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## The Politics of Access and the Politics of Representation

► *THE POLITICS OF REMEDIATION* CHALLENGES THE PERVASIVE idea that remediation at the college level is a novel endeavor because students' needs are novel. This book argues that remediation exists also to fulfill institutional needs and to resolve social conflicts as they are played out through the educational tier most identified with access to the professional middle class. Each chapter explores one of those related beliefs that together sustain what Sharon Crowley calls the "discourse of student need": the special illiteracy of urban students of color, the agency of basic skills programs in promoting access to the B.A., and the equivalence between educational success and a writer's untroubled assimilation to a dominant intellectual culture. Above all, this discourse depends upon the belief that institutions' standards for writing do not change, only the students' abilities do.

The status of college writing instruction in general helps to determine the specific institutional fortunes of remedial English. For that reason, this book focuses chiefly but not exclusively on remedial college English. Indeed, remedial composition would not have evolved as an often silent but always persistent "other" in English studies if the freshman course, advanced composition, and writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs had not also been institutionalized in particular ways. The politics of remediation also illustrate those broader material and ideological conflicts surrounding

literacy instruction within higher education. These conflicts have not been settled in all cases, especially within those mid-level institutions whose missions are less well defined than those that occupy either the top tiers, which are dedicated to research, or the lower tiers, which are dedicated to teaching. Composition teaching is a complex enterprise because writing programs often mediate the institutional and social class needs that tiering is designed to address: the need to offer democratic access to growing numbers of students while also protecting selectivity; and the need to generate enrollments while also promoting the research and development that attract corporate, state, and federal funding.

The time-honored solution to these dilemmas has been to differentiate higher education into sectors, a process that began in the late nineteenth century when colleges distinguished themselves from the public high school. Though differentiation marked the growth of higher education throughout the first half of the twentieth century, it intensified most markedly in the 1960s, which saw the emergence of the four-year comprehensive and a vocational mission for the two-year college.<sup>1</sup> In the post-'60s era, remediation's gradual alignment with these low-status tiers was a result of its institutional use as, to borrow Barbara Ann Scott's phrasing, a crisis management tool. Remediation serves immediate institutional needs to solve crises in growth—in enrollment, curriculum, mission, and admissions standards—as much as it does to serve students' needs.

This is not to say that remedial students don't "need" more intensive writing and reading instruction than other students. But, even at the risk of overstating my case, I want to stress that, since the 1920s, a sizeable portion of the undergraduate population has completed remedial coursework or participated in some form of ad hoc remediation. Since the socioeconomic status of students enrolled in most four-year colleges has not changed dramatically over the last century, we cannot confidently attribute their needs to their backgrounds anymore than we can reasonably view remediation to be extraordinary. We must look elsewhere for an explanation of why at least half of all four-year institutions continue today to offer some type of remedial instruction to their predominantly white, middle-

and upper-class student bodies. We must look elsewhere for an explanation of why, over a century, faculty and administrators in every segment of private and public higher education have skirmished over writing curriculums, complained about student writing, and lamented the decline of standards.

Mike Rose observed in 1985 that the institutional memory of the need for writing instruction is exceedingly short-lived, so that the demand for it in the present always appears to be new. Why we forget what we once knew is largely a matter of institutional politics, which, particularly within the public sector, are shaped by cultural debates about the uses of education. The uses of education are intimately woven into American class politics, for, since the formation of the modern university in the late nineteenth century, the college slowly began to assume the premier role of educating a professional middle class. For complex reasons I touch on in chapters 2 and 3, higher education did not fully assume this role until the late 1960s. Remediation and its adjuncts—writing centers, proficiency testing, tutorials—had been well-entrenched in higher education since the turn of the twentieth century. However, college students' literacy did not become a subject of bitter conflict until the mid-1970s, while remediation at the college level did not garner national attention until the late 1980s. I argue in chapter 4 that the changing fortunes of remedial English teaching in this respect are partly a consequence of an increasing middle-class need to protect the exclusivity of an institution that, now more than ever, most defines its identity as a social class.

Under pressure to justify the existence of programs and students, while trying to stabilize a shaky identity in the academy, basic writing teachers, unsurprisingly, tend to dwell in an exigent present. For the sort of historical and political analysis I develop in this book has not been central to basic writing scholarship. Beyond Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu's 1999 study of open admissions at the City University of New York, there is no sustained historical analysis of remedial English, and only a handful of books and articles documents the institutional politics of remedial writing instruction.<sup>2</sup> Aside from these and other notable exceptions, most research focuses on, even

celebrates, the individual student and classroom pedagogy because basic writing scholarship has always been especially concerned to identify, and then meet, students' needs.

This tendency to focus on student need in the present tense is particularly significant now because of the national backlash against remediation in four-year schools, which I discuss in chapter 4. To counter this wave of critique, some scholars have called for more "hard data," while others assert that we ought to forgo culturalist critique and "return" to the individual case. In the field's most recent book, *Rethinking Basic Writing: Exploring Identity, Politics, and Community in Interaction*, Laura Gray-Rosendale advances this position by focusing on how individual students represent their political and cultural identities through peer group talk. Gray-Rosendale opposes her ethnomethodological approach to cultural or institutional critiques by aligning the first with individual students, and the second with abstract analysis. She finds that "our own attachment to broad categories for analysis can and has already led us to often neglect the local context of interaction as a primary site for meaning and identity production" (14). While it makes sense to ground an issue like "identity" within a "local context of interaction," the study of a few memorable students does not result in a powerful analysis of those "extra-institutional bodies" that exert pressure on basic writing programs (165). Yet these "bodies," Gray-Rosendale worries, will jeopardize the type of summer bridge program she studied at Syracuse University. Commenting on how the struggles over remediation at the City University might affect these programs, Gray-Rosendale notes that New York's Republican politicians attack remediation "while having had little to no engagement in teaching these students and learning about their *specific needs*" (165, my emphasis).

Gray-Rosendale's focus on the political as individual students represent it also determines what she thinks needs most to be reformed. One argument that runs throughout this book is that if we clarify what we mean by "political," we also identify what constitutes a meaningful avenue for reform. Gray-Rosendale ends her study with three lists of specific reforms. The first offers suggestions for developing process pedagogy, while the second offers suggestions for involving more full-time faculty in programs without displacing

the adjunct professorate responsible for most first-year composition teaching. The third calls for more “microlevel” as opposed to “macrolevel” research (170). The reforms contained in the first two lists aren’t equivalent, however. By proposing a theory of literacy that engages with orality, the first list involves influencing the choices that an individual teacher makes in the classroom. But by focusing on “faculty roles,” the second list would require substantial, even revolutionary, changes in institutional hiring practices. Gray-Rosendale doesn’t explore the complexity of what she is advocating because the reform of hiring practices involves macrolevel, not microlevel, analysis.

In her book, Gray-Rosendale locates the “political” in microlevel “practices” and in ongoing, daily interactions (171). As she puts her case, “what might properly be said to constitute the political and the social within rhetoric and composition studies, and within Basic Writing scholarship” has “inevitably centered around political categories and theories such that the theoretical frameworks we use not only characterize but likewise partially constitute the nature of students’ interactions” (171). There is little room in Gray-Rosendale’s list of reforms for a more elaborate discussion of who teaches basic writing, and where, because this view of the political, centered on “meaning” and “identity,” borrows heavily from a poststructuralist vocabulary.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I explore how the politics of meaning that Gray-Rosendale privileges is not equivalent to what I identify as a politics of access. In my view, the politics of access concerns how students gain entry to an institution and to the liberal arts, and the complex roles that remedial education could play in the process. By contrast, the politics of representation is more concerned with how students gain entry to traditional forms of academic knowledge, and with the identity conflicts writers may experience as a result. A politics of access also emphasizes institutional, rather than disciplinary, allegiances and concerns. In chapter 3, I will argue that this distinction is important because composition scholars tend to suggest that what is transgressive in the profession is equally so in a college or university setting.

In the first half of *The Politics of Remediation*, I historicize basic

writing's institutional uses, in part by sketching out an abbreviated narrative of its evolution over the past century. From the perspective of institutional access that informs this part of the book, I locate reform within structures that would alter the conditions for learning that affect who teaches whom, and where. I use the history of higher education, revisionist scholarship on the history of composition, and the sociology of education as analytical frameworks to read historical documents, for instance surveys of composition teaching and archival sources from my institution. In the book's second half, I examine how remediation and remedial students have been represented in the post-open admissions era. Here I locate reform in curriculum development and in ways of writing about composition teaching. I use cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and the anthropology of education as frameworks for reading student writing, ideological debates, and literary and ethnographic accounts.

How we conceive of reform also reflects how we conceive of the responsibility for educational failure or success. Thus, while neither political focus—and its consequent emphasis upon reform—is more desirable than the other, it may be ideologically dangerous to conflate the two because neoconservative critics can use identity politics to dismiss a serious debate about the defunding of public higher education. As I document in chapters 4 and 5, critics can attribute the responsibility for educational failure to students' identity politics rather than to the very direct consequences of downsizing. While an analysis of the politics of representation and the border pedagogies that result from it should remain central to our enterprise, nevertheless we also have to acknowledge that a politics of language doesn't contest the academy's essential selective functions. Reforming curriculum does not necessarily reform the conditions for learning that organize teachers' and students' everyday experiences.

In the humanities, debates about the status of the politics of meaning illuminate the split I identify in composition studies. For instance, John Guillory argues that struggles over canon reformation have not resulted in a critique of the social effects that would result from cultural or educational change. He writes in *Cultural Capital*, "The question is rather what social effects are produced by the knowledges disseminated in the university, and by the manner of

their dissemination” (50). From this perspective, which is informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology, it’s not just the kinds of texts that matter, but who assigns and reads them, and where. Analyzing the relationship between PC debates, multiculturalism, and the Gulf War, Carol Stabile, a professor of communications, concludes that “‘Politics’ (as in the currently fashionable image of the multicultural university) was isolated from ‘economics,’ and the conflict was duly transformed into struggles over language, now safely removed from larger political and economic battles” (117).

The relationship between the politics of meaning and freshman writing courses has long preoccupied composition’s left wing, perhaps best illustrated in Ira Shor’s work on pedagogy, institutional differentiation, and culture war (1980, 1986, 1997, 2000). This long-standing interest owes to composition’s historic role in helping students move between different social worlds, and, perhaps as one consequence of this mediation, to its equally historic role in providing the economic base for a scholarly industry absorbed with the problems of meaning. James Slevin succinctly stated the case in 1991: “Those in composition are stained by their immersion in history, by a preoccupation with social practice, and by a concern with the uses of language that refuses to privilege canonical texts and forms. This conceptual framework seems absolutely indispensable in order to maintain the current economic structure of the profession. If we didn’t have it, we’d have to invent it” (6). Throughout, I emphasize that institutions realize and maintain the “current economic structure of the profession” through various differentiation strategies that manage their growth.

In the first half of the book, I focus on how institutions use strategies of internal and external stratification to resolve the historic tensions that coalesce around first-year composition teaching. Internal strategies include using first-year courses or writing assessment to regulate students’ entry into liberal arts courses, or deploying adjunct labor to teach required composition so that a full-time faculty can teach electives and perform some research. External strategies include using writing assessment to regulate the boundaries between liberal arts and vocational colleges, shifting remediation to the lower tiers, and raising admissions standards in the higher tiers.

The Writing Program Administrator (WPA) is an especially crucial figure in the reform efforts I describe, since she is the individual most able to contest the use of writing instruction to solve institutional needs. In chapter 3, I argue that Mina Shaughnessy offers an administrative legacy that reflects this sort of challenging bureaucratic politics.

First-year writing courses are usually institutionalized to prepare students to enter the liberal arts and professional schools or to enroll in elective courses. For this reason, a longitudinal perspective is critical in shaping a robust politics of access. However, because a long-term view of a student's (or teacher's) development would also include an examination of how nonlinguistic factors shape educational success or failure, remediation's agency is less important within the politics of access than it may be from a viewpoint shaped by the politics of meaning.

Remediation plays a far less prominent role in those few studies that seek to measure retention rates or document students' intellectual growth over the years. In *Time to Know Them*, a six-year study of students' writing and learning, Marilyn Sternglass reveals that, even though some students experienced important changes in their cultural identities, these changes did not affect their persistence in college. As I'll discuss in chapters 3 and 4, Sternglass does not award substantial agency to English teachers in preparing students to succeed in liberal arts classes: neither writing teacher nor composition course plays a prominent role in helping students to stay in school over the long term. In her list of reforms, Sternglass emphasizes those changes consonant with a politics of access. Along with her critique of mass assessment, she stresses the causal role that tuition increases, rising rents, and long commuting hours played in students' educational narratives.

Those who espouse a long-term view will consider how material considerations affect educational success as much or more than linguistic choices that students and teachers make. Linguistic choice is central to the politics of representation, which have informed both a theory of learning and classroom practices. From this perspective, which is shaped by poststructuralism, students' identity conflicts affect how they learn; the privileging of academic language constitutes

a chief barrier to their academic success. In the most extreme view, identity politics are awarded the agency to affect retention rates. Since language use is also connected to ways of knowing that characterize a writer's membership in different social worlds, reform would focus on what we teach and how we construct ourselves and others through writing. To contest academic exclusivity, we would contest the role that language plays in sustaining it.

The 1974 *Students' Right to Their Own Language* most famously illustrates the central role of the politics of language use in composition studies. This is because writing courses have been institutionalized to initiate students into academic discourse; composition's primary institutional identity lies in its mandate to help students write between what are often culturally unequal worlds. In the '70s, that mandate was politicized within the context of access movements that were aligned with civil rights and related social reforms that, in turn, fostered the growth of women's studies and ethnic studies programs in the academy. With the advent of multiculturalism in the 1980s, which informed fields as diverse as linguistics, the anthropology of education, and literary studies, composition scholars problematized writing between worlds as a psychologically and politically complex issue, especially for minority students.

Within this critique, curriculum assumes more power to affect students' intellectual growth than it does in a more materialist analysis. In scholarship that's inflected by poststructuralist theory, remediation's role or agency may be said to be more significant in enhancing students' educational success than it is in a study like Sternglass's. My goal is not to favor one analysis above another or to privilege access to the university at the expense of the access to knowledge but to distinguish more fully than we have done so far between two views of what constitutes the political. In this way, I want to clarify the limits of what each can reasonably hope to accomplish.

Probably another reason that scholars urge a return to the individual case is that they are acutely aware that institutional location defines almost everything we do as teachers, researchers, or administrators. Terence Collins observes that basic writing isn't a monolith because "we all have created Basic Writing from our multiple perspectives in our multiple sites" (100). Gray-Rosendale, for

instance, chooses an ethnomethodological approach because it promises to integrate the microlevel experience of institutional life with a broader macrolevel analysis of institutional politics. I tend to locate the teaching of writing in the sector with which I am most familiar, the midlevel public comprehensive that enrolls the lion's share of students in the four-year segment. I also lean on my own institutional experience because my purpose is to connect material struggles to ideological ones in very specific ways. I use the City University of New York (CUNY) and one of its senior colleges where I teach, the City College of New York (CCNY), as exemplars of remediation's fortunes as they developed over a century in an institution that, before the early '70s, was dedicated primarily to teaching. Throughout the book, I connect this specific case to larger national conflicts and historical shifts which have organized literacy instruction in American higher education for a century.

Using the local example to explore more global issues, I also focus in some detail on the relationships between material needs and ideological justification. I argue in chapter 3 that these relationships have not been richly explored in groundbreaking ideological critiques like Horner and Lu's *Representing the "Other."* Through a focus on remedial English at the City University, I link ideological discussion to specific struggles over material goods and the particular needs of social groups. I hope that a term like "ideology" can function less as an abstract category of analysis and more as a concrete set of arguments that affect our daily teaching lives within institutions. In chapter 4, for instance, I use the revisionist scholarship of literacy crisis to read a particular panic over student writing in New York City. In the 1990s, the always-new remedial student emerged as a potent justification of New York's need to restratify its municipal college system. The City University had rejected this strategy in 1969 but, like other mid-level comprehensives across the country, embraced it in 2000 with an immediate impact upon teaching and learning in the nation's largest public urban system.

The lack of a vigorous historical consciousness in basic writing is not just a scholarly matter, because the proponents of downsizing often rely upon a particular version of the remedial past to bolster their arguments in the present. The discourse of student need de-

pends upon a belief that standards for writing are universal and decline when new groups of students enter higher education. Consider, for instance, *Open Admissions and Remedial Education at the City University of New York*, one of five reports on remediation that were appended to *The City University of New York: An Institution Adrift*. Made available to the public in the summer of 1999, *An Institution Adrift*, which I discuss briefly in chapter 4, claimed that remediation was the chief source of the City University's alleged decline. Sally Renfro and Allison Armour-Garb, the authors of the hefty appendix *Open Admissions and Remedial Education*, frame their critique with a condensed history of remediation in table form, "History of Remediation in the U.S., 1800s'–Present." This table explains how, by the 1920s, "Most four-year institutions stopped providing remediation. Two-year colleges absorbed most of the remedial student population." By the 1950s, "The bulk of remediation shifted to two-year institutions"; between the 1960s and '70s, "Two- and four-year colleges expanded access and began offering some credit for remedial work" (10). As "access continued to expand" in the '70s, "remediation became institutionalized at the postsecondary level" (10).

The always-new student whose needs organized so much hostile discourse in New York and elsewhere could not exist without also believing that standards for writing were uniform before the 1960s, but, as a result of open access movements, began rapidly to decline in the 1970s. In the myth of transience, no group of students needs as much writing instruction as the group that we currently serve. Renfro and Armour-Garb can't deny that remediation existed in the American college before the twentieth century, but, as they note in the body of their text, it did so to remediate students in subjects like the classical languages (8). In any case, by the 1920s, remediation had been shifted to two-year colleges, only to resurface in the four-year college in the wake of '60s access movements. In Renfro and Armour-Garb's version of the past, the historical consequences of expanded access are symbolized in today's remedial programs that serve students of color, perpetuate low standards, fail to differentiate between two-year and four-year schools, and provoke fiscal chaos.

Chapter 2, "Remedial Traditions and Institutional Crisis,

1870–1970,” examines the roots of this historical commonsense. Using Barbara Scott’s analysis of institutional crisis management, I argue that remediation was used before World War II as a way to stratify internally. A college experience was not central to middle-class aspirations before the ’40s in the way it is today; though enrollments grew during this period, declines were periodic and threatened institutional growth and stability. Surely this is one reason why most institutions offered remedial courses to large numbers of their students, often through highly organized ability grouping, in other places through ad hoc, barely acknowledged practices.

Though higher education had begun to stratify as early as the 1890s, when it began most clearly to distinguish itself as the top educational tier, and though in the ’20s a handful of liberal arts schools began to emerge as exclusive, institutions did not, as a whole, differentiate externally until the 1960s. It wasn’t until the ’60s that external institutional differentiation by curriculum, standards, mission, and student body began to occur most markedly, a process that sharply accelerated in the ’70s. Drawing upon archival sources at City College, I examine, for instance, the claim that writing courses declined in the ’60s because of the high level of student ability, only to be reestablished in the ’70s in response to the presence of students with lower abilities. This claim is weakened if we also consider how English departments created writing programs to generate enrollments during a period of social and fiscal crisis that marked the end of the most expansive years of their growth.

Strategies of external differentiation became key management tools in the post-’60s era to manage what is today our primary educational conflict: the struggle between access and excellence. Burton Clark had identified that conflict in *The Open Door College*: “What is to be done when the pressure on colleges from the state legislators, city officials, parents, and students is to open wide the doors, but when, at the same time, college staffs and some outside groups are determined to hold up and possibly raise the standards of admission and attainment?” (162) To mediate between these opposing group interests, Clark thought that public institutions within a state would do one of two things. Either a series of internal barriers would be established that “cool out” working-class students within an institu-

tion, or institutions would differentiate to create less selective colleges that siphon off students who may not fulfill traditional educational narratives. The use of internal barriers and the differentiation of public higher education institutionalize our historical ambivalence toward the uses of education to achieve class mobility. The unselective institution exists *in order to* maintain democratic access without damaging selectivity in a hierarchical system.

Similarly, adopting what Kevin Dougherty calls an “institutionalist” viewpoint, I stress that the vocational mission for the two-year college emerged to mediate this struggle in the ’70s. As private liberal arts colleges and midlevel comprehensives experienced fiscal crisis, the two-year sector was the target of selective federal funding and political attention. This institutional differentiation prepared the grounds for ideologies that emerged in the late ’80s, which, for the first time, aligned the remedial student with minorities, affirmative action, and a dominant discourse of student need. One could say that remediation never became as visible in the history of higher education as when it was attached to students of color, a population that has never been heavily represented in the four-year sector.

By the early ’70s, midlevel institutions struggled to upgrade their status by shedding a pure teaching mission, offering more professional and graduate education, and requiring some research as conditions for faculty hiring or advancement. The conflict between teaching and research that is today most acutely felt in this middle sector was institutionalized during this period. I illustrate this conflict by charting remediation’s fate at the site of its genesis from “bonehead English” to “Basic Writing”—the City College of New York. In chapter 3, “Looking for Mina: Reforming Basic Writing, 1966–1980,” I examine the rise and fall of Shaughnessy’s famous program through the lens of stratification. In this context, Shaughnessy’s emphasis upon acculturating students to academic discourse also reflects a politics of access that challenges the tiering of higher education. The desire to integrate a working-class population into a traditional liberal arts institution contested those plans for tiering that would align nontraditional student bodies with vocational education, and more traditional liberal arts curriculums and middle-class students with the upper tiers.

The subject of much lively controversy since 1980, Shaughnessy is an ambivalent figure because she embodies a friction between the two kinds of politics I identify in this book. By historicizing Shaughnessy's work, I don't gloss over the problems inherent in her formalist pedagogy. But I distinguish between the politics of language use and the politics of basic skills programs by highlighting the considerable administrative work that preoccupied her for several years. Today, Shaughnessy's work provides us with a robust version of a WPA who contests the low status of a remedial program by trying to improve the everyday conditions for working and learning.

Perhaps unfortunately, Shaughnessy did not wrestle with those essentialist attitudes toward language teaching that have helped to justify the weak intellectual status of all first-year writing courses. This is partly because she privileged academic language, but it is also because she was more interested in how language and meaning are segregated institutionally. I offer examples of projects she developed that consistently challenged how teachers, students, and their courses are housed outside or beyond liberal arts courses. From her focus on sequencing, Shaughnessy called for longitudinal research that would complicate the gatekeeping functions of writing programs. Because she understood that remedial programs are often used to solve institutional crises, Shaughnessy also believed that these programs could not function as "the" avenue for access to a liberal arts education. If the agency of basic writing programs is thus downplayed, then not only does the responsibility have to be shared, we must also find different ways to sequence courses and to evaluate or assess that growth beyond a single program.

By the late '80s, remedial programs at the senior colleges in the City University of New York had lost their local autonomy and therefore much of their original insurgent qualities. Nevertheless, remediation became the subject of controversy and, throughout the '90s, the center of arguments to privatize, defund, and restratify the municipal system. Remediation assumed importance in these debates because it symbolized the central crisis of this period: how to protect the selectivity of a research tier without ignoring the aspirations of upwardly mobile working-class and lower middle-class populations. Representations of remediation are central to understand-

ing basic writing's role in the post-'60s era because complaints about students' illiteracy at the college level become ideological.

In chapter 4, "Representing Remediation: The Politics of Agency, 1985–2000," I link the representation of remediation to efforts to restructure the four-year sector, both nationally and in New York. Since, as Clark had suggested in his case study research, stratification can't proceed without the consent of groups with opposing interests, the representation of remediation becomes ideological when it serves to build class coalitions. For instance, I focus on how a coalition of critics in New York City fomented a literacy crisis in order to create a class consensus to downsize public higher education. Though the State University of New York and CUNY were the focus of a fierce debate that spanned a decade and culminated in a series of reforms for both systems, remedial students at the City University played a central ideological role in all these struggles.

As these debates raged nationally, in New York remedial students emerged as members of a special urban underclass who were suddenly "discovered" by journalists like James Traub. Traub and others used these students to assign agency to the cultural deprivation they argued is typical of anti-intellectual, inner-city minorities. I use the analysis of culture war developed by Barbara Ehrenreich, Ira Shor, and John Trimbur to read several texts written by public intellectuals as well as composition scholars. I examine how intellectuals use the "poor" remedial student to reflect upon middle-class responsibility toward the "other" classes and, by extension, toward those institutions designed to remediate poverty. In writing about the student who is estranged from middle-class institutions, neoliberal intellectuals explore their own estrangement from the contemporary city.

Representing remediation becomes a political matter when writers assign agency for educational success or failure to a specific social group, program, or institution. In New York, these representations were often used to argue that, if remedial education fails, then so too does open access as a policy. From this perspective, remediation functions to transform students' literacy skills within one or two precollege courses. When these programs fail to accomplish this transformation, it has often been argued that part of the blame rests upon the shoulders of those students who resist assimilating to

dominant intellectual cultures. In other words, during the New York City literacy crisis that I describe, critics frequently suggested that—in sharp contrast to previous generations—students’ identity politics prevent them from assimilating to the mainstream.

This argument dangerously conflates the politics of access with the identity politics I associate with multicultural perspectives. In the politics of access, remediation plays a less crucial role in sustaining open access policies: more responsibility is accorded here to those larger shifts in higher education such as privatization strategies, which I describe in some detail in chapter 4. But for some neoliberal intellectuals, students’ underclass cultures are assumed to be in irreconcilable conflict with traditional liberal arts knowledge.

Ultimately, representation is political when it serves to establish class coalitions. In New York, the organic intellectuals of the City University’s past often express distance or alienation from those potential intellectuals of the city’s future, many of them enrolled now at the City University. Yet these struggles over assimilation, as I note in chapter 5, “Writing between Worlds: Access as Translation,” have shaped one strand of American intellectual autobiography, an argument that Min-Zhan Lu developed through her cogent readings of Du Bois and Irving Howe (1999). In progressive education, of course, intellectuals have also long questioned the uncomplicated status of melting pot imagery. Perhaps reflecting discussions by intellectuals like Randolph Bourne or Scott Nearing, Jane Addams had proposed in *Twenty Years at Hull-House* a “reciprocal” version of urban education where teachers and students would find new meaning and value out of the dynamic relationship between subordinate and dominant cultures. American society, she argued, does not benefit from the loss of ethnic identities and immigrant cultures. “I believe that we may get, and should get, something of that sort of revivifying effect and upspringing of new culture from our contact with the groups who come to us from foreign countries,” she wrote in 1930 (279). One responsibility of urban education, Addams thought, was to transcreate competing cultures rather than value one above the other.

Anzia Yezierska, whose work I discuss in chapter 5, offers a similarly reciprocal perspective upon education and literacy as the

means to assimilate to a dominant culture. A Jewish intellectual who published fiction and semiautobiography from the '20s to the '50s, Yeziarska complicated the view that a working-class college student will embrace new knowledge by shedding a past identity, language, or cultural tradition. Like other writers who have moved from ethnic enclaves to elite institutions—Zora Neale Hurston offers one spectacular example—Yeziarska does not lose one cultural allegiance in favor of the dominant one, but instead develops an imagery of bilateral travels between worlds as her characters struggle to live meaningfully between them by transcreating the values or languages embodied in each. In their essays, City College students represent their own intercultural encounters in these more complicated terms. Access to traditional knowledge or to dominant American cultures, they suggest, is not a matter of making a singular choice. Writers like Yeziarska or my City College students challenge a politics of agency practiced by critics like James Traub, whose arguments for downsizing remediation often rest on the assumption that working-class intellectuals of the past assimilated smoothly to dominant discourses. But, of course, identity politics are no more novel than are remedial students; both have helped to shape the American cultural milieu since the turn of the century.

Writing courses are often institutionalized to prepare students to write someplace else in the academy. Therefore, many teachers question the value of experimental curriculums that they don't believe fulfill a course's institutional aims. Others will object that the writing I discuss in this chapter does not adequately challenge conventional academic styles. My local answer to these broader questions is to focus exclusively on familiar essay writing as one example of what I call translation pedagogy. Translation pedagogy attempts to negotiate between different discourses—those that students bring with them, and those that they may encounter in other academic situations.

The familiar essay is one among many forms where private and public languages intersect. It gives less-experienced writers the freedom to invent new styles while also imitating those of expert writers, and it allows them to fuse nonacademic languages and artistic forms with the conventional features of prose essays. Its success or

readability depends on the writer's ability to present her experience as meaningful to another audience—it is a representation, not a chronicle, of personal events or feelings. Both conventional and experimental, familiar essays also give teachers a place to discuss those relationships that organize a writing course more generally: the connections between style and meaning, reading and writing, tradition, innovation, and audience. Many of the students whose work I examine do transcreate knowledge, identity, or style using a form whose hallmark is consonant with the broad goal of academic literacies—the development of secular critical thinking.

Public intellectuals often use the form of the familiar essay to comment on the issues of their time to a broader audience. In this regard, a pedagogy of translation aims to give student writers a place in the classroom to act and think as intellectuals who discuss issues significant to each other and to their families as well as to the academic representative, their teacher. We could develop a curriculum that serves solely to prepare students to write in academic contexts, as was the case in the mid-1980s; conversely, we could develop one that radically departs from its institutional mandate. I try to negotiate between these tensions by building upon the rich tradition already existing within composition studies whose goals are parodic. If we view parody as Linda Hutcheon defined it some time ago—as a “repetition with a difference”—then we could teach students to imitate dominant forms by inflecting them with their own accents. While this is not always possible, in the practice I sketch out, many writers can and do imitate forms with a distinct difference. Equally important, they and their teacher experience pleasure in the process of reading and writing, which is not always true for required composition courses.

Those issues that are central to identity politics in composition studies—the loss of self or authentic motives when accommodating readers who represent a more powerful culture—are also relevant to teaching writing in any context. Case study accounts suggest that expert academic writers also struggle not to betray their intentions in the process of translating their local research into forms that are readable for national audiences. On the one hand, the writing of the City College students that I discuss in this chapter provides a rich

exploration of specific contemporary cultural conflicts. On the other hand, this writing also offers a more general portrait of what happens when writers are obliged to translate between different social worlds.

In 1992, Laura Rendón, a professor of higher education administration, published an autobiographical essay eloquently detailing her effort to translate herself between socially unequal worlds. Describing the identity conflicts she experienced as a Mexican American who traveled “from the barrio to the academy,” Rendón concludes: “I contend that the most important lesson to be learned is *not* that higher education must increase access for new scholarship ‘boys and girls’ or must offer them better financial aid packages, more role models, and better counseling and mentoring. These standard solutions, while important, do not focus on the larger and more important issue, which is that higher education must begin to think in new ways about what constitutes intellectual development and about whether the traditional manner with which education prepares new students is appropriate for people of color as well as for white women and men” (60). *The Politics of Remediation* reflects Rendón’s concern that we begin to “think in new ways about what constitutes intellectual development,” especially in courses that continue to play an initiatory institutional role. But I am equally concerned with promoting these students’ access to the liberal arts, especially for those who are not on “scholarship.” While I embrace the view that a critique of knowledge is central to educational reform, I also take issue with multicultural perspectives that tend to assume that curriculum changes will challenge the academy’s selective functions. To work against the discourse of student needs as that has defined our enterprise, we cannot afford to conflate two perspectives or to neglect one in favor of the other. In what follows, I distinguish between the particular power that each holds as a mode of analysis and reform for teaching and administration, for scholarly and activist work.