matters such as “tacit knowledge,” which must be acquired indirectly and never just in the form of explicit instruction. In addition to my own immigrant experience of how tacit knowledge operates, here I would offer the example of Berkenkotter, *et al* citing McCarthy (which I discussed earlier in this essay). We have seen that they cite her work not only explic-

itly by name—a standard academic move one might easily teach a student to make—but also tacitly, by picking up and using a certain kind of rhetoric and its metaphors. The latter is far more difficult to teach as a writerly move.

Yet as teachers and scholars we pick up and use this rhetoric and its metaphors every day. It is part of what we cite, but sometimes unawares, and it can take on an almost dangerous life of its own. Bazerman rightly points out how the established literature in a given field becomes an “object” upon which we can act, something “largely autonomous” (161). Indeed, the cited material of a discipline can sometimes become what Brandt might call an “insular text world” (43) that is visible to students in ways that implicit knowledge is not. Karl Popper has, strikingly, called this new place a “third world” (qtd. in Bazerman 161). Students, like immigrants, might see this text world as more stable than it is, especially if we construct students as immigrants in our professional discourse and pedagogical imaginations.

We might say, then, that the discourses of the disciplines are not just, in David Bartholomae’s often quoted but seldom understood phrase, ones that novice students must “appropriate (or be appropriated by)” (624), but also discourses that *themselves* sometimes appropriate the language of other experts and other disciplines. I understand Bartholomae’s “or” to mean “in other words,” since appropriating is always also a way of being appropriated. As I hope my immigration anecdotes illustrate, I do not see appropriation or assimilation as an “either/or” dichotomy. In fact, even as I write this essay, I feel the shifting tensions between my self-representation as both newcomer and insider in a place that keeps changing.

Experts and teachers in a discipline can be seen by students as settled citizens of Brandt’s “insular text world,” since, as Berkenkotter *et al* put it, “to publish and to be cited is to enter the community’s discourse” (213). Yet an expert’s relationship to that world might be as changing and ambiguous as was the relationship of the citizens to the US in my anecdotes from the previous section. In fact, many academics, far from being the resident citizens, are increasingly itinerant and have to acculturate to the various institutions in which we teach. In doing so, we sometimes find our authority as what McCarthy called “native-speaker guides” (133) complicated because we revise the language and methods we use. At times, we are the newcomers and our students guide us—yet teachers in the professional discourse are seldom metaphorized as immigrants.

As I mentioned in my introduction, my primary goal in this essay is not to recommend teaching practices or an administrative course of action for WAC programs, but to offer some ideas that have what Burke calls “resonance” (160). However, I would like

to conclude with some suggestions about possible ways to use and pursue research in light of the metaphor that this essay has sought to illuminate and unsettle. In doing so, I believe we can heighten our critical awareness of how our professional discourse about students relates to our teaching.

One course of action would involve examining course materials, especially writing assignments and handouts that offer advice on writing in WAC courses, to see if (and how) the metaphorical constellation of student-as-immigrant surfaces there. This research might be followed by ethnographic or institutional study of how students respond in their performances as readers and writers to our construction of them as immigrants. For instance, do students use the same metaphor—tacitly or overtly—to construct themselves? In addition, we might deliberately test other metaphors to see if they alter our expectations and behavior as teachers, and, in turn, if they alter the responses of our students. These other metaphors—all no less troubling and complex than the immigrant metaphor—could include students as consumers, followers, climbers, laborers, builders, converts, Burke’s conversationalists (110), or Canagarajah’s international “code mesh[ers]” (598) who bring together various Englishes in their writing. Some of these metaphors are already ingrained in our professional discourse and need further illumination, as do our metaphors for teachers. Moreover, I believe new and existing citation studies can provide important insights into just what Brandt’s “insular text world” really looks like, especially if we deliberately ask students to characterize it for us.

Though these forms of teacher research might improve our work in WAC, none will bring us beyond the shaping force of the language we use, sometimes automatically, to account for how we teach, what we teach, and why. And this inescapability of Percy’s fortunate “cosmic blunder” is our most compelling reason for attending to the metaphors of our professional discourse.

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