

Previously Engaged: A Foucauldian Genealogy of Student Engagement in Composition  
Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study is a philosophical genealogy of the term “student engagement” as it has appeared in composition studies. It attempts to account for the fact that student engagement has become something of a virtue in educational and composition studies, despite the fact that the term is problematic due its lack of definitional clarity and circular understanding of pedagogy (explained in greater detail in chapter two). Inspired by Foucault, this study employs a genealogical analytic to create a counterhistory of student engagement, suggesting that its principles have existed long before educational theorists coined the term, tracing its practices back to the 1940s in composition studies. Far from being the humanistic and student-centered practice that it is commonly viewed as, this study situates student engagement practices as emerging from various discursive and political desires/needs, especially as a way to ideologically counter the rise of Nazism and fascism in pre-World War 2 Europe; in short, rather than evolving out of best practices in education, the concept of student engagement emerged out of an intersection of educational, psychological, and even medical prescriptions set against a specific political backdrop. This study also examines the ways that power dynamics shift and teacher-/student-subjects occupy new roles as engagement becomes a prominent force on the pedagogical fore, addressing specifically the ways teachers and their assignments enact a disciplinary and pastoral function, all with the intent of molding students into interested, interesting, and democratic subjects. This study closes by considering some of the implications of this new understanding of engagement, and suggests potential directions for the term as well as abandoning the term altogether.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	vi
Research Questions .....	5
Outline .....	6
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	7
Chapter 5.....	9
REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	11
What is Student Engagement?.....	12
The behavioral approach to engagement .....	15
The cognitive approach to engagement .....	17
The affective approach to engagement.....	20
Criticizing Extant Conceptions of Engagement .....	22
Limitations of the behavioral approach .....	23
Limitations of the cognitive approach .....	24
Limitations of the affective approach .....	25
Measuring Engagement.....	26
Engagement as Tautology .....	28
Engagement in Composition .....	34
Genealogy in Composition: A Gap in the Literature .....	40
METHOD .....	44
Research questions .....	44
Genealogy: An Overview .....	45
Performing Genealogical Analysis.....	65
Epistemology. ....	65
Problematizingy.....	74
Analyzing “across” .....	76

	Page
Temporal Juxtapositioning. ....	81
Search for Silence. ....	82
Analysis of power/knowledge. ....	83
What we get from genealogy. ....	88
A Genealogy of Student Engagement in Composition or: How I Do This .....	89
Descent and problematization. ....	89
Engaging ideas. ....	90
Finding the silent .....	94
Analyzing “across” .....	104
What we get from my genealogy. ....	106
FINDINGS .....	109
Part 1: Beginnings of a Compositional Counterhistory .....	109
Part 2: Constructing Subjects Within Composition .....	119
The interested student subject. ....	126
The teacher subject under a pedagogy of interest. ....	135
Part 3: Composed of Various Discourses. ....	139
Psychology. ....	142
Education .....	155
Medicine .....	165
Part 4: Composed of War .....	171
Creating a Democratic Subject: .....	171
Propaganda .....	184
The returning service-student .....	188
Part 5: Where and How is Power .....	197
A Compositional Dispositif .....	197
Disciplinary and Pastoral Power. ....	198
Bio-Power and Governmentality .....	206
CONCLUSION .....	215
Making the Past Present—And Vice Versa .....	215
Critical thinking .....	217
Making writing personal. ....	220

	Page
Groupwork and audience.....	223
Teacher as coach/mentor .....	227
Student Engagement Moving Forward .....	232
Works Cited .....	238

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Initial Archive .....	98
2. Frequency with which Engagement Appears by Discipline .....	105

## INTRODUCTION

My interest in student engagement began, perhaps predictably, when I started formally teaching in the fall of 2009. While attaining a Master's degree, I taught two classes of developmental writing at a community college in Camden, New Jersey. I was prepared for the skill level of the students in my classroom; few knew how to write a cohesive paragraph by academic standards, and many had difficulty writing in accordance with Standard English grammar. What I was not prepared for was the attitude that students approached the class with. Some of them, of course, seemed interested in improving their writing (by academic standards). Most of them, however, seemed disinterested, as though they were forced to be in this classroom and wanted nothing more than to get out. While taking a class in composition theory, I learned that this was a common way to characterize students in college level writing classes. Several chapters from Sullivan and Tinberg's (2006) *What is College Level Writing?* echoed my concerns about the "disinterested student." For the culmination of my composition theory class, I wrote a paper that was an attempt to answer the question "how do we get students to want to write?" Using the idea of self-schema theory from social psychology, my solution was to help them identify as writers. This paper was later published the *Xchanges* journal of New Mexico University.

Still, a question remained: if the key to getting students to embrace writing was to make them see themselves as writers, how then did we go about helping them build a writerly identity? After two years of teaching developmental writing classes, I began pursuing a Master's degree in education with dual focuses on literacy and higher education. During one of my higher education courses taught by Shawn Harper, I was



introduced to the work of George Kuh and the concept of student engagement. This word “engagement” had weight for me, and it seemed to better articulate the question that I had been perplexed by for roughly three years: how do we engage students in writing studies? I was also introduced to John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas* (2001), which furthered my interest in engagement and composition as well as student identity. This idea of engagement seemed to be the answer I was hoping for when I began my studies in literacy and higher education: to get students to embrace writing, they need to be engaged in writing.

At the time, I did not realize how broad a term student engagement was. It had a particular meaning for me, one that I simply assumed all researchers shared. I understood it as a positive emotional reaction or association with a particular phenomenon, one that led to personal engrossment. I entered my PhD program with dreams of building on Bean’s (2001) work, of articulating what it is that engages students when they are writing. Little did I know that I would spend hours simply attempting to define the term engagement, and I would discover that few agree on what it means or how exactly it operates in student learning. The more I began to immerse myself in engagement literature, the more I began to suspect that its weight comes from its undefined character, its ability to conjure a personal, connotative meaning for each individual that interacts with the term. As important and innovative as the term originally seemed to me, it became problematic; it seemed void of any inherent meaning. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault accuses the signified in language as always resting beyond the signifier: “there is always a certain amount of signified remaining... while the signifier is offered to us in abundance that questions us, in spite of ourselves, as to what it means” (1973, p. xvi). Such a problem certainly lies in the signifier engagement, and this problem is reflected in

the literature around the term (I explore this issue in greater depth in the second chapter of this work).

Even so, student engagement is often seen as the greatest predictor of student success; indeed, it is sometimes used synonymously with success (Kuh, 2009; Kuh, 2010; Quaye & Harper, 2015). It is a construct that has emerged to designate and explain a condition and develop/justify practices, in the same way that different beliefs about the roots of insanity, sickness, and delinquency led to various techniques and institutions to address those issues. Engagement is, itself, a kind of knowledge that has real consequences in that it informs the ways students and teachers interact (Quin, 2017) even while it seems to be a moving target with no inherent meaning.

This study, a genealogy of student engagement in composition, reflects my current stance on the topic of engagement as well as my interest in writing studies. Of course, there are many directions this work could take. I could attempt to develop a more coherent definition of student engagement. I could attempt a more experimental study to determine what is engaging to students of writing. This would follow my line of thinking years ago, when I wanted to know how to engage my own students better. However, rather than develop or determine, I have chosen an approach that helps me to dismantle. Genealogy, particularly a Foucauldian genealogy, is an attempt to problematize those practices and beliefs which are taken for granted (Koopman, 2013), to call into questions that which is most natural (Foucault, 1977/1995). But why choose this approach as opposed to the others?

In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1956), Nietzsche refers to his own “*a priori*,” that is, his disposition, his way of coming to and understanding the world. His disposition is

to subvert convention. While I do not claim that my disposition necessarily requires that I subvert, I am drawn to question what is denoted and implied by constructs. One of my peers sometimes teases me by interrupting me to say “what do you mean by...”? She does this as a playful mockery of myself, as I often interrupt people with this phrase. While I recognize that this is probably an annoying trait, it is also constructive in that it serves to deconstruct. Often, when I ask individuals what they mean when they refer to a particular idea, it turns out that there is no strong signified behind the signifier in question. Thus, this project stands as a testament to *my a priori*, an interruption of the fields of educational and composition studies to ask what, exactly, is meant when we refer to this thing student engagement?

Additionally, I am personally drawn to critical theory. This is potentially also a result of my *a priori*, or my defacto way of viewing. I am often concerned by the ways that individual buy wholesale into the metanarratives around them. I have written critically on a number of topics, ranging from who exactly is served by a digital revolution in education to why people develop beliefs about what counts as fashionable and beautiful. In general, I am interested (and often critical) of why humans come around to certain beliefs or knowledges, and under most manifestations of critical theory, the simple answer is power. Foucault in particular is also interested in this topic, so much so that he often uses power and knowledge interchangeably. Thus, by adopting a Foucauldian lens for this project, I am offered the potential of discovering what powers and discourses have operated to build a belief in engagement as a necessary force in education and writing studies.

Moreover, the idea of student engagement allows us to stratify students into those who are engaged and those who are not. It allows a new kind of knowledge to exist about what constitutes a “good” student and why other students flounder. It is not an issue of intelligence, comprehension, or motivation, necessarily, but of level of engagement. A student who is a failure is a student who is unengaged. Thus, the very existence of the concept of engagement allows for a new kind of subject production as well as a new slew of strategies to normalize (engage) student subjects. While Foucault is typically not seen as a humanistic philosopher, I believe that his critical stance toward subjectification and his thinking of individuals as ongoing works of art (1983) helps us to undo polarizing, limiting thought regarding humans. Subjectification comes about as a result of knowledge *about* people and does not provide them possibility. A disengaged student in an academic setting is, in many ways, a delinquent student (Finn & Rock, 1997). I try my best not to typify students in this way, and see a project like this as in-line with my own humanistic tendencies.

In sum, this project stems from a number of interests: my frustration with the term engagement; my curiosity about from where the term originates and why it emerged as such a powerful force in writing and educational research in general; and an interest what powers and discourses operate to create such knowledges and beliefs about students and engagement. These interests invite a genealogical approach. Guiding my research are four questions:

1. How have practices associated with student engagement come to be privileged in the present moment?

2. How have practices of engagement in the freshman college composition course worked to produce a compositional subject?
3. How has a history of the present of the practices of engagement come to be used particularly in the discipline of composition studies, with attention to pedagogical considerations for students and teachers?
4. What does a history of engagement tell us about the schooled subject in the present moment?

Foucault characterizes his histories as a history of discourses (1973). Here, I aim to examine what discourses came together to give rise to the idea of engagement in educational studies with attention to its use in writing. I will attempt to describe the shapes that engagement took in the past to show how it has emerged into the present. More specifically, I focus on the decade of the 1940s, which I pinpoint as an area of swirling discourses in composition studies that gave rise to the current day conceptualization of engagement.

#### Outline

**Chapter 2:** In the following chapter, the review of literature, I problematize the current conception of student engagement in college composition, drawing on current theories and studies of engagement to show that despite its prominence in educational and writing research, it holds little meaning for researchers or stakeholders in education. In particular, I show that the findings from many of these studies amount to a tautology (students are engaged when they are engaged), and spell out how disparities in conceptions of engagement have led to more confusion and clarity. The purpose of the second chapter is to present engagement in such a bewildering way that it leads my

readers to wonder along with me as to how the term came to educational prominence and what purposes it succeeds in serving. This establishes a need for a historical approach to understand how student engagement emerged as a concept—particularly, I argue, that of a genealogy.

**Chapter 3:** The third chapter, methods, reiterates my research questions, and then describes the genealogical approach and highlights how I plan to use genealogy in my study. Drawing primarily from Foucauldian philosophy, I describe the hallmarks of genealogy and the ways that it differs from other modes of historical inquiry, explaining what it is that a genealogist does and why this method is appropriate for my study. In this chapter, I also provide reasoning as to why the 1940s is the focus of the study.

Additionally, in the third chapter, I provide an initial archive composed of journal articles and books that I plan to use for the purposes of my genealogy. I close by considering the affordances of genealogy and explain why this work is important.

**Chapter 4:** The findings chapter is broken into five sections. The first section, though brief, establishes the basis for a counterhistory within composition beyond that of Hawk (2007). Foucault argues that all histories are fictions based on the interests, beliefs, knowledges of the discourses that construct them (Simon, 1971). Thus, I examine what knowledges have already been produced about the history of composition and suggest a different reading. It is in the first section where I juxtapose a general conceptualization of the writing instructor from the 1800s with the writing instructor now, suggesting that somewhere in the last century, a shift has taken place in how the role of writing instructor is conceived. While a number of scholars suggest that this shift has taken place relatively recently, I suggest that this cannot be the case, and suggest a history that goes deeper will

complicate the way that compositional history is understood as well as provide a more detailed look at the ways that pedagogy was conceived, even before current histories suggest pedagogy was a concern in composition.

The second section begins to look at how, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, composition pedagogy was beginning to be driven by student interest. This section lays out how the new “pedagogy of interest” emerged and drove instruction; this is in contrast to histories that suggest the period of the 1940s was bereft of strong pedagogical considerations, being driven by the product-centered current traditional rhetoric. Further consideration is given to the kinds of subjects that this pedagogical move created in students, teachers, and assignments. Students are now judged not solely on their writing, but on their capacity for interest in the subject of writing as well as their capacity to produce interesting writing. Further, this pedagogy begins to insist on reflective writing, wherein students expose something about themselves to both themselves and their instructors.

Then third section examines the ways that the compositional discipline did not develop a pedagogy of interest on its own. Instead, the pedagogy of interest developed as a composite of various discourses. From a genealogical perspective, no discipline exists on its own (Foucault, 1980; 2006). When we look at the works of Foucault that examine specific institutions, such as the prison in *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995), we see that he turns his attention to what was occurring in other institutions, such as schools, asylums, and the military. This is because under Foucauldian philosophy, discourses are always in dialogue with one another as well as the larger *episteme* of the time, that is, the way that knowledge is organized and defined in a given time period (Foucault,

1966/1989). Section three begins to lay out the *dispositif* of composition, or the gridwork of discourses within which composition situated itself, including psychology, education, and to a lesser degree, medicine, especially the prescriptions that these disciplines produced regarding the pedagogy of writing and student interest/engagement.

The fourth section of chapter four addresses the ways that World War 2 affected compositional pedagogy, especially with regard to student interest. This section examines how, more than ever before, it was in the interest of students to become politically active and to develop as democratic citizens. Many scholars used interest as justification for the development of a “democratic subject.” Further, a special subject was emerging during the 1940s: the returning soldier-student. During the 1940s, we see a returning population of veterans that formed a growing topic of discussion in composition studies. Literature in composition characterized these veteran students as different from civilian students, and began developing a curriculum specifically for them around their own interests.

The final, fifth section of chapter four analyzes the powers that reveal themselves in the interactions between composition and its subjects, using Foucauldian demarcations of different types of power. It begins by looking at pastoral and disciplinary powers that existed between student/teacher interactions as the pedagogy of interest began to take hold, which I argue are micro power relations, concerned mostly with individual-to-individual interactions. I move on to a macro analysis of power, examining how the Foucauldian concepts of bio-power and governmentality are active, guiding the emergence of the pedagogy of interest.

**Chapter 5:** The final chapter examines how the past emerges into the present. If a genealogy is, as Foucault claims, a history of the present, then we must determine how



the past bleeds into current practices. This chapter shows how current markers of student engagement are present in the pedagogy of interest that was developing nearly 80 years ago, and provides parallels between then and now to suggest that despite changes in name, many of the practices of the 1940s largely guide the composition curriculum even today. This chapter also suggests new directions for the idea of student engagement, including changing the way that engagement is conceived as well as jettisoning the term altogether.

This study is significant because I believe a particular kind of knowledge exists in compositions pedagogy that blindly accepts and embraces the idea of student engagement. A genealogy forces us to confront such knowledge, and allows us to realize that no one pedagogical approach is natural. Rather, naturalized pedagogies are the result of various power/knowledges coming together and to define and develop strategies for various (potentially anachronistic) goals. Genealogy sheds light on the powers that underlie naturalized and apparently progressive practices, problematizes them, denaturalizes them, and makes way for new knowledges and practices to develop.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I show how the concept of student engagement, despite its prevalence in recent academic research, is poorly understood. To use a Foucauldian term, I “problematize” engagement. Specifically, I explore the ways that it has historically been operationalized as a function of behavior, cognition, and affect. I then deconstruct each of these frames of understanding, showing that even when researchers use such theoretical frameworks to approach the phenomenon of student engagement, they produce little substantive information regarding the phenomenon. I will further show that much of the research on the topic of student engagement thus far offers little more than tautological statements regarding the engagement of students, amounting often to the conclusion that “students are engaged when students are engaged.” By the end of this review, readers should understand that student engagement is an unclear and ultimately unstable term, one which actually does little to further educational research or practice due to its similarity to other extant constructs in educational discourse, its conceptual haziness, and the circular reasoning that underlies the apparent substance of studies on student engagement.

Afterward, I pay special attention to how student engagement has (or has not been) conceived in college composition. I focus my study on engagement in college composition because it is a class that nearly every American college student must take. If engagement is a positive force in education, the college composition course offers an entry point for students to become engaged in their college careers. Much literature in composition reflects this idea, even if student engagement is not well theorized in composition or educational literature. I finally explore how a historical approach to the

topic of student engagement may help elucidate the concept, explain how and why such a poorly understood term has taken such prominence in research in composition education, and offer future directions for the conceptualization of student engagement. I argue that based on the treatment of engagement and the histories of composition studies that exist, the field of composition is ripe for a genealogy of student engagement. In the third chapter of this work, I describe more fully the scope and uses of a genealogy. At this point, however, I believe it suffices to say that a genealogy is useful in exploring how a construct becomes naturalized knowledge. Student engagement in education and composition is certainly a “natural” idea at this point, albeit poorly understood or operationalized. Genealogy will be useful in showing how this term has emerged into the fore. First, however, I attempt to problematize the term, showing how it is a term that, due to its inherent meaninglessness, never should have emerged as it did in the first place.

### **What is Student Engagement?**

Cultivating student engagement is seen as a virtue in education; it has been linked to college completion (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2012; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006) and preventing school dropout (Astin, 1999; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie 2008; Nguyen, 2011). Further evidence suggests that student engagement is particularly important for school completion of minority students (Quaye & Harper; Zhang & Kelly, 2011). Fredericks, Filsecker, and Lawson (2016) claim that there has been an “explosion of research on student engagement because of its potential in addressing persistent educational problems” (p. 1) and according to Quin (2017), student engagement has become “an overarching educational ethos” suggesting “that it is desirable for all students to be psychologically

engaged” (p. 345). At first face, it certainly would seem that student engagement is the answer to many long standing educational problems.

However, despite claims regarding the usefulness of engagement in education, a review of literature suggests that there is no one agreed-upon notion of engagement. Indeed, the term is often used without being clearly operationalized (Trowler, 2010). Christenson, Reschly and Wylie (2012) bemoan the lack of definitional clarity surrounding the idea of student engagement, claiming that this lack of clarity has “hindered efforts to synthesize results of studies, understand effects of interventions, and more accurately detail what is needed for future research” (p. 813). Baron and Corbin (2012) similarly state that “ideas about student engagement... are often fragmented, contradictory, and confused” and “the meaning of the term ‘student engagement’ is uncertain” (p. 759). Trowler (2010) notes that much research “on student engagement [does] not contain explicit definitions of engagement,” and researchers of the topic make “the (erroneous) assumption that their understanding is a shared, universal one” (p.17). This, she notes, has led to a confusion around how to measure the idea of engagement in empirical studies. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004) attempt to give direction by operationalizing engagement via *The Oxford* and *Meriam Webster* dictionaries, describing engagement as a kind of participation in and commitment to something. However, participation and commitment are ideas already in use from motivation theory, and it is probably for this reason that Fredericks et al. (2004) admit that “the definitions used in engagement studies are much less elaborated and differentiated than those used in the motivational literature” (p. 63). Immediately, we see a problem as we review the

literature on this term engagement: namely, it is difficult to say with certainty what student engagement actually is.

Some have tried to define student engagement by describing what it is not. Skinner and Belmont (1993) define student engagement by placing it against the idea of “disaffection.” They set up a kind of scale between the two terms, suggesting that these extremes “[refer] to the intensity and emotional quality of children's involvement in initiating and carrying out learning activities” (p. 572). In this case, engagement might be likened to the idea of enjoyment, set in opposition to the idea of disaffection or dislike. Mann (2001) also attempts to capture the idea of engagement by defining it via a counterpart: alienation. Mann claims that students enter school occupying a particular subject position, and they experience alienation when they are forced into a pre-established subject position by more powerful authority figures such as lecturers, who now see them as “a type rather than an individual” (p. 10). Students are thus objectified, which Mann states leads to estrangement from their studies because they feel voiceless and ineffectual in the broader field that they are studying. For Mann, engagement is tied to the idea of student subject position and identity. However, both of these pieces offer a circuitous definition of engagement; one must infer what engagement is by conceiving of engagement’s opposite. Neither of these pieces provide an exact definition of the term, instead offering extreme examples of what it is not.

I begin my review in this way to highlight the fact that “student engagement” is an ambiguous and slippery term. If it is useful at all, the term derives at least some of its usefulness from other fields, such as motivations studies. Many researchers use the term assuming others know what it means, however initial findings suggest that nearly no

researchers have provided a precise and widely accepted definition of the term. Those that do provide definitions speak of engagement in terms of its opposites, which leads one to wonder why engagement itself cannot be defined. As we begin to search for what it is that makes the stuff of engagement, we realize that the word itself seems to have no center, and it can only be defined by what it is not. Why, then, has the term engagement has taken such a prominent role in academic research and why it is fetishized as a solution to persistence and college completion?

Despite the fact that it is not well defined, student engagement is often conceived of as a function (or combination) of one of three processes: behavior, cognition, and affect (Appleton et al., 2006; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reschley & Christenson, 2012; Trowler, 2010; Yibing & Lerner, 2013). While some have argued that student engagement might incorporate all of these processes simultaneously (Fredericks & McColsky, 2012; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), a review of engagement literature suggests that engagement is often theorized exclusively under one of these three frameworks. Trowler (2010) claims that each of the dimensions provides certain limitations and affordances when used with the lens of engagement. Herein, I describe how behavioral, cognitive, and affective camps understand student engagement. I also describe an empirical study for each category of engagement to illustrate how these particular frameworks of engagement have individually been applied in research practice. In this section, I will highlight the affordances, addressing limitations in a later.

**The behavioral approach to engagement.** Researchers often view engagement as a function of behavior. Indeed, behavior is the most common way of theorizing engagement (Appleton et al., 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), likely because

behavior is much more easily measured than cognition or affect (Reeve, 2013). Under this conception, engagement is manifest in “the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2013). This is similar to how Kuh (2010) and Chickering and Gameson (1987) conceive engagement. Kuh, echoing Chickering and Gameson, provides a list of institutional practices that engage or are engaging to students, which includes “student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning” (2010, p. 8). While Kuh refers to these as institutional practices, upon closer inspection, many of these criteria are not so much institutional practices as they are behaviors that we hope students might adopt as they move through their studies. Similarly, engagement has also been conceived of as students following the rules and adhering to classroom norms (Finn & Rock, 1997). Finally, Quaye and Harper (2015) see student engagement “as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (p. 2). For both Finn and Rock and Quaye and Harper, engagement is seen as an action (or inaction), specifically an action that leads to educational achievement. It is how students comport themselves when traversing the educational environment, especially in regards to behavior that has been shown to produce academic achievement. The behavioral model of engagement may be summarized thus: students are engaged when they participate in activities that are educationally productive, and disengaged when they participate in other activities.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2016) is easily the largest research project that conceptualizes engagement as a behavioral concern. The Survey was

developed as an accountability measure to improve student learning at the college level (Kuh, 2009). It is given to students at over 700 institutions yearly, asking students about their participation in “student behaviors highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college” (Kuh, 2009, p. 8). Many of the survey items measure student participation in the seven institutional practices (Kuh, 2010; Chickering and Gameson, 1987) referred to above. Student engagement in these practices become a proxy for learning outcomes, and institutions may use the data gleaned from the Survey to learn how to better engage students and provide greater learning outcomes for their students (Kuh, 2009). The National Survey of Student Engagement displays how conceiving of student engagement as a set of discreet behaviors simplifies measuring the construct of engagement. Such measurability allows for institutions to quickly respond to perceived student needs and institutional shortcomings.

**The cognitive approach to engagement.** Cognitive engagement has been defined as “the quality of students’ psychological engagement in academic tasks, including their interest, ownership, and strategies for learning” (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012, p. 22). It refers, simply, to learning management strategies, and the desire to employ those strategies in different scenarios. Kahn (2014), enacting a model of cognitive engagement, considers students as reflective processors within their environments. For Kahn, engaged behavior such as that measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (2016) only emerges after students have enacted cognitive engagement. Students must take in and deliberate upon information, constructing potential benefits and drawbacks of their behaviors, as well as considering the ways that they conceive of themselves in relation to the tasks at hand. Students thus determine what in the environment is relevant to/for



themselves (Appleton et al., 2006) and perform behaviors based on this determination. In this way, the cognitive model focuses much more on executive decision making than does the behavioral model. When they are engaged cognitively, students perform a constant, recursive processing in which they take in and process stimulus from their environment, deciding what behaviors to take only after such processing occurs.

Some might argue that conceptions of cognitive engagement overlap with motivation theory. Trowler (2010) describes cognitive engagement as the desire to exceed expectations, noting that “cognitively engaged students would be invested in their learning, would seek to go beyond the requirements, and would relish challenge” (p. 5). Trowler does not state specifically why this is an example of cognitive engagement, but one might surmise that this represents an intrinsic desire to succeed or a need to impress. Mann (2001) “locates control for [students’] engagement in the perceived demands and criteria for success of external others” (p. 7), suggesting that engagement springs for a desire to please or impress others, or to appear a certain way *to* others. In much of the literature on cognitive engagement, there appears to be a balancing between others’ desires and perceptions of the student and the student’s own adopted identity, which are both motivational factors in task completion. The fact that students must consider what is relevant to themselves (Appleton et al. 2006; Davis et al., 2012) and their own identities (Kahn, 2014), suggests that there must be an underlying level of personal motivation for students to transmute cognitive engagement to behavioral engagement (action). This is likely why Fredericks et al. (2004) see the line between engagement and motivation as thin at best.

A prime example of this conceptualization of engagement can be found in Walker, Greene, and Mansell's (2006) study of predictors of cognitive engagement in the college classroom. Specifically, these researchers were interested in determining if there was a connection between among factors, such as identification with the writing topic; intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation; and self-efficacy and cognitive engagement. In their study, they operationalized two different forms of cognitive engagement: meaningful and shallow. In their study, "Meaningful cognitive engagement has been defined as strategy use that combines meaningful processing and self-regulatory strategies such as planning and checking one's work" (p. 3). Meaningful processing, in this case, refers to actively attempting to connect one's existing knowledge to newly learned material. On the other hand, shallow engagement refers to strategies such as rote memorization of information that do not connect information to pre-existing information schemata.

In their study, they used four 6-point Likert-type scales to survey 191 college students (roughly equal numbers of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) to measure students' experiences with intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, identification with academics, and cognitive engagement (measuring specifically students' meaningful and shallow processing strategies) in their college studies. Their results indicated that when student identify with a particular academic study, they are more likely to cognitively engage in a meaningful way with that study. Such academic identification was also predictive of students' self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation was linked to more shallow engagement strategies. Overall, this study shows how engagement, when conceptualized as a cognitive function,

becomes an extension of cognitive processing, understood as how deeply students personalize and connect new information to their existing identities.

**The affective approach to engagement.** A third common way to conceive of student engagement is to think of it as a function of emotion. This idea is prominent in Skinner and Belmont's (1993) work, as they place the idea of student engagement against "not disaffection." If this is true, then engagement must logically be conceived of as affection. Trowler (2010) describes affective engagement as an experience of "affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging" (p. 5). Typically, affective engagement refers to an affinity toward an activity; in fact, Yibing and Lerner (2013) suggest that student engagement should be conceptualized as the positive feelings that arise within students when confronting a particular topic or activity. These positive feelings cause students to engage in the behaviors that Kuh (2010) and Chickering and Gamson (1987) note as being educationally important to student success. Elements of this affective conception of student engagement also arise in Kuh (2008) and Quaye and Harper (2015), as they both discuss cultural affirmation and feelings of inclusion as important to student engagement. Kuh and Quaye and Harper argue that it is incumbent upon institutions to foster affective engagement by building environments where students feel included and valued. When students' emotions are attuned positively and oriented toward an activity, they are able to become more absorbed in that activity.

This idea of absorption also appears in flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which has also been used to conceptualize student engagement (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, & Shernoff, 2003; Whitson & Consoli, 2009; Shernoff et al., 2016). Csikszentmihalyi elaborates on flow, claiming that reaching a state of flow does

not happen often, but on “the rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment” (1990, p. 3). Flow is a kind of hyper-focusing on an activity that produces these feelings, resulting in inattention (or complete obliviousness) to other activities or phenomena, including even the passage of time. Shernoff et al. argue that affective absorption such as that brought on by a state of flow in an activity is a useful way to conceive of the idea of engagement. Under their model, Csikszentmihalyi’s idea of flow and the concept of affective engagement may even be synonymous. Thus, engaging students means presenting them with challenges that pique their interest in such a way that they lose self-consciousness and sense of time while feeling intense joy (Shernoff et al., 2003; Whitson & Consoli, 2009).

An example of how engagement has been seen as affective flow can be found in Shernoff et al. (2003). They sought to understand when students felt the most engaged in school. Data were collected over the course of five years from thirteen randomly selected high schools across the United States, resulting in a total of 526 participants. Shernoff et al. used an electronic sampling method to collect data: specifically, students were paged randomly over the course of the study and asked to fill out a 45 item questionnaire which reported their location, activity, and self-reported feelings of engagement toward their activity. Findings suggested that students feel much more engaged when actively performing, whether individually or in a group, rather than when involving themselves in passive, one-way information transfer (e.g. watching movies, being lectured). Additionally, students were more engaged and enjoyed themselves when activities were challenging rather than simple. Further, this study showed that sometimes, engagement does not occur when students perceive activities as being relevant to themselves. For

instance, Students rated art as a subject with low relevance, but saw it as a highly enjoyable experience. This indicates that internal enjoyment can occur even with reportedly “irrelevant” activities, however Shernoff et al. do not discuss this finding at length. Regardless, the affective conception of engagement helps to show even more deeply why students might engage in specific behaviors. Instead of only relevance, it looks at how students are disposed to certain activities. Buckley, Hasan, and Ainley (2004) have, in fact, argued that the affective approach to engagement is the most “person-centered.” By exploring this personal aspect of engagement, it is easier to intervene when students seem disengaged and to create more meaningful and enjoyable coursework for students.

### **Criticizing Extant Conceptions of Engagement**

It should be noted, though, that none of these categories operationalize engagement *per se*. Rather, they describe how engagement might manifest. This leaves us unsure of what engagement is, where it begins, or where it ends. A series of questions come to mind: for instance, should engagement be synonymous with behavior, cognition, and affect? Is one only engaged once these are enacted? Or does one “being engaged” have to already have happened to say that one is behaviorally, cognitively, and/or affectively engaged? The problem is that these terms do not actually tell us anything about the nature of engagement itself. In many ways, the introduction of behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement begs the question: if one is engaged in such a way, how did one get to that state of engagement? Making engagement a function of action, the brain, or feelings still tells us little about where engagement comes from or why has reached a state of engagement.

Further, while each of the three primary manifestations of engagement may be useful for guiding research, they each have their own limitations. Here, I describe how the behavioral, cognitive, and affective approaches of understanding student engagement may contribute to confusion rather than clarity regarding the term. Ultimately, the largest pitfall of each of these approaches to engagement is that the construct of engagement itself does nothing to further research or understanding of education.

**Limitations of the behavioral approach.** While the behavioral framework for understanding engagement is the most prominent in engagement literature (Appleton et al., 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), it is also the most reductive. Here, the term “engagement” is simply a stand-in for activities that students *do* that are educationally productive. One might ask why the construct of engagement is needed for this project at all. Reschly and Kim (2012) argue that student engagement should be considered in a more layered and complicated way. Reducing student engagement purely to behaviors seems to ignore the connotations that the word “engagement” itself carries—as long as one is doing an activity, regardless of motives or interest, one is engaged. Under this model, one is engaged in doing taxes in the same way that one is engaged in playing a game or sport. In both cases, one is *doing* these activities and is thus engaged. However, nothing about this theory of engagement tells us why students might perform one activity over another, and thus, research using a model of engagement as behavior is limited to description and possibly superficial observation. Reschley and Christenson (2012) suggest that observing the time students spend doing academic activities is not enough to accomplish the goals of schooling. Kuh (2006) also notes that student behaviors under this engagement model become only “proxies” for learning. There is no way to tell if,

when students are engaged under the behavioral model, they are actually learning or developing knowledge. Under this model, we may simply say that certain activities lead to greater educational achievement as Kuh (2010) and Quaye and Harper (2015) do; the term “engagement” itself need not be introduced, because it does not help us to elaborate on the idea of why certain kinds of *doing* approximate educational achievement.

**Limitations of the cognitive approach.** The cognitive approach to engagement appears to go beyond the surface-level treatment of the behavioral approach. However, as Fredericks et al. (2004) note, cognitive engagement is not strongly differentiated from the idea of motivation. Indeed, Trowler (2012), Greene et al. (2004), and Buckley et al. (2004) use engagement and motivation almost interchangeably, and it is difficult to see in their research where the idea of engagement begins and motivation ends. Corno and Mandinich (1983) equate cognitive engagement to self-regulation, again, a major component of motivation theory. If this is the case, the construct of cognitive engagement does not contribute anything new to educational theory, as it simply coopts what has already been investigated under motivational research. Indeed, much research has been performed on self-regulation and motivation without the construct of engagement, and it would seem that cognitive engagement, in its current manifestation, is unnecessary to further our understanding of how students act and regulate in the classroom.

Further, just because cognitive engagement is a form of engagement that moves beyond surface level behaviors, it may also fall into the same descriptive trap as behavioral engagement; in this case, students are not necessarily engaged when they are *behaving* in a certain way, but they are engaged when they are *thinking* in a certain way. Walker et al. (2006) attempt to differentiate two different levels of cognitive engagement

by referring to it as meaningful or shallow, but it is unclear what this distinction does for further engagement as a concept. How to get students to think in a meaningful (read: desirable) way versus a shallow way is never made clear in their study. Students *do* think, but why they think what or how they think is never considered. We are left with observations similar to those offered by the behavioral model, albeit at a less observable and perhaps more personal level for the student. What is more, the term “processing” might just as well take the place of “engagement” in their study, and nothing would be lost while invoking a term already much more established in cognitive studies.

**Limitations of the affective approach.** The affective approach, although it has been called the most person-centered approach to engagement (Buckley et al., 2004) is not without its own limitations. A large criticism rests in the fact that affective engagement only occurs when students feel positive emotions toward a particular topic (Yibing & Lerner, 2013). However, it is not difficult to imagine a student becoming absorbed in a topic because of negative emotions; it is possible to imagine, for instance, a student becoming both horrified and intrigued when learning about the holocaust of World War 2. However, under many conceptions of affective engagement, because the students’ emotions were not positive, the student would not be considered engaged. Trowler (2010) claims that engagement can occur in positive and negative ways, and that both can be productive. The hypothetical holocaust example illustrates the idea of negative engagement—that is, engagement wherein a student is impassioned enough to reject an idea, such as Hitler’s final solution. Even so, this does not appear to be a common way of thinking about affective engagement. Instead, overwhelmingly under this model, students are engaged if and when they feel positive emotions as they



approach their schoolwork. While it is possible to tailor assignments to students' emotions, this model still seems superficial, as there is no exploration of how instructors may begin to understand student emotions. Additionally, like the cognitive model of engagement, the emotional model has been used in conjunction with motivational theory (e.g. Pintrich & Schrauben, 2009; Skinner, 2016; Skinner, Pitzer, & Brule, 2014). When this is the case, as with the other categories, it is not clear what an engagement theory contributes to our understanding of student learning. Indeed, it is not clear why engagement is a necessary construct at all.

### **Measuring Engagement**

Given the variety of ways that engagement has been conceived, engagement has been measured both qualitatively and quantitatively using an assortment of instruments (Fredericks & McColskey, 2012). Rather than contribute to a more comprehensive way of understanding engagement, however, these various measures have fragmented the idea, making it nearly impossible to speak about it comparatively from study to study (Fredericks & McColskey; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Trowler, 2010). Fredericks et al. (2016) and Sinatra, Heddy, & Lombardi (2014) suggest that the fact that engagement borrows from so many other theoretical traditions has led to problems in its conception and measurement, because often researchers are not well versed in the theoretical frameworks and constructs that they borrow from to give engagement its legs. Quin (2017) notes that regardless of how engagement is conceived, there is often “delineation between levels of engagement that is not obvious” (p. 346), meaning that even within studies that conceive of engagement in the same way (behaviorally, cognitively, affectively), there is no agreed-upon scale that establishes students' levels of engagement

(indeed, some might argue that a scale to measure degrees of the experience of engagement would be absurd).

Some methods of collecting information about student engagement include student self-reports, experience sampling, and interviews (Fredericks & McColskey, 2012). However, all of these methods carry with them potential problems in measuring engagement. Sometimes, for instance, survey items for self-reports may be overly broad (e.g. “I feel that I work hard in school”), telling very little about the students’ disposition toward schooling or what exactly the student works hard to accomplish. This further ignores the extremely subjective nature of “working hard” or the potential for self-reporting participants to want to present in a particular way for researchers (as a hard worker, regardless of actuality). Further, Fredericks et al. (2016) found that often, even in these scales, constructs vary from study to study, meaning that self-reported survey items cannot be compared from study to study. Experience sampling may catch students at a bad moment, or, if experience sampling is to measure the level of a student’s engagement in a given moment, it may even break the student’s level of engagement (however it is conceived) with whatever task the student was engaged in. Thus, experience sampling may actually *disengage* students from an otherwise engaging moment. Interviews about school specifically may invite students to fabricate information depending on the interviewer, and in general, interviews may not lead to reliable or stable data (Fredericks & McColskey; McCaslin & Good, 1996).

In some instances, student engagement is not measured based on students as the data source. Rather, teacher perceptions of student engagement are taken as reliable measures. For instance, teachers of students may be asked to determine how engaged

they feel students are (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). On a broader scale, such as the NSSE (2016), student engagement may be measured at an institution by determining “how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities... that are linked to student learning” (n.p.). In these cases, such measurements circumvent the student in student engagement, assuming that other indicators may speak on behalf of the student experience. The fact that so many methods are used to reach this idea of student engagement is not positive. In other cases, these assorted methods might help to triangulate information or data gleaned from other studies. However, in the case of student engagement, the different methods are a result of competing definitions and conceptualizations of the construct; thus, the more methods used in studies, the more fragmented the idea of engagement becomes in the larger corpus of research. Eccles (2016) likens this fragmentation as blind men describing different parts of an elephant. She say of researchers:

...they are trying to identify the various possible meanings of the concept of engagement through qualitative and quantitative descriptions, followed by factor analytic methods to try to isolate the various subcomponents. Like the three blind men, they have produced a set of descriptive indicators. But do these indicators capture the emergent property of engagement? This is less clear. (p. 71)

### **Engagement as Tautology**

In sum, engagement is not a well-defined construct in educational research. Further, to say that engagement is the same as one’s behavior, thinking, or feeling

reduces the idea of engagement to a trite buzzword that offers little in terms of instructional direction. Indeed, thinking of engagement in these ways seems to place the concept of engagement into pre-existing theoretical frameworks, whether these frameworks are behavioral, cognitive, motivational, or affective. However, these frameworks have all existed well before engagement came to the educational fore, and it is not clear that the introduction of student engagement advances these theories. Perhaps engagement should exist on its own terms, its own theory, not necessarily embedded into other educational theories. When treated on its own, however, engagement is still ill-defined, and I argue that educational theorists have a difficult time describing how engagement exists and what engagement does. Often, when treated on its own terms, engagement becomes circular, and it is unclear where or how engagement begins or is enacted by students. To illustrate this point, I draw upon two theories of engagement, the first from Kahn (2014), the second from Quaye and Harper (2015) to show how engagement has been reduced to little more than a tautology in theoretical research, something to the tune of “engagement is when students are engaged.”

Kahn (2014) sees student engagement as a confluence of affect and cognition, a dialogue between students’ emotions, self-conceptions, and the school topic at hand. He elaborates that engagement occurs when students come into contact with uncertainty in their education and are faced with making a decision as a result of this uncertainty; in the face of uncertainty about consequences or futures, students must rely upon personally motivating factors to engage with materials, activities, and projects. In this case, Kahn suggests that prior existing student interest plays a significant role in engagement. When students desire to master material or a practice, their reflexive deliberation leads to

engagement. At first, this appears to give students control over their engagement, but I suggest that such a claim does not tell us much. Students who were already interested in and motivated to learn certain material might be said to be *already* engaged by that material, particularly if we consider engagement either a cognitive or an affective concern. It is difficult to locate the origins of engagement in this case or to say when exactly a student became engaged in material. If they are engaged in a topic or activity prior to coming to school, this leaves little room for instructors to modify their lessons to promote engagement, as engagement might be said to be characteristic of the student, rather than something to create, cultivate, or inspire.

Further, as with the concept of cognitive engagement, is not clear in Kahn's (2014) piece how engagement significantly differs from interest or motivation. Early in his piece, Kahn provides a definition of student engagement as referring to the student's contribution or commitment to a task. The term "commitment" invokes, at least in part, a level of interest and motivation, given that it takes a pre-existing interest and/or motivation to commit. If we hold this to be true, that commitment is comprised of interest, then it means interest leads to commitment, which is being used synonymously with engagement. Interest is already a kind of engagement, however, that leads to commitment, also engagement. We are left with an equation:

Interest = engagement

Commitment = engagement

Interest → commitment

Engagement → engagement

Admittedly, definitions for all of these terms—commitment, interest, and motivation—are unclear in Kahn’s piece. However, when we strip all of these terms to constituent or reflexive meanings, one interpretation of Kahn’s conception of engagement amounts to a tautology: students engage in things that engage them, or students are engaged when they are engaged.

In sum, Kahn’s (2014) conception of engagement falls upon itself. It attempts to explain how engagement is student driven, however close scrutiny prevents this reading. Instead, engagement fosters engagement. Closer scrutiny reveals that the construct of engagement under his model is not even well developed. Unfortunately, he is not the only one to rely on such circularity to conceptualize engagement. Quaye and Harper (2015) also attempt to theorize student engagement, but rely on similar circular reasoning to get at what student engagement is. In contrast to Kahn, they describe engagement as an entity that occurs through interaction, rather than within the student. Kahn claims that Quaye and Harper’s “primary emphasis on diverse populations of students draws one away from the agency of the individual student” (Kahn, p. 1006), unlike his own. In this way, they provide a convenient contrast to his own theory of engagement. For them, student engagement is “simply characterized as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (p. 2-3). They further differentiate engagement from involvement, noting that involvement can occur passively—a student can attend a class or study groups with minimal interest and not be engaged: instead, “action, purpose, and cross-institutional collaboration are requisite for engagement and deep learning” (p. 5). Student engagement, then, is a kind of active involvement. While this may sound similar to

Kahn's definition of engagement, Quaye and Harper move away from the idea that students are responsible for garnering their own engagement. Instead, they state that "weak institutions are those that expect students to engage themselves" (p. 6), and quoting Pascarella (2001), claim that "excellent undergraduate education is likely to occur at those colleges and universities that maximize good practices and students' academic and social engagement" (p.22). The college itself becomes an engaging space, and educators/schools need to provide opportunities for students to become engaged. As Kahn notes, this suggests that engagement originates outside of students and their agency.

Unfortunately, there is immediately a problem with Quaye and Harper's (2015) definition of student engagement. It is measured by participation in educationally effective practices that students do, particularly those that lead to positive educational outcomes. However, this move begins to create a circularity in their argument, which after some dismantling, resembles Kahn's (2014). According to Quaye and Harper, engagement in educationally purposeful activities leads to "deep levels of learning and the production of enduring and measurable gains and outcomes" (p. 6). The problem with this becomes an issue of causality; Quaye and Harper have already, by definition, identified engagement as leading to educationally effective outcomes. They use educational success (deep learning, measurable gains) as an indication of pre-existing engagement in the activities that led to such success (engagement → educational success), but by their definition, they already know that engagement causes such outcomes. It is these outcomes that can be used to determine that engagement occurred (educational success → engagement). Student engagement and educationally effective

outcomes simply refer back to one another in a circularity game. This equation looks something like:

Engagement  $\leftrightarrow$  educational success.

While it initially seems that Quaye and Harper are making a substantial claim about engagement, they actually succeed in dancing around the term, never truly indicating what it is or where it begins. Engagement leads to success because success is an indicator that engagement happened.

Another way of saying this is that by the definitions and reasoning of Kahn (2014) and Quaye and Harper (2015), engagement must already be in place to be enacted. Students engage in certain activities that are engaging, and we know that they are engaging because students engage in them. The circularity of their treatment of engagement causes any seemingly stable definition of student engagement to break down. Both Kahn's and Harper and Quaye's description of engagement attempts to place engagement within and outside of students, respectively. However, the logic breaks into a kind of "engagement is engaging because it is engages," or "engagement is effective because effectiveness is indicated by engagement." When this is the case, where engagement begins, and by extension what it is, quickly becomes aporetic, constantly referring to itself or other similarly unclear terms. We must then begin the work of defining engagement by what it is not, as we saw at the beginning of this review. Engagement is an extension of educational activities just as educational activities are an extension of it. We know that it is not involvement, motivation, or commitment, but it is like these terms, even though it is still different. Perhaps this is why, in a recent systematic review of student engagement (Quin, 2017), an indicator of student



engagement is psychological engagement. In this case, we explicitly have engagement as a measure of engagement. In engagement literature, this is the closest we have come to defining what student engagement actually is. And as such a hazy concept, it becomes unclear what the exactly student engagement has done for education research. As Fredericks et al. (2016) note, it can be used to explain almost everything that students do in school, and by explaining everything, it truly explains nothing at all. This is remarkably similar to Foucault's (1989) criticism of certain "barbarous" words: "many familiar words are barbarous because they say many things at once or they say nothing at all" (p. 413). Foucault would certainly criticize engagement of such barbarity. And by mentioning Foucault, I anticipate the approach that I will use to understand how engagement has emerged over the years as a term at once of such import and such emptiness.

### **Engagement in Composition**

The fact that student engagement is a rather empty concept has not prevented composition studies from adopting and employing the term in various ways. Engagement is one of the essential habits of mind identified by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) (2011) for successful college writing. The WPA offers a vague and short definition of engagements, suggesting that it is "a sense of investment or involvement in learning," which arguably offers some synonyms of the word "engagement," (note that Quayle and Harper (2015) explicitly claimed that engagement was not involvement) but says very little about what engagement actually is. Even so, engagement has been used in composition since at least 1991, one of the earliest uses appearing in Phelps' *Composition as a Human Science* (1991). Phelps describes

introducing students to theory, claiming that “the problem ... is... how to do so according to the principles of kairos: specifically, what knowledge is appropriate at given moments of development and process; how to introduce it most productively; how to engage students in a dialogue about it rather than impost it as a rule” (p. 234). It is possible that Phelps’ use of the word “engage” might simply mean “get students to talk,” however I suspect that engage means something more here. Phelps wants students to internalize theory, to understand that different lenses can be used to understand literature and writing. If this is the case, then Phelps offers one of the first examples of student engagement appearing in composition literature.

More recently, 2008, the WPA paired with the NSSE and developed 27 writing-related questions to investigate “how student writing experiences related to their engagement and learning” (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, & Paine, 2009, p. 1). Clearly, since 1991, the idea of engagement had permeated composition studies, shown simply in the fact that the WPA created such a collaboration with the NSSE. The 27 questions that they developed specifically addressed student involvement in “interactive writing activities” such as peer reviews and visits to writing centers; “meaning-constructing writing,” which includes synthesizing information and writing for specific audiences; and how well students felt their instructors explained expectations for writing assignments. These areas were determined through a confirmatory factor analysis. Anderson et al.’s findings “show that more work in these areas are associated with more engagement in deep learning activities and greater self-reported gains in practical competence, personal and social development, and general education” (p. 1). There is thus an immediate assumption that writing is in some way related to student engagement.

Anderson, Anson, Paine, & Gonyea (2015) elaborate these findings to establish the idea that writing can be a “high impact educational practice” (p. 201). Unfortunately, in pairing with the NSSE to glean this information, Anderson et al. (2015) fall into a trap that engagement researchers in education have already fallen into. A high impact or evidence based practice leads to certain positive educational outcomes, and therefore it is engaging. Engagement is synonymous with positive educational outcome, and we may level the same criticism against Anderson et al. (2009; 2015) as we have already levelled against Quayle and Harper (2015). In effect:

Evidence based practice = student engagement = positive educational outcome

However, through the transitive property, we may simply do away with the middle term and achieve the same results:

Evidence based practice = positive educational outcome

It is possible simply to erase student engagement and nothing is lost from research.

Indeed, Anderson et al. (2015) seem to slowly erase the construct of student engagement from their study, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Despite the fact that they use an instrument of student engagement to measure writing practice, the term does not appear in their 40 page report as often as one might expect. As with the behavioral understanding of engagement, “engage” is often used as a stand-in for the word “do.” For instance, in defining the construct of integrative learning, Anderson et al. refer to it as a “measure of students’ engagement in combining ideas from various sources” (p. 211). This does not invoke the earlier WPA definition of engagement that refers to interest and investment; it only refers to students’ participation in a particular activity.

The WPA's affiliation with the NSSE suggests that student engagement is an important construct in composition studies, but like in educational research (indeed, perhaps because of the WPA's reliance on educational research) student engagement is equally poorly operationalized.

Perhaps the greatest example of student engagement in composition studies exists before the WPA/NSEE collaboration in Bean's (2001) *Engaging Ideas*. Bean's entire text centers on offering pedagogical suggestions and lesson plans to make composition more engaging to students. Interestingly, however, over the course of the entire text, he never actually tells us what student engagement is. The purpose of his book, he states, is "to create a pragmatic nuts-and-bolts guide that will help teachers from and discipline design interest-provoking writing and critical thinking activities" (p. xi). He further argues that writing assignments must be both challenging and "interesting" if teachers intend to "engage students in a sometimes transforming intellectual experience" (xiii). It seems, then, that interest has something to do with this idea of engagement, as does critical thinking and challenge, but how these ideas are incorporated into the broader idea of engagement is left untouched. Without firmly establishing what this thing engagement is, his book may offer good suggestions for practice, but it is unclear as to how or why these suggestions are ultimately "engaging ideas."

Shortly after Bean's publication, Light (2003) released a report on the relationship between college writing and student engagement. In his study, he surveyed 365 undergraduate students, asking about their time commitment to the courses that they were taking, the level of intellectual challenge the course offered, and the level of personal engagement to the course (although he does not mention this explicitly, we see shades of

the behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions of engagement, respectively, in these three questions). He found that when students are assigned more writing, they spend more time on the class and feel a greater level of personal engagement with that class. If engagement is strictly seen as time on task, then this would be telling, however it does not tell us anything about whether or not students embrace the writing that they are doing or what they learn through writing. While Light notes that students write more when they are interested in what they are writing about, the bulk of his article focuses on the amount of writing that students do. Further, we might expect courses that assign more writing to be more challenging, upper division courses. If this is the case, it is likely that students already had a vested interest in the course, and thus personal engagement, and happened to be assigned more writing as an effect of the course level. Ultimately, he falls into the same trap as many educationalists—seeing engaging as a stand-in for “doing,” (in this case, “doing writing”) not allowing the term to become as rich or complex as it might.

Thus far, it would seem that student engagement has simply been taken from educational studies by composition, as the same problems with definition and measurement appear in composition literature. However, engagement in composition has been conceived in a way beyond that of educational literature. Bowen (2005) argues that one kind of student engagement is “engagement with the human condition,” engagement that brings students closer to understanding the societies and cultures of which they are a part. In particular, he notes, the humanities and social sciences adopt this view of engagement. Certainly, composition studies has adopted this view of engagement. Indeed, roughly half of results for the term “engagement” in the CompPile database

(there are currently 89 articles) returns results that refer to “civic,” “political” or “community engagement.”

An excellent example of such community engagement is Rose and Weiser’s (2010) *Going Public*, an edited volume that describes ways that the composition curriculum might more readily offer students community engagement opportunities. Rose and Weiser align themselves with a report from the Kellogg Foundation which describes engagement as a function of institutions that have “redesigned their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined” (p. 9). According to this report, the engaged university should strive for three goals:

1. It must be organized to respond to the needs of today’s students and tomorrow’s, not yesterday’s.
2. It must enrich students’ experiences by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum and offering practical opportunities for students to prepare for the world they will enter.
3. It must put its critical resources (knowledge and expertise) to work on the problems the communities it serves face. (p. 10).

This is a rather different conception of engagement from the NSSE (2013), and Rose and Weiser are aware of this. In fact, they ultimately reject the NSSE definition of student engagement, suggesting that under that model, it becomes simply a tool to academic success, whereas their own definition of community engagement “philosophically... becomes an underlying principle of higher education, not simply a contribution to student success” (p. 2). Thus, in Rose and Weiser’s conception of engagement, there is a degree

of deviation from the various ways that it has been conceived in educational studies, and this deviation seems to have taken hold in compositions studies.

### **Genealogy in Composition: A Gap in the Literature**

Despite my protestations against the term “student engagement,” it cannot be denied that it is a term often used in educational and composition literature. If engagement is so poorly operationalized that it tells us nothing, as I argue, then the next question is “how has it come to be used so ubiquitously?” I propose to develop a Foucauldian genealogy of student engagement in composition studies. To date, I could find neither a history of engagement nor a Foucauldian genealogy in college composition studies. Even so, Licastro, Miller, and Belli (2016) argue that “we are currently in the midst of a kairotic moment in the history of writing studies, when we have both the living memory of the field’s development and the technological memory to gather and query large amounts of information” (n.p). As such, they suggest that the time is ripe for a genealogy of writing studies, although their use of genealogy differs from that of Foucault. They see genealogy as a kind of family tree, one that traces academic relationships within the writing studies discipline. The purpose of their “writing studies tree” is to trace a direct lineage of the field, to determine what figures in the field were influential in moving writing studies into its present moment and to articulate how these figures had influence. This project differs drastically from a Foucauldian inspired genealogy, both in purpose and epistemology. For instance, Licastro et al. do not move outside of the discipline of writing studies to trace the emergence of the field; they are more interested in how scholars within writing studies have influenced each other and passed on ideas. Additionally, there is no discussion of power dynamics in their writing

studies tree. While I describe Foucauldian genealogy in greater depth in chapter three of this study, it suffices to say that such an examination of power as well as a broader focus are necessary in Foucauldian genealogy.

This is not to say that some histories in composition do not, at least to some degree, draw upon Foucault. Goggin (2000), for instance, invokes Foucault in her history of the professionalization of composition when she asks “who is speaking?” (p. 147). Her book is a history of the silencing and reemergence of composition studies, examining what forces led to composition and rhetoric becoming a discipline in its own right, beyond the limited freshman English class. Her book certainly draws upon a Foucauldian epistemology, and she comes closer to a Foucauldian genealogy than most works in composition studies, although she does not refer to it as such. She acknowledges that “disciplines are social products, born of political struggles for both intellectual and material spaces” (p. xxi). Goggin further recognizes various ideological forces and sites of knowledge production that have shaped composition studies into its present form, citing the formation of committees, conferences, and scholarly journals as manifestations of such forces. Additionally, she notes that historians of the field hold similar power, referring to them as “disciplinographers,” those who write the discipline. These are certainly ideas that Foucault would agree with. However, the only mention of genealogy in her work is used in a similar way to Licastro et al. (2016). Goggin notes that journal editors are networked, often advisees of previous journal editors. She suggests that a clear lineage of editorship helps to build a “genealogy of the discipline” (p. 153). However her use of the term “genealogy” does not harness the full force of disciplinary power dynamics and “unearthing” that Foucault would strive for in his own genealogies.



Instead, her genealogy refers to a kind of person-based lineage and suggests a kind of top-down, hegemonic reproduction.

Goggin (2000) is not the only historian of composition to acknowledge Foucault when developing a history of the discipline. Hawk also uses Foucault in his counter-history of composition (aptly titled *A Counter-History of Composition*). Hawk's primary contention in his counter-history is with the idea of vitalism in composition, and while he does not set out to establish a new *episteme*, he offers a "counter" conceptualization of the idea. He argues that vitalism has been historically misread in composition, being thought of as an individual, autonomous, internal drive for invention. While composition prides itself in complexity, he argues that vitalism is not an essentialist concept, and should be brought back to composition from a lens of complexity; he sees vitalism not as a possession or inherent trait of an individual, but as a relation between agent and ecology: "humans combine with many... elements in the environment to create conditions of possibility that suggest potential futures" (p. 172). He uses Foucault as a way to suggest that his argument is not groundbreaking or, itself, an autonomous construction. Rather, it is an extension of an already existing *episteme*, that of the modern, which sees vitalism as a constellation of abstraction that give life to non-life, a "fundamental co-productive relationship that produces a new [Modern] epistemic constellation" (p. 135). Such a constellation of the complex and abstract, he argues, is a productive way to see rhetorical creation.

Hawk's (2007) work falls much more comfortably into a "counter-history" than a genealogy. It does not explore power relations or talk across discourses. Even so, he pays homage to the Foucauldian idea of the Foucauldian *episteme*, and uses Foucault to build a

historical understanding of the idea of vitalism in composition. The final, and perhaps most notable composition theorist to invoke Foucault in a history of composition is James Berlin (1987). Berlin refers to Foucault in his history of American writing instruction between 1900 and 1985. In his first chapter, Berlin recognizes his own subjectivity or “terministic screen” from which he writes his history. He further acknowledges his indebtedness to “Foucault's discussion of the relationship between knowledge and power in discourse communities, and of the role of discursive and nondiscursive practices in shaping consciousness within these communities.” (p. 18). Despite the fact that he describes Foucault as an influence, Berlin’s history is fairly linear, and draws primarily from major journals in the field. The history itself is not particularly Foucauldian.

It seems, then, that while histories of composition might borrow from Foucault—indeed, they may even be Foucauldian in spirit—they fall sort of being Foucauldian genealogies. In general, there is little attention paid to student subjects in histories of composition. Thus, perhaps Licastro et al. (2016) are correct when they claim that the time is right for a genealogy in composition. In the section that follows, I develop the driving research questions of the present study, describe a Foucauldian genealogy, and lay out a plan of action for a genealogy of engagement in composition studies.

## **Method**

To do the work of better understanding the “why?” of student engagement in composition or, perhaps to be more precise, the “how come?” I have developed a Foucauldian genealogy. Genealogy is an historical method of understanding a phenomenon. In this section, I describe what genealogy is, providing an overview of the aims of genealogy as a method. I then broadly describe how one might perform a genealogy, focusing specifically on the techniques that Foucault employed in his own genealogical analytic, and, using this description, close this chapter by laying out how I plan to achieve my genealogy of engagement. I begin, however, with my research questions and a brief justification for choosing genealogy as my approach.

### **Research questions**

The major guiding questions of this research are:

1. How have practices associated with student engagement come to be privileged in the present moment?
2. How have practices of engagement in the freshman college composition course worked to produce a compositional subject?
3. How has a history of the present of the practices of engagement come to be used particularly in the discipline of composition studies, with attention to pedagogical considerations for students and teachers?
4. What does a history of engagement tell us about the schooled subject in the present moment?

These questions immediately lend themselves to an historical analysis. In particular, they invite a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 30), or a

genealogical approach. All of these questions require us to look at the present manifestations of student engagement and to trace backwards, through history, the ever shifting factors that have contributed to its development into the present. According to Prado (1995), a genealogical approach helps us to answer “how and why we hold some things true, how and why we deem some things knowledge, and how and why we consider some procedures rational and others not (p. 10). Moreover, Prado describes genealogy as “concerned with how the development of discursive practices and interactive conventions produce truth and knowledge and so shape and define subjects and subjectivity” (p. 11), as well as how “truth” is historically contingent upon “the conglomeration of blind forces” (p.40). In the case of my own research, a genealogical approach may be used to understand the trajectory of this thing, student engagement, illuminating how/why it has come to be understood as a pedagogical value, a kind of producing power/knowledge tied to various artifacts and subjects, including the successful-student subject, the engaging-professor subject, assignments, lesson plans, and even nationally prevalent institutional analyses such as the NSSE.

### **Genealogy: An Overview of Foucault and his Analytic**

Foucauldian genealogy differs radically from other common forms of history, including empirical accounts, progressivist, Whig accounts, or Marxist accounts of history (I address this more fully in the “epistemology/historiography” subsection). is rooted in Nietzschean philosophy (Foucault, 1983; Garland, 2014; Koopman, 2013; Prado, 1995). In *Genealogy of Morals* (1956), Nietzsche explains his beliefs of historical evolution:

The actual causes of a thing's origin and its eventual uses, the manner of its incorporation into a system of purposes, are worlds apart; that everything exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions; that all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming, and that, in turn, all outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the earlier meaning and purpose are necessarily either obscured or lost (p. 209).

Here, Nietzsche suggests that genealogy is not a history of any particular phenomenon, *per se* (I use the term phenomenon here not to suggest a phenomenological approach of study, but simply to indicate an item of investigation). A genealogical history, rather, examines how a phenomenon is intersected with, acted upon, and appropriated by various discourses over the course of history. A "history of the present," then, is one that examines how a phenomenon developed into its current state as it came to use within various socio-political discourses, and how it was influenced by/influenced those discourses based on the ever-changing powers and knowledges that existed within those discourses. In the words of Visker (1995), a genealogy "does not shed light on the past from the present, but rather illuminates the present from the past" (p. 12).

However, Foucault suggests that his understanding of genealogy differs from Nietzsche's in that he sees genealogy as both a move to problematize current practices and to trace the very history of the ways that problems have been conceived (Foucault, 1983). Nietzsche, he claims, saw history too statically, attributing ethical movements too linearly to Christian influences, not examining in depth the problems that Christianity

developed too address and the larger social influences that colluded for Christianity to emerge in the way that it did. Despite Nietzsche's influences for Foucault, his approach falls into one of Foucault's (1984a) larger critiques of historical methods: that history is dissociative, it "severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory" (p. 93), attempting to create a view of history that claims to be divorced from personal interpretation and the historian's subjectivity. This view creates a division between "types" of genealogy, which Koopman (2009; 2013) further develops. Nietzsche's genealogical approach was subversive; it acted as a way to debunk common practices and values, attempting to show how these values became codified but were, in fact, harmful to the human condition. Foucault's genealogies, though potentially subversive, make no overt claims of harm. Rather, Foucault genealogies of problematization are driven by a more inquisitive nature, attempting to understand what was at work to allow for common practices and beliefs to develop. Koopman further identifies a third type of genealogy that is not deeply discussed by Foucault, which he refers to as a vindicatory genealogy. Genealogies of vindication historically analyze practices and beliefs in order to justify them. My research questions are Foucauldian in nature: they invite a problematizing approach to genealogy, as I attempt to understand what the concept of student engagement is designed to address and how the emergence of student engagement creates its own problems in the educational/compositional landscape.

I am careful not to ask where student engagement began. Rather, I am interested in its emergence. For Foucault, there is no demarcated "beginning" of any phenomenon under research. The purpose of a genealogy is twofold: genealogy analyzes the

emergence of a phenomenon in an effort to understand that phenomenon's "catalytic coming-to-be," (Prado, 1995) which Foucault (1984a) referred to as "emergence."

Genealogy also offers an analysis of descent (Foucault, 1984a), showing the "miscellany of [a phenomenon's] beginnings" (Prado, 1995, p. 36). The analysis of descent shows that there is no definitive originating point of any phenomenon—it is an examination of "shifts and displacements" rather than a "search for the origin" (Foucault, 1972, p. 203).

A phenomenon rather emerges as the result of a series of "happy and unhappy accidents and coincidences united by interpretation" (Prado, p. 34). In showing how an item has emerged as a result of discursive appropriations, accidents, and coincidences, a genealogy also shows how that item existed in myriad ways prior to its generally accepted beginnings. A useful metaphor is the formation of a star. Stars form in nebulas, which are astronomically large clouds of gas, dust, and other particles. Sections of the cloud begin to collapse in on themselves as a result of gravitational forces, becoming more dense and hot. Eventually, these sections become hot enough to initiate nuclear fusion, and a star is born. Now, it is simple to say that the star formed once fusion began, however, the elements (gases and particles) of the star were present long before the star's inception, working upon one another in minute yet important ways. If the star represents a phenomenon under investigation, a genealogy seeks to show how the particles existed prior to the star's inception (analysis of descent) and how the particles moved and combined to contribute to the formation of the star (analysis of emergence). Important to note is that even when undergoing genealogical analysis, there is no zero-point of a phenomenon (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1984a; Garland, 2014; Prado, 1995); in the star metaphor, even the nebula predates itself, forming as a result of countless

cosmic forces, including gravitational pulls, other stars being born, and other stars dying. In sum, a major assumption in genealogical analysis is that nothing ever simply appears—the existence of any phenomenon is always the result of some combination of constituting forces and items that existed before it.

I earlier felt the need to note that when using the word “phenomenon,” I did not mean to imply a phenomenological investigation, but simply an item for study. To further differentiate, I believe it necessary to describe Foucault’s relationship with phenomenology and hermeneutics. Indeed, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) suggest that to truly understand Foucault, it is important to “pin down precisely” these philosophical branches (p. xix). Beginning with the idea of phenomenology, despite himself often using the term “phenomenon” (much in the way that I do—as an object of study), Foucault (1966/1989) clearly sees it as an inadequate philosophy, especially Husserlean phenomenology: “if there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, . . . which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness” (p. xv). For Foucault, as we shall see, the observing subject has no primacy or agency. Rather, the analysis should rest in why the subject observes as it does, why the observing subject is what it is. In phenomenology, there is a true meaning within objects under the subject’s observation, one that is interpreted through this transcendental consciousness. History may be treated this way as well, as an empirical and transcendental, if still interpreted, object of study. Foucault’s project is to “free history from the grip of phenomenology” rather than to establish a continuity, a story of origins, a true meaning (Foucault, 1972, p. 203)As the idea of phenomenology emerged into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and



was taken up by Heidegger, we see some consideration of one's cultural and historical position as affecting one's ability to interpret and give meaning to the phenomena around them; this becomes Heidegger's brand of hermeneutics (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

While Heidegger gives credit to contextual factors in determining the subject's capacity to and way of observing, he suggests that an analysis of these factors *in toto* is not possible; that is, such contextual factors "form a background which can never be made completely explicit, and so cannot be understood in terms of the beliefs of a meaning-giving subject" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. xxi). However, we may still attempt to the meaning that we ascribe to these factors, or as Foucault (1972) puts it, "[rediscovering] what is expressed in them" (p. 162). Foucault further (1966/1989) calls hermeneutics "the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning" (p. 33). The problem with such an analysis for Foucault is that it is, for lack of a better term, too anodyne. Further, it does not take into account the reason that certain backgrounds and practices produce the meaning that they do. Within hermeneutics, the problem is similar to that of phenomenology; the social world which comprises meaning is taken for granted, as a simple and neutral backdrop upon or through which we develop meaning making habits. For Foucault, the social is not take for granted; instead, his genealogical analysis is concerned with what allows the conditions for meaning to be constructed in the way that it is, with what allows a social world to emerge in such and such a fashion. His is not a philosophy of meaning implicit in phenomena and actions, but a philosophy of *why* certain meanings are understood as existing in phenomena and actions in the first place.

## **Power/Knowledge**

One of the largest factors that shows us the difference between Foucault and his phenomenological/hermeneutic predecessors is his interest in power. Indeed, one of the major points (perhaps the primary point!) of genealogy is to examine the forces, or powers, that allowed a particular phenomenon under investigation to emerge in the particular way that it does (Foucault, 1976/1978), especially at the level of the institution (Foucault, 1982). As Foucault states, a genealogy is “the ‘how’ of power” (Foucault, 2003, p. 23). He has further stated that every one of his questions regarding the social sciences might be boiled down to two words: power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980, p. 109). Power in the Foucauldian sense is not simply domination—not a “group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state... [or] a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule” (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 92). Instead, power exists in terms of relations between entities, as well as ways of knowing, that is, knowledge *about* something (Foucault, 1976/1978; Foucault, 2003; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). This is why Foucault often combines power and knowledge as a single entity. Indeed, in *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that “we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where power relations are suspended” (1995/1977, p. 27) They exist in a circular relationship, power leading to particular ways of thinking, and knowledge creating normalized practices. Prado (1995) describes the tracking of subtle power relations specifically as being central to the genealogical conception of history, more so that major events such as battles, elections, or assassinations—those events in history that are most apparent. Such major events, Foucault would argue, are

crystallizations of larger, already-instantiated forms of power/knowledge in play. Instead of focusing on the apparent in history, the genealogist looks for smaller, particular moments in history that suggest new trajectories for extant power structures or nuanced shifts in power relations.

Foucault further elaborates on the ways that power/knowledge exists, particularly within the social sciences. He states that there is consistent historical discontinuity within them, creating different and often conflicting regimes of “truth” as they develop (Foucault, 1980). Examining these regimes of truth requires examining what governs the movements in what counts as knowledge within these disciplines. However, when referring to this concept of government, he does not refer to a particular ruler or position that designates knowledge within a field: it is “not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on a science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes their internal regime of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 112). Within the social sciences, there is a perpetual battle occurring over what should constitute the best methods, the correct knowledge, the truth. As certain knowledges emerge and take on the veneer of truth, they become the guiding principles within a discipline.

But why the social sciences? One of Foucault’s major criticisms was the developing science of the human being, or the concept that the human could be understood empirically (Paden, 1987). The human sciences for Foucault differ from other sciences. Physical sciences have existed *a priori*, regardless of human beings’ presence or interest (Foucault, 1966/1989; 1980). However, the concept of “man” (as Foucault uses it) is not an *a priori*; it has only existed since humans have been interested in the social

and psychological aspects of humans and a need to understand those aspects: “the emergence of the human sciences was occasioned by a problem, a requirement, an obstacle of a theoretical or practical order” (Foucault, 1966/1989, p. 376). And we certainly see the concept of the human changing under different orders of humanism, from the concept of the human during the Enlightenment, to the concept of the human within religion, to the concept of the human within Marxist readings (Foucault, 1984a). In this way, humanism and the human, just as other social phenomenon, are subject to change given changes in times, discourses, and conceptions of truth. Foucault (1966/1989) contends that this study of the human is a fairly recent invention, being “no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position [the human] has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge” (p. xxv). Foucault takes comfort in the idea that this particular conception of humanity “will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form” (p. xxv).

However, human sciences attempt to provide an empirical, timeless examination of the human being, as though such examinations are not temporally, contextually motivated, despite the fact that, for instance, the concept of what determined insanity changes several times over the course of the last three centuries (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1965/1988; Foucault, 2006). This is the issue with labelling the study of humanity a science. Science carries the veneer of truth with it, and thus ascribes a power to any study that may call itself a science. The human sciences may then forget their deeply contextual roles, seeing “truth” as a universal and fixed matter. Foucault (2006)

personifies human sciences, providing a voice which characterizes their relationship with truth and power. In short, a human science need not concern itself with truth because it is ...already a science. And if, as science, I have the right to question what I say, if it is true that I may make mistakes, it is in any case up to me, and to me alone, as science, to decide if what I say is true or to correct the mistake. I am the possessor, if not of truth in its content, at least of all the criteria of truth. Furthermore, because, as scientific knowledge, I thereby possess the criteria of verification and truth, I can attach myself to reality and its power and impose upon ... bodies the surplus-power that I give to reality. I am the surplus power of reality inasmuch as I possess, by myself and definitively, something that is the truth... (p. 134).

By calling these studies “sciences,” we agree that they represent some kind of truth, or at least a kind of knowledge that is true, and they are then allowed powers to classify, to diagnose, to investigate, to cure, what have you. However, as a science, studies of humanities also exclude other kinds of knowledge. It is by the science’s own standard that something is true or false. Thus, any way of knowing that does not follow the science’s standard of verification becomes understood as a non-knowledge.

As we begin to look at knowledges that take pre-eminence over others (I will address “subjugated knowledges” later in this piece), it is important to note that Foucault further differentiates between two types of knowledge: *savoir* and *connaissance*. He states that *connaissance* is “the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it” whereas “*savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this or that

enunciation to be formulated” (Foucault, 1972, p. 15). He typically uses disciplinary knowledge, especially those in the sciences, to describe *connaissance*. For instance, we know that the earth circles the sun. However, it took a shift in a broader way of thinking—one which did not rely on God to prescribe a terracentric universe—to reconceptualize planetary movements and positions. In fact, there was no question (indeed, we were not allowed to question) the truth of a terracentric universe as long as humans were the pride and joy of all of God’s creations. It took a gradual change in a broader kind of knowledge (*savoir*), one that allowed us to reconstruct the way that science was performed, to allow us to rethink disciplinary beliefs about gravity, the solar system, and Earth’s place in the broader scheme of things (*connaissance*). While the two kinds of knowledge go hand in hand, *connaissance* cannot exist without a some *savoir* to situate it, and it is *savoir*, the “domain in which the subject is necessarily situated and dependent, and can never figure as titular (either as a transcendental activity, or as empirical consciousness)” in which Foucauldian history “finds the point of balance of its analysis” (Foucault, 1984, p. 183). While a genealogy may investigate instances of *connaissance*, it is in the service of determining what larger structures were in play at a given time, what general, normalized structures of knowledge (*savoir*) allowed specific instances of knowledge (*connaissance*) to emerge. How, do we know when we have found instantiations of power in the Foucauldian sense? Rather than examining major historical events, we find power hidden in “dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity” (Foucault, 1995/1977, p. 26). Power is not a thing to be held or possessed: “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are

endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 93) Rather, we might think of it as what binds different relations together, the playing field under which actions between players are executed. Foucault (1976/1978) describes power as

“the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in various social hegemonies. (p. 92-93)

We see power crystalized in hierarchical relationships, however its fluid form is exposed during usurpations, discourses coalescing or dividing, relationships being renegotiated, and vocabulary developing, taking on new meanings as various institutions or governments change meanings within discourses, within the relationships and actions that occur between entities, institutions, and competing/converging discourses. These events are moments in history that suggest points where ways of knowing begin to shift, creating specifically shifts in conceptions of the genealogical phenomenon under investigation (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Prado, 1995). Further, no phenomenon exists outside of some sort of power/knowledge: “There is no escaping from power... it is always already present, constituting that very thing which one attempts to counter it with” (Foucault,

1976/1978, p. 82). One form of power/knowledge might have a corresponding counter-power/knowledge, but the even when paradigm shifts occur, they only represent one way of knowing and believing being trumped by another: out with the old power, in with the new. With all of this in mind, it becomes possible to discuss technologies of power and governmentality. For Foucault, power is always exercised intentionally. In *A History of Sexuality* (1976/1978), he describes the how sexuality has been repressed via broad “defenses, censorships, and denials,” which are all “component parts that have a local and tactical role to play in a transformation into discourse, a *technology of power*, and a will to knowledge that are far from being reducible to the former (p. 12, emphasis mine). He uses this term again in *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995); Foucault explains that prison revolts have occurred for seemingly contradictory reasons depending on what was occurring within prisons at a given time: revolts happened for overcrowding as well as isolation practices, for corporal punishment as well as psychological therapy, both because prisoners were ignored and receiving too much attention. The issue at hand, the one which leads to revolt, is then not any one specific practice, but punishment in general, the “very materiality as an instrument and vector of power; *it is this whole technology of power* over the body that the technology of the ‘soul’ ... [which] fails either to conceal or to compensate, for the simple reason that it is one of its tools” (p. 30, emphasis mine). Finally, Foucault (1988a) states that technologies of power “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (p. 18). Based on his examples, we might say that technologies of power are the combined efforts of different strategies and techniques designed to produce in individuals a normalized way of thinking and behaving, whether



that be a secrecy and modesty surrounding the idea of sex, or disciplined subservience in prisoners. A technology of power is not any one activity or specific technique, but an idea which justifies various, potentially even competing strategies or techniques, to reach a particular end, namely that of producing a specific kind of subject.

Guiding the creation of technologies of power is the concept of governmentality, which Foucault describes as both the “ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument” (Foucault, 1978, p. 144), as well as “the tendency, the line of force,” that leads to a governmental power which can then develop technologies of power and guide the creation of *savoir*. Governmentality is the playing field, the way of thinking, the normalized rules and procedures that a government produces. We should not think of government simply as those in an overt political position, however. Referring to it as a complex ensemble of institutions certainly implies that a more traditional government (i.e. legislators, judiciary members, political executives) may help to develop these political technologies and knowledges (*savoir*), but it does so in concert with other disciplines as actors as well, including psychology, education, medicine, and so on. These institutions establish the bounds of normalcy, that which is sayable, knowable, and doable for those subjects who are governed. Once normalcy is established, once we “know” what behaviors are correct or incorrect, what will make us more or less secure, it becomes possible to designate those who fall within the norm and without, those who are “dangerous” to the system as it stand, those who are criminal, those who must be

corrected or put away for the security of the government but also for the security of the individuals that comprise our population more generally.

A final note on the idea of power is that Foucault describes his take on power as an analysis rather than a theory (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). We might refer to it as a “living theory” of power. Foucault encourages us to “move less toward a ‘theory’ of power than toward an “analytics” of power: that is, toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis” (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 82). Thus, just as a history is a fiction born of the historian’s own subjectivity, so is this analytic situated within the genealogist’s world, designed to analyze the movements of power as they appear to the genealogist. To be clear: there is no concern for replicability within genealogy. It is a highly personalized take on history, and each genealogy will differ based upon each genealogist’s subject positions.

### **Subject Production**

But what is meant, exactly, by one’s subject position? Foucault, as much as he is interested in power/knowledge and ideas, behaviors, attitudes, etc. that become naturalized, is also interested in the ways that power can “transform human beings into subjects” (1982, p. 777) (although none of these topics are completely isolated from one another). Much of his genealogical analysis focuses on “procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (Foucault, 1994, p. 87). For Foucault, as discourses gain or lose legitimacy in line with extant epistemes and government

rationalities—as they become sciences—they establish that which is “normal” in terms of thought and action. As individuals think and act, it becomes possible to classify them into type, or a “scientific objectification” (Foucault, 1977/1995 p. 101). As individuals are subject to a “scientific” system, they become potential objects of study—and within this objectification is the production of a composite of beliefs about this object, a composite that comprises the subject. Foucault (1994) suggests that *Madness and Civilization* (1965/1988) act as prime examples of this. As psychology emerges as a mode of explanation, a “human science,” it begins to create a view which allows for specific divisions between the mad and nonmad, and within the mad category, we find even more specific ways of diagnosing madness. Beyond creating divisions, however, this also creates a desired way of being within those subjected to these forms of power/knowledge. Thus, we also see the creation of roles designed to help others attain a status of normalcy, including institutions, therapists, doctors, and counsellors. There is no autonomous subject that exists outside the governmental designs which produce the subject—even when we self-fashion, begin a project of knowing the self or try to better the self—it is within a constrained system that has always already determined *how* one should better or what is important to know about oneself (Foucault, 1994).

Further, it is important to note that the designation “subject” by no means refers to a fixed identity (Foucault, 1994). When shifts in power/knowledge occur, different kinds of subjects are produced. We see this playing out in certain roles (e.g. prisoners, guards) described in *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995). For instance, when certain knowledge is developed about what causes a criminal to break the law (e.g. nature, a “bad” soul, education, upbringing, personal need, personal desire), it changes the way that a criminal

is understood. The criminal is now a new kind of subject in the eyes of the penal system. However, this means that the role of the system, including other subjects in the system, such as police, judges, juries, or guards, must change in relationship to the prisoner. A penal system that adopts a psychological lens must begin to include therapists, psychologists, and a different mode of rehabilitation than one based on simply punishing criminals. New figures gain legitimacy and power when the discourse—knowledge surrounding/about a subject/topic shifts. In this new system, and psychologist may have more power than a guard, and the guard's initial powerful role, that of physical disciplinarian, may be reduced to one of intimidator and peacekeeper. The guard may even begin to take orders from the psychologist when beforehand, the guard was able to act with less direction from higher figures. At the same time, the guard may find other ways to maintain the power that is lost in a penal system based on criminal psychology, perhaps by abusing prisoners when no one is watching, perhaps by quitting the guarding job, or perhaps by finding some new form of empowerment outside of work. Here, the point is that power circulates and changes as new knowledges develop, and this affects a various networks of individuals (subjects) as they are complicit in the system(s) that produce their subjectivity.

As such, an analysis of power/knowledge is not complete without determining how and where power is directed (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1984a; Foucault, 2003): what kinds of relations between entities does power produce, how are individuals made into certain kinds of subjects within power systems, and what kinds of knowledge circulates around/about those subjects? Just as Foucault (1976/1978) claimed in *The History of Sexuality* that a genealogy tracks power relations, he also claims in “The

Subject and Power” (1982) that his project “has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 777). In this work, he claims that subjects exist in two overlapping ways: “subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (p. 781). Sometimes, subjectivities are thrust upon us, in the way that a criminal becomes a prisoner after a series of institutional happenings that define one as a prisoner. The prisoner takes on the role of the prisoner as one subjected to the prison system, outside of personal control. In this way, subjects are “caught up in a system of subjection” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 26). The prisoner may rail against this identifier, but the fact is that a system of rules of practice identify the prisoner as such. Ideally, under the governing system that defines “prisoner” in one way or another, the prisoner will fall in line by taking on the role of prisoner, behaving and believing in the way that knowledge prescribes a prisoner should, just as those prisoner-subjects in Zimbardo’s notorious Stanford prison simulation.

On the other hand, the prison guard elects to be a guard, and may have personal investment in identifying as a guard. The guard is not outside of the systems of power/knowledge that determine the subjectivity of a guard—the guard is taught to think about the job in a particular way, about prisoners in a particular way, about the role of the penal system in a particular way (indeed, this discourse may well have been at work on this guard before ever taking the job; certainly, other connected examples of power/knowledge were to merit the guard’s taking of the position)—and in this way the guard is still subject to a system; however, the guard has not likely been physically

coerced into becoming a guard, opting instead to be willingly (proudly!) subjectified by the system. This subjectivity is internalized by the subject. Regardless of whether one opts to be subjected to/in a system of practice or one is coerced into that system, subjectivity is connected to power/knowledge in that knowledges about individuals produce those individuals: how a criminal should become a prisoner, how a guard is supposed to act and be as a guard. Ultimately, power “[disciplines] individuals to believe themselves to be persons having a certain nature” (Prado, 1995, p. 88). The correct ways of acting, as prisoner, guard, or any other subject position, become habituated knowledge. Genealogy examines how power/knowledge constitutes the subjectivities of those entangled in certain discourses, all the while examining how that power/knowledge has historically fluctuated, causing the subjectivities of those acted upon by such power/knowledge to, in turn, fluctuate. In looking at a phenomenon, genealogy does not simply examine at how power fluctuates and comes to be; it also examines who is affected in what ways by those power fluctuations.

An important point to make here is that power, in the Foucauldian sense, is not hierarchical; it is not a tool that some (the powerful/rich) necessarily hold over others (the weak/poor) as in Marxist philosophy, although individuals can use power to gain leverage over others at certain times. Power (and the knowledge that guides and is guided by power) emerges as various discourses develop to create new ways of understanding in the world. At any moment, a change in cultural or political knowledge, or the episteme, may delegitimize some positions, such as the guard, while legitimizing other positions, such as the prison psychologist. Further, in Foucauldian theory, power is not seen as a negative, entity; on the contrary, power produces. Power produces knowledge and

subjects, but this is not necessarily the result of a select few conspiring to maintain power, as in Marxism (Prado, 1995). Power may be used sympathetically, with the best of intentions, as in the case of changing the penal system from one of punishment to one of reform. The important point to note is that knowledge and subjective creation is simply a byproduct of power, however it may be used.

While genealogy offers a social critique, it is not set for or against a particular phenomenon (Koopman, 2013). A genealogy simply describes. The reason this is important for Foucault is that while power is neither inherently good nor bad, power is always potentially dangerous (Garland, 2014; Foucault, 1980). As much as it produces, it also establishes limits. Power both produces and delimits ways of being in the world. In an interview in 1971 (Simon), Foucault suggested that his historical approaches show how we are always constrained in our ways of thinking as a result of power/knowledges in play. Further, he stated in this interview that such histories helped him to “place [him]self at a distance from [systems of knowledge] and to show how one could escape” (p. 201). This is not to suggest that Foucault believes that escape is always desirable, and he certainly would not say that one can escape from systems of power/knowledge entirely (Koopman; Prado, 1995). However, by being aware of what dominant power/knowledge structures (epistemes) are in play, we become more aware of alternate ways to think and be in the world, and potentially more susceptible to other discourses and modes of power/knowledge (Garland, 2014). Power/knowledge and the subjects that emerge through extant epistemes are not problematic in themselves; rather, “the problem speaks more to the conditions of possibility for being, acting, and thinking in the present than it does to any normative judgement about what we are, think, or do” (Koopman, p. 97).

My genealogical analysis of student engagement is designed to examine the discourses that have apprehended, modified, and made use of the idea of student engagement. Further, I seek to understand who has been affected by engagement—that is, how subjective roles in composition studies (students, instructors, administrators) have shifted in turn with shifting ideas about what it means for students to be engaged. I do not see the deployment of engagement necessarily as a strategy to hold power over students in a writing class; however, I am curious as to why student engagement became perceived as a needed strategy in educational and composition studies to begin with; what problem does it serve to solve? Such an analysis will better show us how engagement came to be, which, I suggest, will offer much needed perspective on student engagement, which is used with abandon in educational and writing studies. This genealogical perspective will allow us to gain a better idea of how we might think about the uses of student engagement, including the types of subjects it produces. Further, we might place some limitations on this term that is at once the end-all-be-all of pedagogy and, I argue as a result, meaningless.

### **Performing Genealogical Analysis**

Herein, I highlight a number of “moves” common to Foucault’s genealogical works in an effort to better describe how a genealogy might be performed. Much of these moves come from *The History of Sexuality* (1976/1978) one of Foucault’s few works that provides a “method” chapter. Afterward, I suggest ways that these moves may be included in my own analysis of student engagement.

**Epistemology/Historiography.** Foucauldian history differs radically from other common forms of history, including empirical accounts, progressivist, Whig accounts, or



Marxist accounts of history. To begin to understand Foucault's conception of history, I contrast his approach to these major conceptions of history. For instance, an empirical approach to historical analysis rests on the assumption that certain truths exist throughout history; by linearly studying and laying out those truths, one can create a true account of what occurred in history (Green & Troup, 1999). Foucault on the other hand, would claim that there is no access to truth—all "brute reality" is subject to human interpretations. The belief that there is a "truth" to be accessed in history is, itself, a result of power/knowledge at work, various discursive regimes that have shaped subjects to believe in a truth and inform the way that an empirical historicist might approach doing history. Foucault (1980b; 1984a) himself has suggested that genealogy must be set against the scientific methods that have established themselves as dominant and powerful discourses. As such, genealogy cannot operate under the same epistemological assumptions as positivistic, empirical approaches that parse out a "true" history; for Foucault, all histories, including his own, are fictions (Foucault, 1979).

A Whig account of history is one both in search of "both a historical pedigree and a political justification" (Macaulay, 1968, p. 7) Butterfield (1931) has said of Whig history that those who write in its tradition "write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (p. 2). In short, a Whig history is one which seeks to understand history as justifying the present, one driven by the idea that at any given point, the present is the most progressive outcome of the history that has preceded it. For Foucault, progress is replaced with the ideas of discourses and power/knowledge. When we see the resolution

of a war, for instance, it does not jettison us into a newly found era of peace and enlightenment. Rather,

Following traditional beliefs, it would be false to think that total war exhausts itself in its own contradictions and ends by renouncing violence and submitting to civil laws. On the contrary, the law is a calculated and relentless pleasure, delight in the promised blood, which permits the perpetual instigation of new dominations and the staging of meticulously repeated scenes of violence. (Foucault, 1984a, p. 85).

History, states Foucault (1984a), is a repetition of dominations, one after the other. The idea of progress is what takes hold when we see different discourses, different conceptions of power/knowledge, different governments bring about apparently new laws, ideas, and/or ways of living via domination. We must be careful to note, however, that even the idea of domination as Foucault uses it here does not imply complete annihilation of one belief over another. It may simply mean that the limits of what might be thought and done have changed, have gradually shifted to address newly perceived problems as new discourses take precedence over old ones. History may show change, but it is the result of which discursive regimes hold weight at a given time—under Foucault, change does not occur because progress is inevitable. Change, rather, is the result of a confluence of discourses, each with its own notion of “truth,” constantly interacting with one another, gaining leverage over others, defining and redefining the notion of progress.

In his critique of progressive accounts of history, Foucault (1984a) states that the concept of “class domination generates the idea of liberty” (p. 85). This may initially

sound like a Marxist statement; however, in this particular statement, he simply means to highlight the fact that a way of thinking (in terms of class domination) creates a certain understanding of progress (liberty). While Foucault was interested in analyzing power's machinations through historical readings, he did not see power in the same kind of top-down structure that Marxists typically did. A Marxist history sees the history of society as a struggle for material goods, and "the driving force in Marx's conception of history are classes, which arise from different economic roles in the productive process" (Green & Troup, 1999, p. 36). In Marxism, power is determined by those who have the means to produce material goods. Foucault (1976/1978) has suggested that historical readings of power are too centralized and reductive, stating that "in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (p. 88-89). Here, the meaning is that we have not developed a nuanced view of power, attributing power to individuals and giving it an "ownable" property, rather than seeing it as the dynamic and fluid thing of Foucauldian theory. While Foucault would not argue that power relations exist where money is present, he would certainly reject the idea that it is reducible to monetary ownership and a linear hierarchy, ultimately suggesting that another theory of power must be developed if we are to do justice to social analysis (1976/1978; 1980a).

A final school of historical thought that we may contrast to Foucault's own view of history is the Annales School. The Annales school also sought to undermine the empirical, positivistic approach to history, seeing history as comprised of all aspects of a given society, including its economy, relationship with surrounding geography, as well as the visible politics occurring in that society at a given time (Green & Troup, 1999). This was a radically different way of conceiving of history, as it moved agency away from

human actors to non-humans, such as mountains or the sea, and one that attempted to account for a totality of history, divorced from the progressivism of Whigish history or the power dynamics associated with Marxist history. However, in the beginning of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault criticizes the heavy emphasis on the structure of history that such a totalizing approach creates, which seeks to create definitive periods, unities, and series within history. However, he notes, that such periodization is not necessarily reflective of “the great ages of the world, or to the periodization dictated by the rise and fall of civilizations; it is the effect of the methodologically concerted development of series” (p. 7-8). That history can be totalized in the approach of the Annales school of thought and divided into definite historical periods is not the way that history necessarily operates or proceeds. Rather, it is the result of one method, an approach that insists upon the seriation of history.

Foucault (1972) notes, however, that a newly emerging approach to history, a history of thoughts or different disciplines, begins to suggest that there are ruptures within this total approach to history. The history of thought problematizes traditional periods, showing where periods have overlap, are overly simplistic, and not necessarily linear. When such discontinuities make themselves present, “the theme and the possibility of a total history begin to disappear, and we see the emergence of something very different that might be called a general history” (p. 9). The purpose of a general history, he states:

is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical system they are capable of forming; what interplay of correlation and dominance exists between

them; what may be the effect of shifts, different temporalities, and various rehandlings; in what distinct totalities certain elements may figure simultaneously; in short, not only what series, but also what 'series of series', or, in other words, what 'tables' it is possible to draw up. A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre - a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view. An overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion. (p. 10)

Jumping off from the history of the *Annales*, Foucault takes the concept of seriation and suggests that we begin to look for counterpoints to the totalizing narrative of seriation. Rather than be satisfied with clear distinctions, we may see where ideas cross over from period to period, how they relate to one another, and other ways that we might consider stratifying fixed series of history. We must examine the criteria used to create the series in the first place, and question what happens to historical seriation if we use different criteria from which to measure historical events.

Foucault, then, radically reconceptualizes the project of history with the concept of genealogy. It should be noted, first, that there is no single method of performing genealogy. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) refer to it as an “interpretive analytic” rather than a method, and they claim that Foucault’s genealogical method “can only be guessed at if one uses Foucault's own books as exemplars” (p. 127). It is fair to say, however, that genealogy, as far as it can be called a method, differs strongly from an empirically “objective” approach to history (Dreyfus & Rabinow; Prado, 1995). To begin understanding a genealogical approach, it may help to turn back to the idea that histories are fictions (Foucault, 1979a). What might Foucault mean by this? Certainly, he does not

mean that there is no value in doing historical analyses because they amount to nothing true. Instead, he means to caution readers of history: because all information is filtered through subjective interpretation, there can be no access to an objective truth in history, only idiosyncratic, highly situated truths (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). For instance, that the French Revolution happened is not a question. However, the amount of focus that it is given in history, the cultural significance ascribed to the French Revolution—even the choice to highlight it as an important moment in history—is a matter of interpretation, a matter of how one chooses to construct, foreground, ignore, and build a meaningful story around this historical event. Foucault (1976/1978) refers to this as “the rule of immanence;” Speaking of sexuality, he claims that if it “was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object... if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourses were capable of investing it” (p. 98). History is a fiction for Foucault because it always involves a commitment to a particular, personal invention of the organization of events, informed largely by discourses that have already determined what counts as “knowing” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). In the same way that a fictional novel is a constructed, potential reality, so too is our understanding of the events of history. History is not a series of events for Foucault, but in his words, “a series of interpretations” (Foucault, 1984a, p. 151). A close examination of those those phenomena that have become “immanent” offers us an understanding of our own subjective stances, a history of interpretations, as much as it offers us a history of anything else.

Foucault further reconceptualizes history by allowing accidentality to play a role in historical shaping. Just as much as “reason” is a reasonable approach to understanding history, so too is chance (Foucault, 1984a). Foucault states that his approach to history is intended to “cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other” (Foucault, 1984, p. 80). He further says of history

to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (p. 81)

The study of history has thus far attempted to reason out events, attributing specific and generally human centered causality to the chronology of the past. According to this version of history, what we have now—laws, governance, economic structures, social norms and mores—have been carefully crafted for the betterment of humanity (or the betterment of some classes of humanity). Due to the deliberate nature of this crafting, Western society is the best of all possible worlds. And, since we have invoked the idea of the best of all possible worlds, Foucault would call this view of history utterly Panglossian. We cannot calculate all that has occurred to create the world of normalcy now, and we cannot suggest that every aspect of our history is marked by careful planning. Discourses emerge and interact with one another outside of any individual’s

control; chance meetings lead to alliances or wars; deeply entrenched beliefs and values that drove thought during a particular time period could just as well have been other beliefs and values driving thoughts in a different direction. As such, it is impossible to account for all of history's happenings. Indeed, the particularities that we turn attention to when doing a history, those accidents that we decide have made history what it is, cannot amount to more than one's circumstantial interpretation, or, as Foucault would have it, a fiction.

What, then, does this mean for genealogical method? Foucault did not provide a strict methodology for developing genealogies. Indeed, he left it to researchers to determine exactly what it might mean to write a genealogy. In a meeting with Sawicki (1991), he implies that genealogy is something one simply does as they attempt to write history. When Sawicki asked about his genealogical method, "He suggested that [she] not spend energy talking about him and, instead do what he was doing, namely, write genealogies" (p. 15). Implicit in his "advice" to Sawicki is the idea that there is no singular method for doing genealogy. This is consistent with his statement that all histories are fictions. Just as any historical writing is idiosyncratically aligned with/created by the writer's discursively situated subjectivity, so too is genealogical method. Even if Foucault had written a "how to" piece on genealogy, I suspect he would argue that even the reading of such a hypothetical step-by-step would inevitably be colored by individuals' readings of it. What we deem worthy of genealogical study, what counts as a "problem," how we understand discourses as interacting with one another would still be a matter of subjective interpretation. Thus, there is some degree of futility



in developing a “how to” of genealogy. Still there are some general guidelines that may be useful to follow when beginning a genealogical analysis.

**Problematizing.** Given that history is largely a product of established, dominant ways of knowing, the first goal of genealogy is to problematize that which is taken for granted (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Prado, 1995). Foucault (1989) has suggested that problematization is central to nearly all of his work. Indeed, in an interview with Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault (1983) explains that he saw his work as “not the history of solutions” but “genealogy of problems, of *problematiques* (p. 231). Koopman (2013) claims that problematization is the cornerstone, or “master concept that ties together the other core conceptual elements of [Foucault’s] mature genealogical critique” (p. 132). Indeed, problematization may be the first “recognizable” step in beginning a genealogy. However, problematization can take two forms in Foucauldian genealogy. The first, and perhaps easier to recognize of the two, is a kind of deconstruction of an extant phenomenon. Foucault describes this type of problematization in a second interview with Rabinow, referring to problematization as “the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem ... to pose problem for politics.” (Foucault, 1998, p. 383). It is a questioning of the politics that surround one’s topic of investigation, which Foucault suggests politics have never sufficiently answered. One must recognize a form of power/knowledge that has taken hold in dominant discourses and begin to explore how it emerged, creating questions of emergence: how and why was such and such a phenomena able to emerge in the way that it did? This necessarily problematizes that phenomenon. The second way that genealogy problematizes, however, is to become a history of problematization itself. In a different interview, Foucault explains that in his

history of insanity, his driving “question was how and why, at a given moment, madness was problematized through a certain institutional practice and a certain apparatus of knowledge.” In the second case, genealogy examines how “emergent practices render problematic certain other conceptions that are no longer capable of effectively performing the work they once achieved. This is the sense in which an emergent practice makes problematic certain other practices” (Koopman, 100). Phenomenon emerge when other phenomenon (practices or conceptualizations) become seen as problematic. Each emergent practice is built on the negative problematization of a previous practice in the name of progress. This is why shifts are able to occur in power/knowledge.

To perform a genealogy, then, means beginning with a problematization: first, one must identify a commonly held, perhaps unquestioned narrative phenomenon produced by dominant discourses at a given time period. After identifying a particular phenomenon to investigate, one must find an example in history of its emergence: a moment, an event, an item. This item allows the genealogy to become manageable—instead of determining the history of an abstract idea (be the idea prisons, asylums, or engagement) it is possible to use a tangible item or event as a proxy for the idea, an example of a point of emergence of the idea. Then, before delving into the history of that narrative, one must also determine upon what such a narrative is built. What “problems” were perceived that this particular phenomenon was designed to solve? Starting a genealogy means identifying narratives, or current conceptualizations of the world, and asking what those narratives serve. One must explore the creation of the problem, problematizing how the phenomenon under investigation, itself, exists as the antidote to its own problematization. In practice, this means examining the uses of the phenomenon under genealogical

investigation while bearing in mind that these uses only ever solve what is perceived/constructed to be problematic under a particular set of values or rationalities. **Analyzing “across.”** For Foucault, no discourse exists independent of other discourses. Foucault was interested not in how any particular phenomenon appeared in isolation, but in how phenomenon were expressions of synchronic patterns that occurred across disciplines over a period of time (Foucault 1976/1978; Garland, 2014). In his histories, Foucault describes ways that institutions not only develop, but about how they are in conversation with each other in a “tactical polyvalence of discourses” that comes together to form strategies and practices in line with constructions of knowledge (p. 100). This is why in each of his works, regardless of the “topic” or “subject matter,” be it insanity or sexuality or discipline or health, he describes a network of institutions working together. Foucault (1976/1978) was concerned with “search for instances of discursive production... of the production of power... of the propagation of knowledge,” and genealogy shows “coagulation, support, reciprocal reinforcement, cohesion, and integration... the bundle of processes and the network of relations” (p. 12). Garland explains this idea in greater depth, stating that

In each historical era, a powerful “episteme” or generalized structure of thought, imposes its patterning onto discourses of that period, and does so in ways that are more powerful than the topic or subject matter – life, language, labor – that links each of these distinct discourses as they each develop over time. The distinctive task of the archaeologist, as Foucault describes it, is not to trace out processes of change – the task of the

conventional historian – but instead to distinguish these historical epochs and trace the differential logic of each of their structures.”

We have already seen this idea expressed in the subsection

“Epistemology/Historiography” The idea is that individual items do not develop individually, autonomously, through history. Rather, items, institutions, and discourses are networked with one another, taking cues from one another, driven by similar goals, beliefs, and assumptions. Koopman (2013) suggests that a genealogy investigates points of intersection of various discourses; these intersections “give rise to problematizations that operate as both obstacles to certain older forms of practice and vases for the elaboration of newer forms of practice” (p. 105). We see how various discourses come together to problematize extant practices, construct assorted subjectivities, and push toward new forms of power/knowledge. At the same time, this analyzing across disciplines also shows how the topic under investigation may become fragmented. For instance, Foucault (1976/1978) describes how sex, as it was taken up by different discourses such as medicine, psychology, and biology, became a “strangely muddled zone,” plagued by “incongruity” (p. 54). As different discourses weigh in on a phenomenon, they approach that phenomenon with their own traditions and values, which may create radically different understandings, problematizations, and interpretations of that phenomenon. Aspects of knowledge from one discipline may inform another, and an entirely new kind of knowledge may emerge around a topic as a hodgepodge of knowledges informed by various disciplines. While we would think incongruity would undermine knowledge regarding a particular object, this incongruity can also become a strategy in knowledge production. Foucault claims that such

disparities allow certain truths (and non-truths) to emerge regarding a particular topic. Picking and choosing from various discourses, “evading truth, barring access to it, masking it” (p. 55) and creating incongruities allows interested individuals to create different types of knowledge about a given topic. Borrowing from different discourses allows new influences to be held over the topic at hand and new kinds of knowledge to be constructed.

As we perform this cross analysis of disciplines, and as we discover the incongruities between such disciplines, we might expect there to be disagreements, arguments, and dismissals. Each discipline may have its own peculiarly constructed definition of knowledge or normalcy. As this is the case, certain kinds of beliefs, of knowledge, take prominence over others. This is how subjugated knowledge develops. Foucault describes subjectified knowledge in two ways. In one way, subjugated knowledge simply refers to “historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations” (Foucault, 1997, p. 7). In a way not entirely divorced from the first, subjugated knowledge may also refer to “a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity” (p. 7). Within any network of discourses, there are ways of knowing that do not pass epistemological muster, that are understood as inadequate by the normalizing structures of the disciplines. Within medicine, a drug with a pedigree of clinical trial is given more merit than a homeopathic remedy; it is “known” that the drug works whereas the homeopathic remedy may simply operate as a placebo. Within education, evidence based practices may take

precedence over the intuition or experience of a teacher; like the drug, there is a reliance on what has been shown, through “unbiased” trial, to work. This combination of knowledges, that which has taken prominence and that which has been subjugated, is an important point for genealogy. Genealogy is fueled by this combination and conflict of knowledge. Foucault (1997) refers to genealogies as a “combination of erudite knowledge and what people know. They would not have been possible—they could not even have been attempted—were it not for one thing: the removal of the tyranny of overall discourses, with their hierarchies and all the privileges enjoyed by theoretical vanguards (p. 8). A genealogy exists as a kind of counter-knowledge. It is subjectified knowledge unearthed. This means that in the cross-analysis of disciplines involved in the emergence of a particular subject, there must be consideration of the discourses or particular ideas that are dismissed in relation to that subject. We thus receive a better idea of how that subject has emerged, especially the power/knowledge that has gone into the formation of that subject.

From the concept of subjugated knowledge, we may look again at the phrase “tactical polyvalence of discourses” (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 100). The word “tactical” implies the idea of strategy and intention in the deployment of knowledge, and certainly Foucault would agree with this idea: Foucault (1980) notes that

There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth' - it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true', it being understood also that it's not a matter of a

battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology', but in terms of 'truth' and 'power'. (p. 132)

The movement of discourses is not a neutral happening. There are always stakeholders with something to lose or gain by adopting a certain conception of “the truth” (thus, the subjectification of certain knowledges). Foucault is interested in analyzing much more than discourse or even the episteme within which a discourse falls. As we begin to shift to a discourse analysis that considers the shifts in power/knowledge that pronounce truths and subjugate others, we must look at the particularities of the battle occurring within and among discourses to develop a sense of the *dispositif*, or “disciplinary organization” (Foucault, 2003, p. 49). We may think of the *dispositif* as a gridwork, or the arrangement of discourses, as well as the actions, actors, and power plays that come together to establish that which is normal practice or conventional knowledge (Foucault, 1980).

Thus, an important move for genealogical study is to determine what disciplines, discourses, or institutions have come together or intersected to develop the conceptualization of the phenomenon under study, as well as to track the discrepancies, those knowledges within certain disciplines and from various angles, that have been subjugated. Within a discipline, and the discourse being adopted by that discipline as it borrows from other, we begin to see how knowledge comes to be defined as well as what shifts, tactical moves, or forces allow for certain knowledge to take precedence over other knowledge. All of this requires an “analyzing across” disciplines, determining how a concept received its shape not from any one particular discourse, but how different

discourses borrowed from and influenced one another to allow a particular concept to emerge, imbued with certain connotations and associations, in the way that it did. In practice, this means including more material than a different historical perspective might, to look for associations where a standard history might see a break. For instance, two disciplines may use the same term to mean radically different things. The job of the genealogist is to examine these terms and to see how, at some point, they may have diverged from a singular meaning, and further, to see where there might be similarity in what initially appears disparate.

**Temporal Juxtapositioning.** A common stylistic move in many of Foucault's works is that of opening with a juxtaposition between the current understanding of a particular phenomenon and a radically different understanding of that phenomenon from the past. In *Madness and Civilization* (1965/1988), for instance, Foucault begins by discussing a time when madness was not seen as something needing to be confined—rather it was associated with an esoteric, even godly kind of knowledge and freedom. Rather than confining the insane, they were sent away in ships. While this kind of exile may seem a punishment, Foucault notes that the sea “is the freest, the openest of routes” (p.11), and thus madness is also associated with freedom, a stark contrast to the confinement of rooms and straightjackets that we now associate with madness. He similarly opens *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995) by recounting the intense bodily torture of a regicide in 1757, a far cry from the prison rule of the penile system only 100 years later. Yet again, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976/1978), his first paragraph describes the 17<sup>th</sup> century, wherein “sexual practices had little need for secrecy” (p. 3), a fact which would change during the Victorian Era, when sexuality became highly



regulated and often prohibited (although, Foucault would argue, never outright repressed).

The purpose of such juxtapositions is certainly rhetorical: it introduces the reader to the topic at hand, and it points to the historical nature of the study. However, I argue that such juxtaposition serves a useful purpose in the genealogical analytic. First, while there is no zero-point in genealogy, such a juxtaposition acknowledges a temporal limitation on the analysis. It points to a different *episteme* than that under investigation and provides a “jumping off” point for the analysis. Second, such a juxtaposition reminds us that no phenomenon is natural, and that any particular subject, particularly the knowledge surrounding that subject, is malleable across time.

**Search for Silence.** Foucault argues that silences “are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (1976/1978, p. 27), and a genealogy “must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized” (Foucault, 1984, p. 76). These lines come from a recognition that throughout the course of history, certain knowledges are subsumed within and silenced by others. Further, as Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) note, power operates within silence. Disciplines develop, determine, subjectify and objectify quietly in a relatively undetected way. However, like a counterhistory, a genealogy disrupts or sheds light upon such a silence (Foucault, 2003). One way to begin examining silence is “to understand power by looking at its extremities, at its outer limits at the point where it becomes capillary; in other words, to understand power in its most regional forms and institutions” (Foucault, 2003, p. 27). Foucault tells us to look at local, minor, “quiet” instantiations of power and trace them along to find how it has radiated from other, rawer locations: he tells us to

begin an analysis of power by examining its “infinitesimal mechanisms, which have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then look at how these mechanisms of power, which have their solidity and, in a sense, their own technology, have been and are invested, colonized, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended, and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination” (p. 30). This means that we must give our attention to that which might at first seem innocuous—perhaps a fact of everyday life (that which hides in plain sight), perhaps a phenomenon or history which a discourse encourages us to take for granted and thereby ignore. What has been written off in history? What is generally agreed upon uncritically by scholars of a particular discourse? Such agreement represses the potential for alternate ways of knowing, and Foucault (1976/1978) encourages us to speak, to transgress against the repression, to “pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights” (p. 8).

**Analysis of power/knowledge.** Foucault describes various forms of power throughout his oeuvre, including sovereign, pastoral, disciplinary, and bio-powers. Indeed, it is this analysis of institutions and power that begins to set his later, genealogical work apart from his earlier, archaeological work (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Prado, 1995), and it is the analysis of these kinds of powers that help us understand how naturalized thinking and behaving develops in those subjected to various discourses. Herein, I provide a description of each. Demarcating these types is useful in determining how power and authority are conceived and operationalized during particular historical periods.

*Sovereign power.* Sovereign power appears prominently in both *Psychiatric Power* (Foucault, 2006) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995), and in both pieces is juxtaposed to disciplinary power. Sovereign power is that type of power exhibited by kings, “expressed through the symbols of the dazzling force of the individual who holds it” (Foucault, 2006, p. 22). Sovereign power operates as clear displays of authority or control, and is often located in a specific authority figure such as a king or religious leader (O’Farrell, 2005). We see this kind of power play out in the example of a king publicly punishing transgressors. Such a punishment acts as a means of warning the general population not to transgress against the king’s crimes, exercising the extent of authority vested in him, and claiming the right to possess such power. While this type of power exists in an overt and top-down manner, it is also the most difficult to maintain. Due to its overt and obvious nature, it invites subversion and rebellion. Its transparency allows it to be most easily confronted. Further, the attempt to dominate through the machinations of sovereign power is ineffective due to the fact that only a select few are designated authoritarians when sovereign power is in play; one cannot be in all places at all times, and therefore the reach of these designated authoritarians is highly localized. This is not to say that sovereign power no longer exists, but that there are examples of power structures that are much more efficient for reaching different aims.

*Disciplinary power.* One such example is disciplinary power. Whereas sovereign power maintains itself through gross displays of authority and “dazzling force,” “disciplinary power is a discreet, distributed power; it is a power which functions through networks and the visibility of which is only found in the obedience and submission of those on whom it is silently exercised” (Foucault, 2006, p. 22). Disciplinary power, rather

than punishing and commanding as in sovereign power, surveys, corrects, trains, and educates individuals, producing certain kinds of subjects (Foucault, 1977/1995; O'Farrell, 2005). While disciplinary power is like sovereign power in the sense that it controls, it differs in that it controls without calling attention to itself as an external force exerting such control. Instead, the control comes from within the individual upon whom disciplinary power operates. We see this kind of power operating in schools, the military, and prisons. Subjects within these institutions are expected to act in certain ways, and the institutions themselves are designed in such a way as to produce this behavior—indeed, to invite the subject to behave. Perhaps the greatest example of disciplinary power resides in the panopticon, an idea that Foucault (1977/1995) explores deeply in *Discipline and Punish*. The panopticon is a prison in which all cells are arranged in a half circle. At the center of the half circle is an observation post where guards may sit and observe, although those occupying the cells are not able to see if a guard is present. In this case, any time a prisoner misbehaves, the prisoner runs the risk of being seen and punished. Therefore, a prisoner must enact and internalize the brand of discipline prescribed by the prison, even if no guard is present to dole out punishment.

*Pastoral power.* In “Omnes et Singulatim,” Foucault (1979b) explicitly describes pastoral power as a power “whose role is to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one” (p. 235). Invoking the image of the Christian “good shepherd,” he explains that this type of power is pastoral because the shepherd leads the flock of sheep to salvation. For this leading to occur, the shepherd must have extensive knowledge of the flock’s whereabouts, an account “not only of each sheep, but of all their actions, all the good or evil they are liable to do, all that happens to them” (p. 236). For

the shepherd to lead the flock to salvation, the flock must be willing to submit to the shepherd. The shepherd takes an authoritative role, but it is in the service of improvement for the individual sheep in the flock. As such, the flock is grateful to have the authority of the shepherd in its presence, and will follow the shepherd's will to achieve this improvement. While he does not name pastoral power explicitly in *The History of Sexuality* (1976/1978), this piece provides perhaps the strongest example of this type of power. As bodily desire became an increasing concern, confession became a means for the pastorate to better know the members of the congregation. It was a device for salvation, but it was also a convenient surveillance technique that allowed preachers to "know" individuals, to create an account of each sheep's experiences. Such knowledge would allow the shepherd to create a personalized salvation plan for the sheep in the form of advice and penance. We see this type of power at work when any kind of "salvation" is at stake, when members of a community strive to reach a higher place and must trust in another individual, usually provided institutional authority, to help them attain their elevated status.

*Biopower.* Biopower differs from disciplinary and pastoral power in that it considers large groups of individuals, rather than individuals. This is not to say that biopower ignores individuals entirely, as it is individuals that comprise groups, but it is concerned with laying out governing principles for the ways that humans function, especially in terms of their biology. O'Farrell (2005) claims that the focus of such biopower is "the life, death, and health of entire populations... forms of knowledge and practices related to hygiene, public health, and control of reproduction and sexuality" (p. 106). We certainly can see how disciplinary and pastoral power become useful in

contributing to this larger idea of biopower. Disciplinary power, which seeks to control individuals through means of rules, surveillance, and instilling within them a desire to behave in a particular fashion, was also concerned with how individuals conducted their bodies, which might be used in determining how armies might be made to march and fight in a particular style or students to always wash their hands before lunch (e.g. Lunchroom manners with Mr. Bungle). The best example of pastoral power is concerned with humanity's relationship to intercourse. Knowing each individual allows pastors to create a larger set of rules for populations to follow regarding sexuality. Biopower operates when we begin to find behavioral practices for large groups of individuals, particularly concerning bodily and biological functions. Further, given that the focus of biopower is the biological functioning of entire populations, it anticipates the idea of governmentality.

*Governmentality and technologies of power.* A further consideration of power within a genealogical analysis is governmentality. For Foucault (1978), governmentality is a “whole battery of multifarious techniques” that display a “wider and more overall perspective that we can broadly call a technology of power” (p. 162). Foucault has suggested that an understanding of governmentality is essential (and even primary) for doing the work of genealogy, as well as understanding the techniques and strategies used to govern individual conduct: “the first methodological principle is to move outside the institution and replace it with the overall point of view of the technology of power” (p. 163). What is it that guides the instantiation of certain technologies of power? Governmentality, we might say, describes a macro-level of power relations, which helps to establish the limits of what is sayable, knowable, and doable (Gordon, 1991). It is the

knowledge and justification of that knowledge which in turn justify the manifestations of the other types of power for a larger project. If certain subjects are being produced among various institutions, it is to fulfill the purposes of a broader sense of what is “correct” conduct within the limits of an established governmentality. As such, it has also been referred to as the “art of government” (Foucault, 1991, p. 89) or the ways that a government designates “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Foucault (1979b) has also described it as the rationalizations that surround governmental practices and decisions. It is the rationale that governments draw upon to produce and justify the art of governance in place at a given time. An examination of governmentality begins to focus on broader social desires that may determine or lead to shifts in practice, looking at why certain subjects might be produced and what problems they were designed to solve. It requires looking at broader social and political factors occurring during the time period under investigation, including economics, pandemics, social production, and wars, as well as governmental rationalizations for such practice (Foucault, 1978; 1979b).

**What we get from genealogy.** In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History* (1984), Foucault argues that the task of genealogy is to “expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body.” Genealogy shows that what is imprinted on us, what seems so natural to us, is actually historically contingent. Normalization allows knowledge to become naturalized (Foucault 1995/1977), and we therefore forget that knowledge is contingent. That which is normalized becomes “the only way” of doing and being. Genealogy helps to upset normalization/naturalization, to reconstruct possibility. Koopman (2013) argues that the purpose of a genealogy is

twofold. First, he agrees that it does succeed in denaturalizing the knowledges that we possess, but he argues that other historical and philosophical methods do this as well. For him, the value of genealogy lies in showing not *that* but *how* such knowledges and practices became naturalized. This “how,” Koopman states, “equips us with some of the tools we would need for beginning the labor of remaking our future differently” (p. 130). By seeing how a phenomenon has developed in a way that is not necessarily natural or inevitable, it becomes possible to orient oneself in a new way toward that phenomenon. In changing our understanding of the way that history is imprinted on our bodies, we may also change the value/knowledge that is inscribed on the various phenomena that inscribe themselves upon us.

### **A Genealogy of Student Engagement in Composition or: How I Do This**

Below, I describe the ways that I took the above rhetorical and analytic moves by Foucault and personalized them for this project.

**Descent and problematization.** I believe that I have already suggested that the term “student engagement” operates problematically via my literature review; the term itself is unclear, used in a way that says little, despite being a nationally recognized, nearly ubiquitous term in educational studies. However, I must designate a place to begin analyses of emergence and descent. I believe that Bean’s (2005) *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* offers a kind of “crystallization” of the idea of engagement in college writing in the present. It is arguably the most emergent extension of the idea of student engagement—a kind of “how to” engage students guide—for teachers of college English. As such, this text offers an inroad to literature on engagement in composition, making the



analyses of emergence and descent manageable. Instead of asking “how did engagement come to be,” it becomes possible to ask “how is Bean’s emergent conception of student engagement reflected in past iterations of the idea?” From Bean, it is possible to see how engagement is not simply an original concept, but one that has been in the making for years.

**Engaging ideas.** An immediate difficulty with this project is that student engagement is a relatively recent invention. Trowler (2010) suggests that it did not come to the educational fore until the early 1990s, and it is rare to see engagement literature reference pieces written before the mid-1980s (e.g. Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gameson, 1987). Thus, it is fair to anticipate that as I delve into literature before the 90s, it will not name student engagement *per se*. However, it is possible to look for commonalities across current practices labelled as engaging and past practices that may have been designed with similar effects in mind. Conveniently, Bean (2005) provides a set of “engaging ideas” for writing that may serve as criteria for determining if past pieces discuss what could now be referred to as practices for student engagement. While he does not explicitly define student engagement, it is possible to look for elements of his conception of student engagement in pedagogical pieces spanning decades prior to its naming.

**Critical thinking.** Bean (2005) is insistent from the first chapter of his book that good writing is synonymous with good thinking. Thus, he suggests that one way to engage students in writing is to help them understand that writing is a way of thinking through problems. Specifically, he advocates for a writing-across-the-curriculum approach in which students can become “engaged with a problem and, once engaged,

formulate, develop, complicate, and clarify their own ideas” (p. 20). Thus, concepts such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, and problem solving are, at least according to Bean, indicative of student engagement. He suggests the use of both formal and informal write-to-learn activities in schools, which he terms “microthemes” (p. 79), as well as assigning essays that address a clearly defined problem or purpose. For Bean, students are engaged as long as they are engaged with a particular problem (here, “problem” is used loosely) that requires a reasoned solution. Such concepts become markers to search for in the discourse surrounding writing pedagogy in pre-war America if we are to engage in an analysis of descent.

***Making writing personal.*** Bean (2005) does not attempt to undercut the importance of teaching students to write professionally in different disciplines; however, he also advocates breaks from professional templates and genre styles in favor of more exploratory, expressive, and personal writing. In fact, he argues that such writing can help to personalize writing that is generally considered “objective” or transactional. Thus he advocates the use of “journals, in-class free-writes, thought letters, e-mail conversations” as well as “essays written in other styles and forms that stand against conventional academic writing and create different ways of seeing: autobiographical essays, interviews, experimental pieces, personal reflection pieces, dialogues, magazine articles... satires, short stories or poems” (p. 52). For Bean, engaging students in writing does not necessarily mean scrapping a traditional curriculum for more poetic or artistic language (although he certainly advocates using such forms in the classroom), but making writing personally relevant for students by “linking course concepts to students’ personal experience of previously existing knowledge” (p. 123). Thus, another point of analysis in

literature 1939-1952 becomes the pedagogy of personalization. In one way or another, past literature speaks to engagement when it speaks to concepts of relevance and personalization in student writing.

***Teacher as coach/mentor.*** Under the engagement model, the role of the writing teacher becomes one of a guide, mentor, or coach. In addition to developing models and assignments that develop critical thinking and personal connections to/through writing, the teacher “coaches their performance through encouragement, modeling, helpful intervention and advice, and critiquing of their performance” (Bean, 2005, p. 121) Bean does not speak deeply about how a professor might embody such an attitude (opting instead to describe yet more activities that foster critical thinking), but it seems that to engage students, the professor must be both instructive and approachable. This is in the service of keeping the student amenable to development, helping them to understand the reasons behind assignments, writing practices, and grades. The idea of teacher as coach seems also to surface in Mann’s (2001) position that engagement stands opposed to the idea of alienation, wherein students “shut down” or resist ideas presented by the professor. Engaging students is not simply about providing the right assignments, but adopting a demeanor and philosophy of teaching that students perceive as inviting as well as authoritative. Thus, another indicator of engaging ideas prior to the invention of engagement is discussion about coaching, openness, helpfulness, or approachability on the part of the writing instructor, so that students will internalize a deeper understanding of the material being presented.

***Groupwork and audience.*** Bean (2005) suggests that one of the most difficult problems for a writer is understanding what their “role” as a writer is, which is typically

determined by the author's audience and purpose. As a result, a final means of engaging writing students according to Bean is the use of audiences, particularly in the form of small groups in the classroom. He claims that "having students work independently in small groups on purposefully designed and sequenced tasks... produces significantly higher levels of thinking" (p. 151) than other methods of teaching, and that it can lead to discussion and productive conflict in writing, as well as greater self-monitoring. In short, Bean argues that asking students to work with or consider others while writing is an engaging pedagogical strategy. This means that pieces in my archive that describe groupwork or authentic audiences in writing address the concept of engagement.

Thus, we have four broad criteria for assessing the existence of engagement in writing. But what does engagement do? Who is it for, and why? It is important to note what has been problematized by the emergent construction of student engagement discourse—what problem did the emergence of engagement solve? Here, it is relevant to turn to Heilker and Vandenberg's (1992) *Keywords in Composition*, an edited collection of words and phrases commonly found in composition in the early 90s. For each word, they include a short literature review that suggests how the word has been used in composition over the course of 30+ years. The term "student" is particularly interesting for my study. Words that they use to describe such students include self-centered, disinterested, hedonistic, formless, scatterbrained, unpredictable, failed, irresponsible, glowering, brooding, and scheming. While there are redeeming qualities ascribed to students in research, students are largely constructed as "problematic" in the writing class, as hating what they are doing, as completely disengaged from the task at hand. Over the course of 30 years, there is a clear construction of a "student problem." There is

a story created in this research about a problematic student subject, one that demands some sort of response to turn them into interested, open-minded, responsible, engaged subjects. Only a decade after Heilker and Vandenberg's articulation of the student-subject attention/interest/engagement problem in college writing, Bean published his text on "integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning" in college writing classrooms. This idea of the student subject, then, becomes a crystallization of the problem that student engagement is designed to fix. It takes its head as we read through Heilker and Vandenberg, who synthesize thirty years of research to create such an articulation. This genealogy, in addition to being a history of student engagement, is necessarily also a genealogy of the student.

**Finding the silent.** Thus, we have a problem—the student—and a proposed solution, namely engagement, expressed through Bean's (2005) four primary criteria. Where does this problem begin? Does it begin thirty years prior to 1992, as Heilker and Vandenberg's work suggest? If genealogy is an analysis of descent, we must determine where this "problem" begins its formation, and as a genealogy of student engagement, we must see where engagement becomes the proposed solution to this problem. The question then becomes "when does composition studies begin to focus on ideas such as student-centeredness and pedagogy?" The short answer regarding the construction of a problematic student subject is that this construction has existed since the beginning of composition as a study. In 1885, students of the first composition class taught at Harvard were surveyed about their experience. One student felt that the class was rudimentary and stifled his creativity. Those who reviewed the surveys said of that student that if nothing else, he had learned to complain more effectively (Copeland and Rideout, 1901).

However, at the turn of the century, there does not yet exist a question of how one might engage the problematic student. Goggin (2000) claims that one of the earliest instantiations of the question of pedagogy occurred in the first issue of *College English* in 1939, condemning the way that composition was taught, as composition teachers essentially received no training to teach it. In this case, we see some attention to pedagogy—a question of how to teach composition. However, it could be argued that the issue of student engagement was not given substantial attention until 1952, when the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) formally issued a mission statement focusing on uniting teachers of English in “pedagogical and professional needs” (Goggin, 2000, p. 53). Thus, another new question emerges. What occurred between 1939 and 1952 that led to a movement toward instruction and pedagogy, and by extension, engagement?

This period, between 1939 and 1952, falls into the larger period-movement of current-traditional rhetoric. This movement in rhetoric, which began in the late 1800s and is supposed to have lasted until approximately 1970 (Berlin, 1982; Crowley, 1996; Fleming, 2009; Young, 1980), is often characterized lacking consideration for the student; rather, writing was a routinized, linear, stimulus-response activity, and composition was simply a course that students had to take to determine if they could move on to upper division classes (Berlin & Inkster, 1980; Petraglia, 1999; Pullman 1999). However, the pieces that Goggin (2000) references from *College English* suggests that this was not always the case, and that even in the late 1930s, there was concern for students and, at least to a degree, their engagement. She references Dudley’s “The Success of Freshman English” (1939) wherein he proposed a pedagogical model of

composition with topics that allow the student to be “interested” (p. 23). Certainly, these are early instantiations of a form of engagement, one designed to draw the student into the subject of composition. He himself was responding to a 1939 piece by Campbell entitled “The Failure of Freshman English.” This suggests that even in 1939, amidst the current-traditional paradigm of composition, there was a conversation regarding students, pedagogy, with some consideration for student engagement (even if it was not referred to as such at the time).

Thus, the range of dates for this study is 1939-1952. 1939 marks the development of a discourse with the appearance of the *College English* journal, and 1952 marks the professionalization of composition with the formation of the CCCC. Despite the importance of this time period, historians of composition have thus far seemed to gloss over this period, characterizing the process movement as the first serious instantiation of student-centeredness and engagement to arise in the study of composition and rhetoric. Varnum (1992) argues that no composition history adequately addresses the pre-war period of composition pedagogy. Indeed, Elliot (2005) devotes approximately 15 pages of a 300 page book to this time period in a history of writing assessment. Berlin (1984) devotes far more attention to the post-1960s era in his history of writing instruction in the American college. Goggin’s (2000) *Authoring a Discipline* focuses primarily on post-war developments in the field, and Stephen North locates the birth of the field of composition at 1963. However, preliminary evidence suggests that a discussion of composition pedagogy existed even before the 1950s, that it was more than simply “the dark ages” (Connors, 1986) or “the stone age” (Stewart, 1988) of composition and current-traditional rhetoric. We might argue, then, that this has been a period silenced. It is important to

explore silence, that which has not been said, to discover how such a silence fits into broader discourses overall. In this case, it is clear that the area under my investigation has been silenced, if not entirely dismissed. What might be found in that silenced period?

To explore voices that have been repressed within this silenced period, I propose to build a database of articles from prominent English journals that take part in the conversation of students and pedagogy to determine how engagement was present even at a time when it has been characterized as virtually absent. Specifically for this study, I drew on *The English Journal*, *College English*, the two major English journals present during the time of my study, as well as a number of composition textbooks that appeared between the years of 1939 and 1952. The four areas of content described by Bean above, helped to show how engaging students was a concern during the time that has been largely ignored as current-traditional rhetoric. Thus, the criteria for the pieces chosen in this study included the timeframe; as well as how the pieces spoke to the idea of the formation of a student/teacher subject; and/or the development of a pedagogy that encompasses what we now would consider to be, in Bean's "engaging ideas." A final inclusion criterion was that the piece must relate explicitly to composition or writing, not literary study or reading skills, both of which were also common topics in the chosen journals during my designated time period. Below is a table of preliminary readings that comprised what I refer to as my "initial archive."



Table 1. Initial Archive

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year; Volume; Issue</b>
Dudley	The Success of Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1939; 1; 1
Weingarten	The Use of Phonograph Recordings in Teaching Shakespeare	<i>CE</i>	1939; 1; 1
Ringnalda	Colleges Belong to Students	<i>CE</i>	1939; 1; 2
“A School Principal”	A Contrast in College Professors	<i>CE</i>	1939; 1; 3
Fountain	The Problem of the Poorly Prepared Student	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 4
Digna	We Investigate Together	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 4
Maddox	Review: For the Class in Composition: Introductory English Composition for College Students by Joseph M. Bachelor; Ralph L. Henry; Robert B. Sinclair	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 4
Williams	Who Should Teach English?	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 5
Wykoff	Teaching Composition as a Career	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 5
Tilley	Composition by Critical Analysis	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 6
Smith	Learning to Write in College	N/A	1938
Hendricks	Exemption from Required Composition		1940; 1; 7
Spencer	Responsibility of the English Teacher	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 7
Garnett & Griebing	The Freshman Intellect	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 8
Green	Significant Theme Content	<i>CE</i>	1940; 1; 8
Mulder	An Editor Looks at Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 1
Shaw	A Complete Course in Freshman English	N/A	1940
Colby	Laboratory Work in English	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 1
Inlow	Differentiation in Freshman Composition	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 2
Hogrefe	Self-Exploration in Creative Writing	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 2
Smith	Problems of Articulation in the Teaching of English	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 2
Rice	Articulation of the Secondary School and the College	<i>CE</i>	1940; 2; 2

Roberts & Trelease	Student Prose Models	N/A	1940
Buckner	English Composition in Practice	CE	1940; 2; 3
Halvorsen	Two Methods of Indicating Errors in Themes	CE	1940; 2; 3
Wagner	Articulating the Program in English in College	CE	1940; 2; 3
Boothe	English for Midwesterners	CE	1941; 2; 4
Scudder & Webster	The New Hampshire Plan for Freshman English	CE	1941; 2; 5
Bernbaum	Are we Downhearted	CE	1941; 2; 6
Green	The Reform of Freshman English	CE	1941; 2; 6
Weisinger	A Subject for Freshman Composition	CE	1941; 2; 7
Green, Hutcherson, Leake, & McCarter	Complete College Composition	N/A	1947
Morrison	A Philosophy for Required Freshman English	CE	1941; 2; 8
Fleischauer	A Solution for the Teaching of the Investigatory Paper	CE	1941; 3; 1
Olney	Freshman English	N/A	1940
Jefferson & Peckham	The College Writer	N/A	1941
Haber	Vive Freshman Composition	CE	1941; 3; 3
Aiken & Carleton	Freshman English at the University of Vermont	CE	1941; 3; 3
Blackmur	The Undergraduate Writer as Writer	CE	1941; 3; 3
Campbell	The Evolution of a Writing Laboratory	CE	1942; 3; 4
Mulder	Benjamin Franklin: Teacher of Composition	CE	1942; 3; 5
Hard, Kirk & Marcoux	Writing and Reading English Prose: A Complete Course in Composition	N/A	1942
Colodny	Usage for College Freshmen	CE	1942; 3; 8
Brower	Problems of High-School English and College Freshman English	CE	1942; 3; 8
Diel	A Portrait of the 'Typical' Instructor of English in the Junior College	CE	1942; 4; 1
Ford	The Menace of the Freshman English Workbook	CE	1942; 4; 1

Gullette & McCrimmon	Writing Effectively	N/A	1941
Landis	Freshman Composition	N/A	1940
Henderson	Democratic Procedure in Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1942; 4; 3
Eels	A Portrait of the 'Typical' Instructor of English in the Junior College—A Comment	<i>CE</i>	1943; 4; 4
Hooper	Freshman Courses in English in the United States and in South Africa	<i>CE</i>	1943; 4; 5
App	Old Ben Jonson on 'Grading' Compositions	<i>CE</i>	1943; 4; 5
Stanley	This Game of Writing: Studies in Remedial English	<i>CE</i>	1943; 4; 7
Sanders, Jordan, Limpus, & Magoon	Unified English Composition	N/A	1946
Arms	The Research Paper	<i>CE</i>	1943; 5; 1
Baker	The Value of Writing Philosophies of Life in Freshman English Classes	<i>CE</i>	1943; 5; 3
Watt, Cargill, & Charvat	New Highways in College Composition	N/A	1947
Hatfield	English for Men in Uniform	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 4
Marshall	Predicting Success in Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 4
Coon	The Freshman English Situation at Utopia College	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 5
Weigle	Teaching English in an Army Air Force College Training Program	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 5
Thurston	A Deferred Course in Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 6
Crawford	Reading and Composition as Related Problems of Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 6
Holmes	The Ideal Student (poem)	<i>CE</i>	1944; 5; 7
Baker	Composition on the College Level: A Case Test	<i>CE</i>	1944; 6; 1
NCTE	Proposed Constitution of the NCTE	<i>CE</i>	1944; 6; 1
Pooley	Achieving Continuity in High-School and College English	<i>CE</i>	1944; 6; 3
Hamilton	Let's Teach Composition!	<i>CE</i>	1944; 6; 3

Mirielees	Teaching Composition and Literature	N/A	1943
Wykoff	Army English Experiences Applicable to Civilian Postwar English	<i>CE</i>	1945; 6; 6
Buckley & Wiley	The Technique of the Roundtable in College Composition	<i>CE</i>	1945; 6; 7
Miller	Some Unexpected Results of College Military Programs	<i>CE</i>	1945; 6; 8
Woolley & Scott	Handbook of College Composition	N/A	1944
Saul	Suggestions Toward a Revised Program in College English	<i>CE</i>	1945; 7; 1
Wright	What Freshman English Cannot Do	<i>CE</i>	1945; 7; 2
Elliott	Again—Freshman Readings	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 5
Guest & Randal	Report on a Missouri Conference on Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 5
Dunn	A New Freshman Approach	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 5
Grey	Improving In-College and In-Service Education of Teachers	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 7
Firebaugh	On Being Unacademic	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 7
Bond	A Post-war Program for the Remedial English Student	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 8
Stabley	Newspaper Editorials and College Composition	<i>CE</i>	1946; 7; 8
Snowden	Some Suggestions for the College Course in Vocabulary	<i>CE</i>	1946; 8; 1
Cervney	Facts and Judgements: A New Approach to College Writing	N/A	1947
Davidson & Sorensen	The Basic Communications Course	<i>CE</i>	1946; 8; 2
French	The New Curriculums of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton	<i>CE</i>	1946; 8; 2
Wykoff	The Eleventh Theme	<i>CE</i>	1946; 8; 3
Bailey	Remedial Composition for Advanced Students	<i>CE</i>	1946; 8; 3
Falk	International Understanding: An Experiment in Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1947; 8; 4
Parks	Source Materials for a Course in the Teaching of Composition	<i>CE</i>	1947; 8; 5

Perrin	Maximum Essentials in Composition	<i>CE</i>	1947; 8; 7
Benardete	A Practical to take the Drudgery out of teaching freshman composition...	<i>CE</i>	1947; 8; 7
Montgomery	Communications Work for Freshmen at Talladega College	<i>CE</i>	1947; 9; 2
Middlebrook	English 1 in Cellophane	<i>CE</i>	1947; 9; 3
Angus	Avoiding the Pseudo-Research Paper	<i>CE</i>	1948; 9; 4
Cline	The New Plan of Freshman English Advanced-Standing Examinations at the University of Texas	<i>CE</i>	1948; 9; 4
Briggs	College Programs in Communication as Viewed by and English Teacher	<i>CE</i>	1948; 9; 6
Dow	A Speech Teacher Views College Communications Courses	<i>CE</i>	1948; 9; 6
Eikel	A Theme Project for Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1948; 9; 7
Westerfield	Limiting Research Paper Subjects	<i>CE</i>	1948; 10; 1
Weaver	To Write the Truth	<i>CE</i>	1948; 10; 1
Sams	Composition in the New Curriculum	<i>CE</i>	1948; 10; 2
Wiles	What We Face in the Field of English	<i>CE</i>	1948; 10; 2
Ogden	On Teaching the Sentence Outline	<i>CE</i>	1948; 10; 3
McCrimmon	The Composition Instructor: Priest or Scientist	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 4
Perrin	Sample Trends in the College of English	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 5
Wykoff	Toward Achieving the Objectives of Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 6
Hotchner	A Research Exercise for Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 6
Baker	Freshman Theme Reader	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 7
Jacobs	A Modest Proposal	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 7
Diederich	The Use of Essays to Measure Improvement	<i>CE</i>	1949; 10; 7
Farrar	The Condition of American Writing	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 1

Reeve	One View of Freshman English	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 1
Hatfield	A Basis for Grading Themes	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 1
Buckingham	Ends and Means in Composition for Adults	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 2
Osborn	The College Freshman	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 2
Wright	Faculty Responsibility for Student Writing	<i>CE</i>	1949; 11; 3
Wykoff	Suggestions for the Reading of Themes	<i>CE</i>	1950; 11; 4
Warfel, Matthews, & Bushman	American College English	NA	1949
Osenburg	“Tests” of “English Fundamentals”	<i>CE</i>	1950; 11; 5
Kennan	Our Freshmen Wrote a Book	<i>CE</i>	1950; 11; 5
Moore	The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory	<i>CE</i>	1950; 11; 7
Edland	What College Students Want to Learn in Freshmen English	<i>CE</i>	1950; 11; 7
Prosser	English as she is Wrote	<i>EJ</i>	1939; 28; 1
Biaggini	The Reading and Writing of English	NA	1946

This archive provided an overview of the “conversation” that was occurring around composition pedagogy between 1939 and 1952. Such a conversation helps us to understand what discursive constructions were being built at the time around students, teachers, and composition as a whole. Even in the development of this archive, I began to see an unexpected subject emerge: the veteran student. A question that we might ask, then, is how this new kind of student-subject enters the conversation of composition, pedagogy and engagement. As a new conversation around pedagogy develops, I found changes in discourse and a series of divergent voices. What voices becomes silenced over the course of these years, and what voices were raised to prominence? Answering such a questions helped me to write a history of the present; this archive allowed me to see where the present exists in the past, and vice versa, where the past emerges into the present.

**Analyzing “across.”** Typically, one delimits the materials that will be used to conduct a study, restricting those materials to a range of years published, strict definitions of terms used in those materials, methods utilized by those materials to produce information, and (whether explicitly stated or not) discourses from which those materials emerge. Above, I limited myself to a timeframe and definitions. However, the theoretical orientations of a genealogy do not allow for such restrictions to be placed on a discipline. An analysis of descent can continue indefinitely, as there is no originating point of a phenomenon. Further, genealogy is concerned with how phenomena emerge as the result of various discourses in conversation with one another, all guided by a broader *episteme*. This means that genealogy does not remain within one particular discipline. For my genealogy of student engagement in composition, it was necessary simply to explore the field of composition, but to determine how other disciplines in academia affected and influenced composition. Genealogy forces us to confront the fact that all limitations are artificial and that any study has the possibility of extending indefinitely; genealogy embraces the reality of the indefinite.

From a practical standpoint, however, there must be limits on any study so that it can be completed. As for analyzing across disciplines, I provide here a list of disciplines that spoke to the emergence of student engagement in composition: education, psychology/sociology, and to a lesser degree, business. I base this list off of an initial search for the term “engagement” in EBSCOHost Academic Search Complete, limited to pieces published in the past ten years. Examining the first 50 search results, I developed a table (shown below) that describes which fields are represented by this search.

Table 2. Frequency with which Engagement Appears by Discipline

Education	18
Communications	2
Business	6
Mechanics/Engineering	5
Psychology/sociology	14
Medicine	4
Political Science	1

Clearly, education, psychology/sociology, and business feature most prominently. While five articles also came from engineering and mechanics journals, all of these articles referred to “engaging brakes.” While the job of the genealogist is to look for commonalities and evolution in terminology, I suspected that “engagement” as used by mechanics differs too drastically from “engagement” as it was conceived in this study. Given these three fields, it was my intent to determine the differences and commonalities across literature and to see how all of the different manifestations of engagement gave way to the emergence of engagement as it exists in composition, as epitomized by Bean’s (2005) text, where I began my problematization of this term, by examining how the term was used across disciplines in contemporary times. I suspected that the conversations in my archive set a stage for the emergence of the idea of student engagement in



composition; how, then, does the use of this term in other disciplines establish a *dispositif* of composition that pushes student engagement to the forefront?

Additionally, I was aware that I had to pay attention to political historical contexts as I move through the descent of student engagement. Engagement appeared across disciplinary literature because it served a purpose for each discipline and responded to a need established a governmentality, the sayable, knowable, and doable at a particular time. By examining the larger political and historical contexts of engagement, I gained clearer understanding of the uses of engagement as well as why and how it existed both within and outside of composition studies. An example of such a historical context which immediately appeared in my archive is World War 2. A number of articles addressed the idea of the returning soldier student. Such a subjective construction could not occur without the historical event of the war, as well as various power/knowledge constructions of soldiers: how soldiers differ from normal students, what soldiers need to be engaged, how soldiers learn, etc. Every discipline represented in the above table was, in some way, affected by the war. If these disciplines contribute to the body of knowledge on engagement, this means that the war, in affecting such disciplines, also affected engagement, if only in a subtle or nebulous way.

**What we get from my genealogy.** A genealogy is a history of the present. It traces how we have gotten to a particular point in discursive constructions of knowledge and subject. While a Foucauldian genealogy is a historical approach designed to show what occurred in the past, it is also meant to show how traces of the past occur in the present. It shows a movement that allows problematic constructs to emerge in the present as natural and unquestioned. The first point of this genealogy is to show where and how

the present is reliant on the past, specifically the time period between 1939 and 1952, with attention to past, nebulous manifestations of engagement.

Additionally, a genealogy is designed to examine power/knowledge structures. As described in the previous chapter, student engagement is understood as a virtue, a kind of altruistic approach to teaching that somehow makes the student unquestionably successful. It is apparently egalitarian device. However, power/knowledge underlies all of our relations, guiding in subtle and overt ways the beliefs we hold and the interactions we have, and a genealogy seeks to understand how power “undercuts the theoretical equality positioned by the law” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 185) and other institutions that hold political force and sway. This means that even student engagement, which immediately seems to serve students, is not neutral, and in fact may serve a variety of purposes. Indeed, that which constitutes “success” is driven by a particular, already existing belief that precludes other possibilities of success. This is an example of power/knowledge operating through the concept of student engagement; genealogy works to expose where this power resides and how individual subjects (teachers and students alike) become embroiled within the political technologies that develop as a result of such power/knowledge and themselves become agents that unknowingly act in accordance with and perpetuate such power/knowledge.

The concept of student engagement is no different from other concepts in that it exists to achieve a certain goal, and that goal is informed by particular beliefs about how the world does and should operate. Even so, the idea of student engagement is both ubiquitous and vague. It is difficult to conceive of how a term that has been researched at length and taken a prominent place in the educational fore can at once be so revered and

offer so little. In sum, this genealogy helps us to understand how we have gotten to such a point. In understanding that student engagement is a product of historical contingencies, we see that it is a strategy employed to a specific purpose. However, whether or not it succeeds in meeting this purpose, there are always potentialities for other means of progress, as Foucault suggests in his interview with Simon (1971). I argue that student engagement has ultimately fails in achieving its aim—the construction of an engaged subject—because over the course of time, as my research indicates, we have lost sight of this aim. My genealogy rethinks student engagement as a shibboleth. As such, genealogy invites us to move beyond this construction, to reconceive what it might mean to “engage” a student, and indeed, to rethink the students’ relationship with education and pedagogy in general. Through a deconstruction of the past, we can attempt to build a different future.

## FINDINGS

### Part 1: Beginnings of a Compositional Counterhistory

“Wrong, do it again! If you don’t eat your meat, you can’t have any pudding! How can you have any pudding if you don’t eat your meat?! You! Yes, you behind the bike shed! Stand still, Laddy!” The schoolmaster, a comically tall and thin creature with round glasses, a skinny cane (used more probably for corporal punishment than walking), a handsome sports jacket, tie, and slacks, feeds children into a meat grinder. Pink Floyd’s representation of the pre-war school teacher, imbued with the authority to control children’s bodies and treat them as livestock, follows a history of similar representations in literature and art. Mark Twain describes Mr. Dobbins, the schoolmaster in *Tom Sawyer*, as a teacher who will “whip” a student good, whose very gaze “smote even the innocent with fear” (p. 169). Twain’s schoolmaster was the inspiration for Rockwell’s *The Caning*, a painting which portrays a screaming child being beaten by a rather lanky teacher with thin cane and handsome coat and slacks. Yet another book, Roald Dahl’s *Danny, The Champion of the World* describes Captain Lancaster, a teacher characterized as perpetually taking on a pre-World-War-2-era mode of thinking (hence “captain”), who whips the protagonist’s palms with a hickory switch. The principles behind such a representation of the teacher are simple: students should be seen and not heard—indeed, the well-disciplined schoolhouse should be quiet enough to hear a pin drop (Burton, 1883). The interest of the teacher defines the interest of the student, and the students’ interests should align with the desires of the school teacher. Anything else is a distraction or an outburst, one which must be corrected. Such representations suggest that in The

West before the war, a student-centered pedagogy had yet to be invented, to say nothing of strategies to *engage* students in their studies.

Or, in any case, this represents the popular conception of education at the time. It may very well be that students' interests were a pedagogical concern before World War 2. For instance, it may be argued that such an authoritarian approach was *in* the students' best interests. Or it might be argued that this prominent artistic characterization is wholly untrue—that teachers even in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were sympathetic to students, responsive to their desires and interests. After all, this time period is when educational reformers/philosophers such as Horace Mann and John Dewey were active, and they were certainly concerned with what type of education was in the best interest of students—we might even argue that they offered pedagogical foundations that anticipated the idea of what is now termed engagement. But we do not need to make this argument. Whether or not the artistic representations above are accurate is not the issue. The issue is that such art represents a popular opinion, a caricature perhaps, (shall we say “savoir”?) of the state of education. They offer a “truth” about education that does not need to reflect facticity, one that is based in a shared understanding that public education was rooted in controlling, directing, and delimiting activities.

Certainly it must have been different at the level of the university? It is a fair enough proposition: students attending university elect to attend, and thus, there should be less need for such disciplinary tactics; students would already “engage” with their studies. However, the history of American colleges suggests that this was not the case. Geiger (2000) notes that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American college was forced to contend with a phenomenon never experienced in academia before: student revolt, “the

full-fledged defiance of college authority by a significant portion of the student body” (p. 10). Geiger attributes such revolution to the fact that values in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were fast becoming democratic, while colleges “embodied the previous century’s preoccupation with hierarchy and authority” (p. 11). Jackson (2000) has suggested that such revolt may have resulted from the “inherently confrontational element within the very structure of student life” as well as specific grievances such as “poor food, poor teaching, and inadequate curriculum” (p. 47). If this is true, then there was something in the very fabric of the relationship between student and professor—in the values held by each respective entity, in the ways that student and professor knew how to interact with the world—that resulted in conflict, to say nothing of the curriculum that these antiquated professors drew from. We might say that students were alienated from academia to the point of revolt, and as a result, colleges in the late 1800s were, much like primary and secondary schools, forced to implement various disciplinary measures to keep students in line, primarily through fines, probations, and expulsion (Geiger).

The point of these observations is to highlight the disjunction between students, their interests, and their desires on one hand, and the academy on the other. However, in these historical accounts, when authority figures place blame, the problem is invariably with the student. It would seem that it never occurred to those in power to consider why such unrest might lie within the student body, in primary school or at the level of the academy. Students who did not conform to a rigid code of acceptable conduct, one of passivity and subordination, were seen as belligerent and/or lacking. This explains the characterization of the schoolmaster as, more than anything else, a mental/corporal punisher, one who insists that student behavior, interest, and knowledge align with his

(the schoolmaster always seems to be a “he”) own; and this explains why students, even at the collegiate level, dissatisfied with their education, were fined. The justification of such punishment lies in a deficit model of students to be sure, but the deficit is not exactly in knowledge; rather, it lies in the students’ inability to want to submit to the academy, to care about the right material in the right ways, to embrace the ways of learning that the professor prescribes. Foucault (1997) describes the traditional relationship between student and professor: “the traditional teacher first makes his audience feel guilty for not knowing a certain number of things they should know; then he places the audience under the obligation to learn the things that he, the professor, knows” (p. xv-xvi). The professor’s knowledge, and by extension, the professor’s interests, take precedence over those of the students, and students should feel both guilty and obligated to learn those topics that the professor deems worthy of one’s interest.

However, somewhere along the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our understanding of pedagogy changed. Foucault (1997) describes his own experience after taking a position at the *College de France*, focusing on students’ relationship with classroom attendance: “if it interests [the student], he comes; if it doesn't interest him, he doesn't come” (xvi). Suddenly, a student’s interests—what the student deems worthy of knowing, of investing time into—dictates how the student is allowed to behave in the academic environment. Allowing students to pursue their own interests in an educational environment is something of a game-changer. It first changes the expectations that are placed on both student and teacher. It is no longer incumbent upon the student to align his or her interest with the teacher’s, and a student is no longer deficient if he or she cannot find the subject matter of the classroom interesting; in fact, the deficit now might be upon the teacher for

not being interesting enough, for not going to lengths to develop engaging lessons and lectures—a fact which is made painfully clear at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an influx of “how to” publications laying out different methods for teachers and colleges to engage student (e.g. Abernathy & Reardon, 2002; Adams, 1996; Bean, 2001; Beuscher, Keuer, Meuhlich, & Tyra, 1997; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Second, this shift redefines the ways and reasons that teachers may implement authority over students. Beforehand, a disinterested student might be chastised for such disinterest. However, as the focal point of pedagogy shifts from the interests of the teacher to that of the student, this chastisement is no longer possible as it is no longer reprehensible for the student to pursue his or her own interests outside of the teacher’s jurisdiction. It is for this reason that when he began teaching at the *College de France*, Foucault felt that he was no longer in a position to “[exercise] a relationship power with respect to [his] audience” (xvi) (a fact which Foucault celebrated).

Another way to think of this change, I argue, is to say that what we see near the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a change in the conception of how students should both engage with and be engaged by their studies. Student engagement, which is generally operationalized as how students are behaviorally, cognitively and/or affectively invest in their studies (Appleton et al., 2006; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reschley & Christenson, 2012; Trowler, 2010; Yibing & Lerner, 2013), emerged as a term in the late 1980s and has since come to the fore in educational research. It has been argued by some that engagement is essentially a measure student success (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2013; Quaye & Harper, 2009), and has become what Quin (2017) has described as an “overarching educational ethos” (p. 345). That is, it has become a kind of mantra for



many educators, a virtue upon which the professoriate may hang their practice. It permeates educational theory and practice. “Does this lesson/lecture/activity engage my students?” A far cry, certainly, from the image of the pre-war educator as illustrated by Pink Floyd, Mark Twain, or Roald Dahl.

An area of study that has consistently described students as disengaged is composition studies. While I address this in much greater depth later, students have consistently been understood as behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively divorced or alienated from the writing that they must produce for composition classes (Dubson, 2006; Gunner, 2006; Heilker & Vandenberg, 1996), even from the first composition course ever taught (Elliot, 2005). Dubson perhaps expressed this view the best, saying that students “don’t care enough in the right way about the work they are doing” (p. 93), and as a result of not caring in the right way, we are left with “a student who clearly does not embrace the writing assignment, does not feel engaged in the work of writing, does not care about his or her own writing” (p. 103). His solution, instead of assigning paper topics broadly to students, is to “help each and every student find and develop their own ideas” (p. 108). These observations, made over the course of a 17 page essay, act as a kind of microcosmic history of education and composition studies in general; in the beginning, students do not think the right way about their studies and they are disengaged as a result. Near the end of the essay, however, he claims that the solution is not to whip students (figuratively and literally) into shape, but to try to help them develop their own interests in written form. Is this not representative of the history of education in general, the one that Foucault (1997) describes? In the beginning, students were seen as not caring “in the right way,” and over time, we have decided that to get them to care, we need to

allow their interests to permeate (and perhaps even dictate) the classroom in an effort to make them more engaged in their work. Not surprisingly, it is around the same time Dubson's essay was published that we see Bean's (2001) *Engaging Ideas* become one of the most well cited works in compositions studies. There is clearly a move at the turn of the millennium toward a student-centered, *engaging* writing pedagogy.

In histories of composition, the time before the 1970s has been described as decidedly *not* student centered, dominated by current-traditional rhetoric, a pedagogical model that saw writing as a skill that students could or could not do, a linear activity having no connection to student motivations, affections, or interests (Berlin, 1982; Berlin & Inkster, 1980; Crowley, 1996; Fleming, 2009; Petraglia, 1999; Pullman 1999; Young, 1978). Given the influx of literature on engagement in the late 90s and early 2000s, this idea seems reasonable enough. If the 90s is the time of engagement, why should we expect that any period prior should be preoccupied with the idea? However, if college composition has existed since 1885, then there is something suspicious about this reading of history. It is overly simple and perhaps naïve, an observation made by Varnum in 1992, but one that has not yet be adequately addressed: if current histories of composition are accurate, this means that it took composition nearly a century to rethink the way that it addressed its students' pedagogical needs. Is this true? Were no tactics deployed in an attempt to speak to students and their interests, to get them to, for lack of a better word, *engage* in their writing? Were other tactics employed, perhaps not in the name of engagement, but at least in an attempt to move away from the supposed "I say; you do" model described in current-traditional rhetoric?

Even in 1952, we see the formation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a conference designed to address both the pedagogical and professional needs of teachers of composition. This means that 20 years before historians of composition locate a shift away from current-traditional rhetoric, there was a conversation occurring about how to best teach composition coursework, a fact that seems strange to overlook in composition histories. However, the emergence of a conference cannot denote the beginning of a conversation. A conference such as the CCCC is designed to meet a need that has already been recognized by practitioners in the field. This means that there must have been dialogue regarding pedagogical needs among practitioners of composition for some time before 1952, one that was not being addressed by the current-traditional rhetoric model, and one which we may locate as far back as the first publication of the *College English* journal in 1939 (Goggin, 2000).

This work will shed light on the conversation of composition pedagogy, particularly in terms of student engagement before the term “student engagement” existed. Using the history of composition as a kind of case study, I show how student engagement has been a term that did not simply appear at the beginning of the new millennium, but one that has been a longstanding concern for educators since before World War 2. This project acts as a kind of tracing of engagement to see how it has emerged into our present moment. Further, I explore the implications of this move toward such a student centered pedagogy; if it is true that teachers held positions of intense authoritarian, perhaps even sovereign power capable of corporal punishment at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is naïve to believe that such authority was simply relinquished. A shift in pedagogical models does not invert the power dynamic between those who have power

and those who do not. If we are to follow Foucault (1976/1978; 1977/1995), thinking about power in these terms is reductive. Shifts in power can change relationships, and they change how entities within relationships may interact, but shifts in power do not necessarily strip authority from one and give it to another. Instead, shifts in power change the limits and potentialities of the interactions of those enmeshed in a power dynamic, (re)writing their roles within that relationship. Thus, this project also traces the shifting of power as pedagogy historically changes to one of engagement, examining what this means for the roles and actions of those in authoritative positions (teachers), those who are subjects of the pedagogy (students, and those institutions that interface to move engagement to the front of educational practice and studies (universities).

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When we look at the ways that power operates within a discipline such as composition, we must look at the subjects implicated in, affected by, and affecting such power. We might argue that no discourse comes about without a/the subject upon which to guide the direction of that discourse. By subject, I mean an individual that is subjectified within a system, one that becomes “an object for a discourse with a ‘scientific’ status” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 24). Foucault further describes subjects within a discursive system:

There may be a ‘knowledge’ of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them: this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. Of course, this technology is diffuse, rarely formulated in continuous, systematic discourse; it is often made up of bits and

pieces; it implements a disparate set of tools or methods. In spite of the coherence of its results, it is generally no more than a multiform instrumentation. (p. 26)

The individual becomes a subject under various knowledges *about* the individual, knowledges possessed and developed by the discourses in which the individual is enmeshed. Such subjectification allows us to “know” about the individual—to understand, to make predictions, to classify, to help or to hinder depending on the individuals’ (and the discourse’s) motivations, and perhaps most importantly for Foucault, to determine how an individual might productively contribute to the *political*, or the broader values and aims of the discourse itself. Such knowledge is generally not dispersed by a single entity, however. The formation of the subject occurs as those within the discourse—subjects themselves—continue to observe, to speculate, to tie in knowledges from other discourses, to produce new knowledges about themselves and others implicated in the discourse. The subject is constantly being refined and specified as these knowledges continue to deliberate, define, refine, change.

Much has been written on the various subjects *in*—and their relationship *to*—college composition. Crowley (1986) opens an essay that names and characterizes the main subjects implicated in college composition, calling composition “a black hole since its inception, swallowing up students, teachers, and money without giving much in return” (p. 11). In addition to classifying composition as a “black hole,” the two major subjects in college composition, students and teachers, are painted as powerless when confronted with this composition, more subjected *to* than subjects *within*. The metaphor of the black hole implies that these subjects have been pulled into it against their will, swallowed by it, and once there, they simply must endure. She describes students and

teachers of freshman English\* as both unskilled and unmotivated, and as a result, composition imposes a “grinding workload” on those subject to the class. This acts as a convenient place to begin a discussion on those subject to/in Freshman English: Crowley identifies and provides a portrayal of the subjects in college composition as well as their relationship to the discourse in general. But if we are to take Foucault at his word, this is a simple narrative. For Foucault, the subject is constructed of bits of knowledge produced over various instantiations of discourse. How did Crowley decide that this was the appropriate way to characterize these subjects? How reliable is her portrayal? Is it true that both teachers and students have, at least until Crowley’s work, been painted as unmotivated, untrained, and lacking in compositional knowledge?

## **Part 2: Constructing Subjects Within Composition**

An initial reading of the history of the term “students” in composition seems to make this case. Students have been described as “disinterested... formless... scatterbrained... failed... niggers” across swaths of composition literature, an observation made even a decade after Crowley was writing (Heilker & Vandenberg, 1996, p. 225). Students have been “socially and politically imagined as children whose Victorian innocence retains a tainted need for civilizing” (Miller, 1991, p. 196). Such a reading for teachers of composition is equally bleak, and they are portrayed as “hyperbolically bad teacher[s]” who are idiots, lacking in knowledge about the very subject matter they are to teach, and as slaves (Heilker & Vandenberg, p. 232). If these readings are accurate—or even if this is just how students and teachers have been understood in the broader

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\* College composition has been named several times over its history. Note that composition and freshman English name the same course.

discourse of composition, accurate or not—and college composition is serves the purpose of teaching students how to write, then the historical reading of current-traditional rhetoric and the teachers that used it is reasonable. If students did not care, and teachers were unable to teach, then why not take rhetoric, a “potentially rich intellectual enterprise” and diminish it “into a truncated and impoverished one” (Goggin, 2000, p. 33). Students seen in this light needed the disciplinary guidance of the teacher: guidance that kept them on track and forced them to practice their studies, one that was allowed to implement some degree of punishment should students’ formlessness and disinterest cause any sort of distraction from writing correctly. At the same time, these unskilled teachers needed an accessible means of teaching the material. Both subjects here could benefit from the truncated, overly-simple, easy-to-teach current-traditional approach to rhetoric. It would take a rather massive change in the way that students and teachers were understood as subjects, perhaps one at the dawn of the millennium, to reimagine the way that students should be addressed. And it is easy to say that an emerging discourse of student-centeredness, one heralded by the idea of student engagement, has recently changed this way of thinking in composition. Suddenly, by the 1990s, students had interests that might be leveraged in their writing to foster engagement in composition. As this new paradigm emerges, it turns out that students are not formless after all. Instead, composition had just not done enough to reach out to students, to make the stakes of writing matter enough to them. Heilker and Vandenberg’s reading of the word “student” seems to agree with this reading of history. According to them, it was not until the 90s that students begin to take on different identifiers: “nascent rhetors... apprentices... novitiates” (p. 226).

Of course, any compositionist would balk at this simplified version of history. Certainly composition had, at least since the early 70s, made an effort to reach out, to make writing “matter” for students. Gage (1996) argues that Kitzhaber’s 1953 dissertation, *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College*, was “one of the first books to explore pedagogical approaches to college composition” (p. 377) and to break with current-traditional rhetorical practices. It is also worth noting that the movement/pedagogy of expressivism which made its mark in the late 60s/early 70s asks students to focus on their own interests and their feelings (e.g. Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1972). Expressivists have been arguing for nearly 50 years that there is a self that students can discover and articulate through writing—this self exists, for the most part, autonomously, with its own truth and authentic voice (Faigley, 1986; Fulkerson, 1990; 2005). Writing under this model was designed to address the student on his or her own ground, writing about the topic that he or she was most familiar with—to illustrate or articulate the authentic self that existed in each student. Under expressivism, students should be valued on an individual basis and could be made interested (as well as learn) by addressing topics of personal relevance to themselves. This suggests that even in the 70s, the construction of student as disinterested, alienated, or divorced was rejected by a major movement in composition at least two decades before education began using the term “student engagement.” The student was, somehow, worth knowing, and the pedagogy of “know thyself” emerged. We might argue that the principles of student engagement are present in expressivism in that at its core, it is a strategy to get students to affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally embrace writing. It is surprising that the expressivist



movement, despite being underpinned by the core tenets of student engagement, seems to have dissipated just as the idea of engagement came to the fore (Bryant, 2015).

It is true that composition is often characterized as coming into existence as a cohesive field of study at roughly the same time as expressivism, specifically 1963 according North (1987). Here, it makes sense to suggest that even though students were still being described as formless and disinterested—and they certainly were—some conversations were being held about ways to better engage them in their studies. As the compositional discourse emerges and takes shape, we would imagine a result of this emergence (or perhaps a cause, or both) would be the conversations about those students in composition classes: their needs, how to address those needs, the purpose of the course for the students, in effect, what to do that had not already been tried with students. This was also the time that basic writing emerged at CUNY, a result that Otte and Mlynarczyc (2010) attribute to changing attitudes toward students and their abilities. And histories of composition generally suggest that this is when any thought of the student experience in composition began (e.g. Berlin, 1982; Berlin & Inkster, 1980; Young, 1978). Beforehand, states Varnum (1992), “the sixty years between roughly 1900 and 1960 have been characterized as a period of stagnation in the history of composition and as a period in which ‘current-traditional’ rhetoric, an approach developed in the late nineteenth century, operated as a monolithic and increasingly obstructive paradigm” (p. 39) which, in fact, retarded and prevented student learning. Under this account, we might draw the conclusion that students have until recently been victimized by compositional pedagogies: it is not simply disengagement inherent in the student subject that led to poor

performance; instead, the student is subject to composition, forced into a classroom that the student is rightfully disengaged in.

We can certainly see how a history of composition that paints students as victimized by the field would lead to a pedagogical overhaul, one that attempts to undo the victimization and (re)kindle student interest in the subject, whether or not that overhaul explicitly names student engagement as a virtue. But Varnum (1992) is not critical of current-traditional rhetoric in itself; he is critical of the characterization of the first 60 years of composition as being dominated by current-traditional rhetoric. While he does not provide a comprehensive overview of those 60 years, he does suggest that it has been grossly over-simplified. As such, this means our understanding of “students” and “teachers,” as well as the ways that they have been constructed as subjects, is probably simplistic. It also means that perhaps we are hasty in suggesting that engagement is the way to counter a characterization that may, in fact, have little basis in history or fact. It is a solution to a problem that, perhaps, was never a problem in the first place

There is, of course, something to be said for historical accounts as they stand. In the years leading up to the 60s and 70s, analyses of textbooks suggest that what is now termed current-traditional rhetoric (and the practices conventionally associated with it) was in vogue (Dean, 1999; North, 1987; Kitzhaber, 1953). And there is certainly something stuffy about current-traditional rhetoric, both in theory and in practice. Kitzhaber noted that under current-traditional rhetoric, “the best sort of education was that which offered the best opportunities for rigorous drill” (p. 2). We see this in early works that are now considered to be foundational to current-traditional rhetoric, for instance Chittenden’s (1891) *The Elements of English Composition* or Lockwood and

Emerson's (1901) *Composition and Rhetoric for Higher Schools*, both which act as intense grammar primers complete with copying exercises. In Wendell's (1891) *English Composition: Eight Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute*, he states that good writing simply comes about by memorizing "a very simple set of general principles under which details readily group themselves" (p. 2). Applying those principles should be "painstaking" if we take Genung at his word (1894, p. 1). Rhetoric in all of these works is largely driven by monolithic prescriptivist logics: some words are necessarily correct to use while others are barbarisms or improprieties; students should be able to identify Latinate or Saxon words and use them to a rhetorical end; certain arrangements of words, sentences, and paragraphs will necessarily have a specific effect, and students would do well to note how arrangement affects various hierarchies of clearness, force, and elegance in writing; copying from so called "great" writers can lead students, perhaps by osmosis, to develop good writing skills. When we examine these textbooks looking for specific ways that pedagogy seemed to be formulaic, boring, a pedagogical disservice to students in the composition classroom, it is easy to find such instances and generally to make a case against current-traditional rhetoric as history has done. Nearly 40 years after the publication of these foundational texts, Campbell (1939) urges us to do away with freshman English altogether, a need brought on by the mechanical treatment of writing in such classes, one "engendered and grown in a kind of intellectual vacuum" (p. 178). The aim of composition under this model was certainly not to engage students. After the first composition course at Harvard in 1885, several students were surveyed regarding their experience. While one student complained that the course had stifled his creativity, one

of the survey reviewers simply responded that the course had taught him to more effectively complain (Copeland & Rideout, 1901).

Such a dismissal of the student's complaint is telling of the way that students were seen at the time, and certainly the construction of the student subject as somehow formless, disinterested, or ignorant exists in the early works of current-traditional rhetoric as well. Wendell (1891) describes his interactions with students at Harvard: "'I can't write anyhow' say students to me year after year; they mean that they won't think" (p. 136-137). Genung (1894), in his prologue, compares students to "great writers," stating that great writers' "thought region is too mature for [the student], too high; [the student] cannot interest himself in their lofty principles of political morality or of literary criticism." Lockwood and Emerson (1901) consistently describe students' failures to follow simple patterns in writing, characterizing them as ignorant, wasting time, unable—or unwilling—to commit serious effort to writing studies. Students are spoken about in terms of their deficiency, to be sure. It is easy, then, to see why current histories suggest that students have been characterized by their lack until nearly the beginning of the new millennium.

However, while it is possible to paint current-traditional rhetoric in terms of its lack of engaging qualities and its conception of students as deficient, such historical accounts do not provide a full story of composition pedagogy, the student subject, or what now may be termed strategies to engage students during the early years of composition. Even some of the defining pieces of current-traditional rhetoric begin to speculate about pedagogical approaches, offering advice for engaging those student in the course. Genung (1894), for instance, claims that composition is positive and creative

work, and notes that it would be a “pity to keep students working exclusively at crooked English, without doing something from the outset to foster that desire to contrive, to build...” and he attempts within his book to “give the student all along something creative to do” (p. vi). Lockwood and Emerson note on the first page of her skills book that in addition to being practical and broad in scope, they wanted their book to be interesting because “to sentence students to the use of a dull and lifeless text-book is, often, to condemn them to a lifelong distaste for the subject of that particular book” (p. v). Whether or not these writers succeed is arguable, but the idea of fostering interest, creativity, and desire in students around 1900 seems counter to current histories of composition and rhetoric: it is a concern better suited for the newer pedagogy of engagement than the teacher-centric anathema that has been dubbed current-traditional rhetoric. It further suggests that students have not always been cast as the formless, clueless, deficient entities as histories of composition suggest they have. While the conception of the student subject as deficient exists in many early readings, it represents only one way that students have been subjectified in composition, what we might call a “strain of subjectification,” and if it was possible even in early years to engage students, then other readings, other such strains of subjectification must exist as well.

**The interested student subject.** If not only in terms of their deficiencies, then how exactly have students been characterized by compositionists during the supposed reign of current-traditional rhetoric? One place to turn is Dudley’s (1939) “The Success of Freshman English,” arguably one of the first articles in compositions studies that seriously addresses pedagogy (Goggin, 2000) by describing Iowa State University’s approach the freshman composition course. What he describes is a classroom markedly

different from the classroom that we might imagine dominated by current-traditional rhetoric, at least as it has been presented in recent histories of composition. Dudley describes a pedagogical approach that he claims had been in place at Iowa for at least five years, one that begins by “encouraging the student to explore his own experience. Autobiography furnishes the models, and personal reminiscence the subject matter, for the compositions of the first few weeks. The resulting papers, if not profoundly philosophical, are alive and encouraging” (Dudley, 1939, p. 23). The underlying reason for this approach, he explains, is for student to discover that “the past is interesting to himself, and then, gradually and somewhat to his surprise, that it is interesting to others” (p. 23). These lines could easily have been taken from an expressivist piece of the 70s or perhaps even as a strategy for engaging students in the new millennium (In fact, Bean (2005) suggests autobiography as an engaging alternative to top-down, thesis governed essays), despite appearing in the midst of the current-traditional rhetorical movement, a movement characterized as decidedly *not* engaging or student centered. We thus see student interest becoming a serious, even central, concern in the question of composition pedagogy.

The changing of a pedagogical approach occurs in tandem with a change in the discourse surrounding the student subject; we must now see the student beyond a one that cannot think (Wendell, 1891) or consider the lofty principles of the poets (Genung, 1901). Indeed, Dudley (1939) implies that many students produce profoundly philosophical pieces simply through reflective autobiography writing. By 1946, Bond suggests that intelligence is no way at all to anticipate or characterize a student’s ability to write:

Experience with corrective English has disproved the old fallacy that a student of average intelligence who cannot meet the usual standards required for basic English composition cannot be college material. Even though a close correlation has been found between scores on English placement tests and intelligence tests, it has been determined that the student can raise his mark on the intelligence test for the reason that most intelligence tests are highly verbal. It follows that a gain in scholastic aptitude will accompany improvement of reading ability and general ability in English. (p. 469)

Such observations upset the way that students have conventionally been understood as simply lacking and suggests that even during the time of current-traditional rhetoric, some instructors understood students as potentially complicated individuals. Students are capable of producing good work now, provided that they are confronted with the right kinds of assignments. And by no means did Dudley stand alone on this issue. By the early 1940s, *College English* and *The English Journal* had published a number of pieces addressing different pedagogical concerns, so much so that Ringnalda & Ringnalda (1939) open their piece by noting how heartening it is that “so many teachers [have been] writing about Freshman English” (p. 135). Many of these pieces directly address Campbell’s (1939) “The Failure of Freshman English,” which called for the abolition of the course on the grounds that it was reductive and essentially pointless, Campbell’s argument amounting to bad writing is the result of a student who cannot think well, and the freshman English course cannot teach one to think better. However, the bloom of literature in the early 1940s directly refuted Campbell, and much of this writing

resituates the relationships between student and their coursework. For instance, Hogrefe (1940a), like Dudley, saw value in the potential for writing to lead to self-exploration for students. Buckner (1940) described a class designed around “the ideal of trying to make the students' English composition classes the most interesting hours of the week for them, of making their assignments challenges instead of drudgery, of giving them the opportunity to work with their classmates... of giving even the dullest the joy of achievement” (p. 280). Digna (1940) described how her students became interested in research writing when they are allowed to determine the subject matter for the course. Garnett and Griebing (1940) surveyed freshmen literary preferences at Kent State, and concluded simply that that “youth has taste” (p. 688). They close their piece by asking for a curriculum that allows students the opportunity to appreciate modern works, rather than stale literary canon. Inlow (1940) echoes this sentiment, describing what happens when students are allowed more choice over their readings for composition: “many students, after reading some of the better books of recent vintage the first semester, become interested and wish to read more extensively” (p. 166). These examples represent only a portion of the work that was being published in the 1940s that bot cast students as capable and attempted to engage their interests as a strategy to improve writing. As students were being cast in a new light—as capable of interest, expression, taste—a new pedagogical model had to follow.

But a new pedagogical model places new kinds of responsibilities on both the teacher and the student, including adopting a new way to understand the relationship between students and writing. Beforehand, the student was simply seen as incapable. Some were meant to be writers; most were not. This shift away from a binary of



(in)capability meant that all students had the potential to be skilled writers if the right conditions were met, and on the other hand, poor writing was the result of meeting certain conditions not yet met—not, as Campbell (1939) or Wendell (1894) argued, an inability to think. Fountain (1940), noting that students were often poorly prepared when entering Freshman English, argued for research on social factors that might contribute to poor preparation. He tellingly begins to refer to poorly prepared students simply as “the poor,” suggesting that the issue in poor preparation is socioeconomic rather than something inherent to the student, such as IQ or even race, as it had been conceived suggested some years earlier (Elliot, 2005). He further suggests that formative years and high school curricula may not offer students all that they need to succeed in college writing classes. But attributing poor preparation to various social factor and erasing the necessity of “student as lacking” means inventing new ways to address this poor preparation, to bring out the potential inner writer within each and every student. It requires understanding the student at a level that had not yet been conceived, examining more meticulously than ever before their social makeup, attributing causes to poor preparation beyond an innate laziness, stupidity, or poor taste. Certainly, there had been means of assessing student abilities, but they had not been designed with Fountain’s level of specificity in mind. While college entrance exams had existed for over 40 years, they created a quick snapshot of the student, one that told whether or not a student was skilled enough for college study. But in 1944, Marshall recasts the purpose of such examinations: “The problem of selecting probable successes and probable failures among students in freshman English is of both academic interest and practical administrative importance. The more accurately it can be done, the more effectively... counseling,

differentiating courses, individualizing instruction, and differentiating time allotment” can be carried out (p. 219). If we can discover the cause of poor preparation, we can more readily remedy it and bring students into the academic fold, as it were. And if we look back at the pedagogical literature from the early 1940s, we see a new word beginning to flourish in writing pedagogy, namely the concept of “interest.” an exploration of what factors make writing interesting to students and what kinds of assignments allow student to produce interesting work. The “ideal student” in freshman English is not defined by the knowledge that they do or do not have, but by their willingness to learn, to “read ahead from pure affection... the lust for knowledge crying in the blood” (Holmes, 1944, p. 393).

But how is interest operationalized? If interest is now the driving pedagogical force, one which leads to better writing, how can one know if the student is interested? How can a teacher engage the interest of the student? Interest is necessarily personal, and we quickly see that what becomes good, interesting writing for compositionists like Dudley (1939), Green (1940), and Hogrefe (1940a) becomes synonymous with “unveiling.” Students must now tell something of themselves, whether that unveiling be an “intelligible explanation of why he is or is not joining a fraternity, of what he expects from his college course, or of how relief activities have affected his home community” (Dudley, 1939, p. 25) or simply asking a student “to define as precisely as possible the position which her family or her town occupies in the economic order” (Green, 1940, p. 694). To assess whether or not a student writes or thinks well, the student must articulate a defensible position as a political subject. Foucault (1982) suggests that subject positions are obtained in two ways: one may be “subject to someone else by control and

dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (p. 781). To effectively name (and mold) a student subject in the composition class in the former instance of subjectification, we should develop an understanding of the latter instance, how the student develops and defines his or her own identity. In the years to come, this will become a major theme in the pedagogical work produced by writing studies, and is addressed in serious depth by both Alcorn (2002) and Rickert (2007) 60 years later. Under this developing pedagogy, one of addressing the subject, it is not enough that the student in college should want to join a fraternity or feel a certain way about relief efforts. There is a need for the student to do the work of understanding his or her own subject position and to turn over that work of self-understanding to the instructor. This charge is no more apparent than in the work of Green (1940) who, while explaining how to persuade “average” students to produce “significant” theme content, provides an example of what he considers to be an ideal assignment:

You are the product of your environment, of your experience. Discover, define, and interpret one of the formative elements in your experience. Get down to concrete, tangible things. Tell us what they mean. You may describe, you may argue, you may narrate, you may explain, but you are required to develop a thesis, that is, to analyze your material into its several aspects, and to give it definitive significance. (p. 695)

It is remarkable how at once this prompt manages to be both innocuous and probing: innocuous, perhaps, because we can imagine such an assignment being given in any contemporary composition course. It has become normalized in the discourse of writing

assignments, and follows the same principles as the critical writing studies movement (Berlin, 1996) some 45 years before it became popularized. But at the heart of this assignment is a demand to know the student at a level of phenomenal and existential *being*. Students must define the very meaning of their experience, to “get down,” to unveil an aspect of their lives that led them to occupy their individual subject positions, as the assignment implies, in painstaking detail.

What makes this move perhaps even more innocuous is the face that it bears in implementation. As much as this move begins to unearth and reveal self-identified subject positions of students, it is arguably designed to empower students as well as to make the coursework of composition palatable for them. No longer skilling and drilling, students may write about a topic that, presumably, they know best: themselves. It (theoretically) creates an affinity for writing in those that historically had none, and paints the students, themselves, as interesting subjects. It humanizes the subject by providing a voice and expression, and, if we trust Dudley (1939), it is both effective and productive for the aims of the writing course, fostering in “students some desire to communicate correctly and effectively their thoughts and feelings” (p. 25). Digna (1940) is similarly pleased with the success of student interest and personal experience as pedagogical guides. Her students, as a class, were able to produce an entire book of lessons learned as freshmen new to college. This book would be given to the next year’s incoming freshman cohort, the experiences of the writers given meaning because others may learn from them. For Baker, having students articulate their philosophies of life contributes to student interest and achievement (1943). After this assertion, most of Baker’s work is comprised of student surveys who saw definite value in and enjoyed the work of his

course. In sum, according to the literature, students embraced the opportunity to speak about themselves and to let their own interests dictate the direction of classes. As interest is engaged, meaning that students' subjectivities are systematically aired, there is a willingness to do the work in composition.

Thus, pedagogy in composition takes a turn, one underpinned by strategies to foster unveiling while drawing upon the interests of and engaging those that unveil themselves: "[the task of freshman English] must depend upon the instructor's ability to understand the individual student as fully as he can" (Morrison, 1941, p. 789). Green (1941) cautions his readers that it is not always an easy task to discover the highly personalized experiences of students. Even so, he notes that is the responsibility of the teacher to make this happen: "to get the student to apply reflection to experience, to perceive and interpret its meaning, is the hard job and bounden duty of the instructor of rhetoric" (p. 594). Thus, assignments should be designed to persuade students to make a statement explicitly about themselves and their beliefs. Weisinger (1941), encouraging the adoption of a new attitude (pedagogy) on the part of teachers, elaborates why:

Information takes on significance and liveliness only in so far as it is connected with man, his history, his ambitions, and his hopes. Taught from this point of view, ideas become real and vivid. If the emphasis is placed not on political theories but on how men try to devise ways of living... then the freshman can be expected to have an interest in his work, no matter how difficult, for that work now has meaning to him as a human being with needs, problems, and aspirations. (p. 693)

The idea of what is interesting to students is intimately tied to the ways that students view themselves, including their hopes, ambitions, and histories. It almost seems that for an assignment to be interesting, a student must reveal something of themselves. The student must examine him or herself as a subject to access a place of engagement with the writing work.

**The teacher subject under a pedagogy of interest.** An argument might be made, to some degree, that this is true of all writing. Certainly Elbow (2015) would make this claim, that anything worth writing necessarily comes with a degree of personal investment and subjective reflection. Hogrefe (1940a) also identifies this idea, stating that “interesting amateur writing, we think, like nearly all great literature, is in some way autobiography, based upon self-exploration and developed with authentic feeling” (p. 156-57). Important to note for this study, though, is the context within which this writing occurs; it cannot be done without the intervention of a teacher. Students, while they may now be seen as more complicated human beings with interests, needs, problems, aspirations, what have you, still need the context of an assignment to produce prescriptively reflective writing, the context of the classroom to motivate them to do so, and the critical eye of an authority figure to assess whether or not the writing is acceptable (both mechanically and in content). Green (1940; 1941) is quite vocal about this point, and it seems that the others who have taken this “interest approach” to writing pedagogy would agree: is the teacher’s job to lead students to this kind of self-understanding. Students, though now seen as harboring potential, are still too lost, too ignorant, to do this type of work on their own.

It is thus the teachers' job to lead students. However, with the emerging pedagogy of interest, the teacher-leader does so by adopting a new role, that of the performer. Garnett and Griebeling (1940) as well as Holmes (1944) refer to the Vaudevillian talents that make a professor particularly interesting. Haber (1941) suggests that for a student to maintain interest in the class, the professor must have a sense of humor. Williams (1940) acknowledges that composition students are often not interested in the finer points of language, and thus "the professor of language must have dynamite on the brain. He needs it for shocking his class into similar interest" (p. 408). Assignments are not sufficient to engage students; the professor needs to evince a particular personality and/or become a performer. In other words, the professor must be likable. Nothing about this is surprising; as the professor takes on a more a pastoral role, acknowledging individual student interests and by extension, who they are, there is a need to build trust with those student. Indeed, one "means for a student's achieving self-exploration is his teacher's help to the recognition of creative values in his material. Here the teacher is a friendly advisor" (Hogrefe, 1940a, p. 158). In this case, it is the friendly of the teacher that gives way to the self-exploration that also serves as an unveiling of confession to the teacher. The concept of professor likability reigns during the period that the pedagogy of interest dominates. Even criticism of students' writing, though sincere, should be delivered in a friendly way (Green, 1941; Glicksberg, 1950).

Thus, the power dynamic between student and teacher changes. Now, to teach in an effective way, professors of composition must attempt to absolve, at least to a degree, the authoritative lines between student and teacher, to become something of a friend—and given the nature of probing assignments, something of a confidant. This is not to

suggest that the authoritative power vested in the teacher disappears. But it takes a new shape. It is now more subtle; the teacher is on the student's side. If there were any doubt, we need only look at the fact that the professor now tries to understand student interests, develops assignments not to test the student, but to interest and engage them, and above all, entertains. In this way, the professor is beholden to the student; however, the professor may ultimately call upon a position of authority should things get out of hand. The professor still disciplines as the student has to speak the appropriate discourse, occupy the appropriate subject position, to advance. But the role of disciplinarian is less apparent when it is combined with the roles of pastor and friend.

But as the professor is now expected to entertain, so is the student. The engaged and interested student should now be able produce engaging and interesting work. An underlying message of nearly every piece examined thus far is that the student, once interested and stimulated as a writing/written self, should produce work that "says something." Indeed, this may be one of the largest complaints of professors during the 1940s, that the student, unless stimulated in the right way, has nothing to say (e.g: Blackmur, 1941; Campbell, 1939; Green, 1941; Ringnalda & Ringnalda, 1939; Wykoff, 1940). Green (1941) a strong advocate of autobiographical writing in freshman English, provides a series of instructional suggestions designed to "get final papers with original theses at least tenable and interesting" (p. 601) that produce something "worth saying" (p. 596). The balance of student subjectivity, interestedness, and interest production is perhaps displayed best by Westerfield (1948). Tired of receiving themes that were boring to him, Westerfield began creating specific assignments that *he himself* thought would be interesting to read—but even then, the ideas of student interest and subjectivity helped



guide his assignments: I limited the research subjects to studies of a racial or national minority in the United States or of a foreign population problem. I had interest and information here; all students should be interested because they were all members of minorities or interested in some neighboring minority (p. 42). Others argue that a virtue of interesting the student produces interesting work (Dudley, 1939; Hogrefe, 1940a), and in fact, one of the requirements for exemption from freshman English at Indian University was to write on a topic of personal interest—to pass, the writing itself had to have “something to say” and be “interesting; vivid” (Hendricks, 1940, p. 614). There is thus an expectation that while the professor performs and entertains through appealing to students’ selves and interests, the student returns this consideration in writing.

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Thus, a pedagogy of interest provides new ways to assess students and their characters. By blurring the authoritarian lines that clearly existed between student and teacher in the early 1900s, students are persuaded to share something of themselves so that it is not simply their writing that is on display to be judged, but their potential to “fit in” with academia, their subjective command and alignment to academic discourses. More than ever before, writing is not simply a command of mechanical conventions, but it is the ability to say something, to remain interesting, while painting a picture of oneself and staying engaged mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally throughout the writing process. Students are capable of this as long as their interest is effectively piqued by the professor and coursework. This understanding of history stands markedly against the conventional understanding of the era before the 1960s. Far from being dominated by the top-down, lock-step black age that was current traditional rhetoric, we see a conversation

emerging in which the student is the central concern. Under this model, the student is understood as deeply complicated, affected by various environmental factors, and the pedagogy of interest develops ways to better understand the student subject.

If we take all of this seriously, it would seem that we have effectively done away with the binary of student as inherently capable/incapable. Incapability is now explicable, a result of social causes, and to make a student capable, we need only determine what those causes are, counter them, and ignite interest within the student. All students are thus capable. And yet, from all of this, a new binary emerges. It is no longer the binary of students as capable or incapable, as existed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is now a binary of interested vs. dis-interested: engaged vs. disengaged. When understood as inherently incapable or stupid, there was little one could do to blame the student. The student simply *was*, and the university was not the right place for this student. Now, however, the disinterested, disengaged student is consciously or unconsciously resistant, not willing to be interested in the efforts of the professor. We must dig deeper into this students' subjectivity to find out why, to develop a different strategy to engage this student. The pedagogy of interest provides a justification for meticulous analysis; a technology that justifies and produces new knowledges about the students in our composition classes.

### **Part 3: Composed of Various Discourses**

Thus far, I have referred to composition as a field, which is perhaps a misnomer. It is, rather, a discourse composed of those other discourses which preceded it. For Foucault, a discourse is an irruption of the knowledges that exist (and have existed) around a given area of knowledge—a formulation composed of that which has already

been said, or at least acknowledged as valid and true within a particular *episteme* (Foucault, 1972). No discipline, or irruption of knowledge, can exist without deriving legitimacy from other disciplines already established. Foucault provides an example within the schooling institution: “the school has to call in the psychologist when the power exercised at school ceases to be a real power, and becomes a both mythical and fragile power, the reality of which must consequently be intensified” (2006, p. 190). Power ceases to be “real power” when it is no longer viewed as a legitimate or necessary practice between individuals. The introduction of another discipline, in this case, psychology, and using psychology both to guide and back up the practices in education reaffirms the necessity of relationships that exist which we call a school. The introduction of scientificity through the means of a discipline like psychology provides legitimacy for the practice. In the case of composition, Hawk (2009) has described how this kind of legitimizing scientificity can be seen as composition conjoins itself with rhetoric, a rational, teachable, and generally scientific approach to argumentation and writing.

However, college composition, as it began developing its engaging pedagogy of interest, was under the influence of various discourses outside of itself. In 1940, Williams noted that “because there is academic lightning and thunder and earthquake today, college English will be different tomorrow; it may lose individual entity, merging with other subjects of the curriculum in one common aim” (p. 406). What type of merging was she referring to, and what disciplines did she see as having such sway over College English? Examining the literature, we see both direct and indirect references to other fields in composition, especially education, psychology, and even, to a degree, medicine.

Of course, this is not to say that these discourses had not already influenced composition before the 1940s. Even thirty years before we see interest dictating composition pedagogy, Palmer (1912) noted that “the proverbial rhetoric instructor is breaking away from the staid ways of the dogmatic pedagogue and is beginning to thaw a little, to throw life into a subject that was once considered dull but necessary, by imbuing his students with the contagion of scientific investigation” (p. 490). Included under the heading of scientific investigation are the fields of psychology, philosophy, history, and “kindred sciences.” Such openness, he suggested, keeps the field alive, progressing, moving. But how exactly did these sciences appear in composition? At the time of his writing, psychology was pioneering new means of assessment for writing studies. College entrance examinations had recently been developed, introducing psychometrics to the college environment. Elliot (2005) identifies 1911 as the point when composition began showing signs of psychology’s influence; this is when Thorndike introduced what he referred to as a “non-arbitrary” scale for assessing writing skills of college students. At this time, psychology was developing statistical measures to pinpoint, compare, and express human intelligences, and the ability to assess one’s writing skill as “a perfectly definite thing” (Thorndike, 1903, p. 22). As Elliot notes, this reliance on statistics is how American psychology began to differ from its German counterpart, which was based on more generic observation and theory, rather than statistical measurement. Such psychometric measures allowed administrators and teachers to objectively name stronger and weaker writers, and this became the model for college entrance and admittance to college English classes.

**Psychology.** But these tests did not simply tell university personnel how poorly students wrote; psychometrics allowed college personnel to make predictions about one's intelligence and general ability to succeed in college, and this is why they were considered effective as measures for admissions. Those that could not pass a simple written examination simply were not cut out for the rigors of college. At the same time, IQ tests were being developed and validated using mass numbers of military recruits, and this is the time that eugenics was strongly considered as a result of such tests (Elliot, 2005). The discipline of psychology and the statistical, empirical measures that it brought could tell us everything we needed to know about the individual's ability to think. Such an approach to understanding the individual aligned nicely with the early manifestations of current-traditional rhetoric (e.g. Genung, 1894; Lockwood & Emerson, 1901; Wendell, 1891) at the turn of the century, which was driven by its focus on trying to fill in students' deficiencies (and a lack of focus on individual student subjects). But this approach does not match with the pedagogy of interest that was emerging less than thirty years later. As I have already established, by the 1940s, one's intelligence was no longer the marker of ability to write. It was one's individual interest, the possibility of engaging students in a lesson by having them write about themselves and their environment (Dudley, 1939; Green, 1940; 1941; Hoguefe, 1940; Weisinger, 1941) or metaphorical (or literal) dragons (Digna, 1940; Inlow, 1940; Daniels, 1949) that determined one's success in the writing course. This is likely why, even in 1932, Carl Brigham, then the associate secretary of the College Board, stated that psychometric testing had become "ridiculous," that "data may be regarded from another viewpoint which is not psychological... a

science independent of psychology will emerge from a closer scrutiny of test data” (p. 28).

Brigham’s (1932) words suggest an emerging anxiety around typifying students based on psychological testing, however he was certainly hasty in suggesting that any science emerging from the data would be entirely independent of psychology. Brigham, himself a professor of psychology and developer of many such psychometric tests (including the SAT), was not clear about what this other viewpoint might be or how it would be entirely divorced from psychology. His psychology, based on validated instruments produced for mass use, did not account for individual variables, or what Berlin (1987) has referred to as subjective rhetorics, which he notes started becoming popular in the 1920s and 30s. While Brigham did not account for such subjectivity in his version of psychology, this does not mean that composition, as it began to focus more on student subjectivity and interest, was void of psychological disciplinary influence altogether. As Berlin notes, “the most immediate sources of subjective theories for college writing courses during the twenties and thirties are found in the depth psychology of Freud’s American disciples” (p. 11). It was not a new science apart from psychology that composition drew influence from, as Brigham claimed, but a different brand of psychology, one designed to better understand the inner workings *of* the individual subject *at the level* of the individual subject. Even in the 1940s, those in the field of English recognized that psychology was breaking into distinct kinds. Muller (1943), examining how the sciences might inform literary criticism, suggested that the “literary critic can be content with the obvious pertinence of all these psychologies, and can even welcome their diversity. In adapting the various provisional findings to his own uses, he

can get along well enough with practical wisdom” (p. 81). Psychology as a discipline could offer a number of ways of approaching teaching, beyond those offered by just psychometric data. By 1945, practitioners and pedagogues were highly skeptical of any broad claims that psychology made about human intelligence. Baker (1945) takes Thorndike to task (and, in fact, compares him to Adolph Hitler), suggesting that a “science of man” could never be accounted for in the science of psychology because of its reductionist tendencies. A true science of man considers individual developments, morality, truth, and beauty. And when we consider the way that the pedagogy of interest manifest—by having students write about themselves, finding personal truths, expressing beliefs about beauty—we see how closely composition aligned with a psychoanalytic approach by the 1940s rather than Thorndike’s quantitative take on psychology. This observation, perhaps, is what led White (1941) to note that “biography—which was ever a somewhat spinsterish companion of humane learning—found her true calling with the advent of popular psychoanalysis. The poet’s soul was bared” (p. 572). In both college composition and psychoanalysis, there is a revealing or “baring” that must occur, a therapeutic “talking through” of the self, so that greater enlightenment, either psychological or educational, might be attained. What we see emerging, then, is not a “science independent of psychology” referred to by Brigham, but a psychology of independence, focused on understanding the independent individual.

Though Brigham expressed concern over the kind of scrutiny given to psychometric test data in the early 1930s, but composition had been adopting more individualistic psychological approaches since the advent of Thorndike’s writing portion of college entrance exams. However, what we see in the early 1900s is not yet Freudian,

and it does not call itself psychoanalytic. It is, rather, based on readings of Deweyan theories of psychology and education. It appears even in the first publication of *The English Journal* with Abbott (1912), who acknowledged the usefulness of exact standards of progress created by Thorndike, but who also encouraged new teachers to acquaint themselves with both Dewey and James. He does not explain what, exactly, these new teachers will gain from reading Dewey and James beyond the development of broad foundational, professional knowledge. Such a sentiment is echoed by Baker (1913), who asks the English teachers take “general courses in the theory and practice of teaching based on psychology” because with such knowledge, “one escapes many blunders, arrives at skill sooner” (p. 339). These two pieces do not speak in great detail about what skills, precisely, psychology will help teachers of composition to cultivate. However, Dewey is cited well into the 1940s in composition literature, and later works shed light upon what Dewey’s psychology may have offered to composition pedagogy. In many ways, his version of psychology (or, rather, 1930s and 40s compositionists’ readings of Dewey) creates a bridge between the conception of static intelligences put forth in early psychometric testing and current-traditional rhetoric, on the one hand, and the individualistic pedagogy of interest developing in the 1940s on the other.

Several pieces suggest that Dewey is useful as his theories help to articulate how students should be made to think. Indeed, it is exactly this reasoning that Thompson (1916) provides to justify a step-by-step model of paragraph development. His model, he claims, is a useful template for helping students think in the right way about topic development in writing. For the purposes of this project, the model itself is unimportant—what is important to take away is that Dewey’s psychology can be used to



both create and justify a specific kind of thinking subject. Similarly, citing both Thorndike and Dewey, Hosis (1918) puts forth an outline for the “problem-project method,” a “principle” and “natural method of learning” (p. 599) that smacks of the problem-based learning of today in that students are encouraged to define a problem and work as a group to write through and solve it, often as a group. The point of this method for Hosis is that it allows the “occasion for thinking and for organization of knowledge” (p. 600). Hosis claims that it is easy to waste time trying to teach children to think, and that a reliable method needs to be developed for this purpose. He is quick to acknowledge that his method is not aligned with the idea of interest. Rather, it is a means of developing correct approaches to thinking through composition work. We see this kind of model/thought building into 1936 with Bader, who argues that the goal of composition and paper writing should be to have students engage in Dewey’s “reflective thinking,” or “a mode of thinking which in any given situation implies the analysis of fact, judgment exerted upon that analysis, and the consequent forming of a belief” (p. 668). In these cases, Dewey’s psychology does not support the developing pedagogy of interest that will appear so strongly in the 1940s, but it is used as a way to justify a more disciplinary approach to composition, one in which student intelligence can be molded through the use of writing. Under this model, writing acts as a technology that can be used to examine the way that students think, assess whether or not their thinking process is coherent and correct, and to (re)shape extant (incorrect) ways of thinking. Under this model, psychology moves away from the psychometric understanding of education because thinking and intelligence are malleable. However, it does not yet embrace the pedagogical approaches outlined in the previous chapter because there is less concern for

the differences that exist in each learner. Each student may be taught a model, and the good student will adopt that model to form expressions and thought.

However, we still see in early work that invokes Dewey an anticipation of a pedagogy of interest. Even Thompson (1916), who argued that writing and thought building were two sides of the same coin, suggested that such thought building could not be done if students were not genuinely interested in their assignments: “the teacher must make sure that there is interest in the assignments. If an interest does not exist, he must create it; he must, if possible, make the pupils feel that there is a fascination about the subjects” (p. 617-618). He does not explain how exactly a teacher might develop this interest in students, but Marsh (1916), writing at the same time as Thompson, helps to shed light on what might need to be done. She notes that if school *is* life, as Dewey claimed, “then there should be, on the part of the teacher, close study of the needs of the individual child. With this carried to its extreme, we can readily see that we should have individualism as a result.” (p. 89). Similarly, Breck (1923), addressing the Deweyan notion that school is designed to integrate students into the broad community, argues that teachers of English need psychological training in student development because “when we teachers know as intelligently the students we teach as the material which we present, there will be more general and genuine liking there than is today for the subject of English” (p. 548). We see Breck anticipating the pedagogy of interest and engagement, as her focus is on producing an affinity toward the discipline while studying the needs of the student through student psychology. In both Marsh and Breck, there exists the idea that to help the student, teachers must know the student. Even as psychometric testing was coming into its own, developing ways to understand and categorizes students based on

mass measures of intelligence, compositionists were adopting and extending a different brand of psychology for the “close study” of their students, one rooted in individualism; as Brower (1942) would later claim, coursework in psychology (as well as philosophy and methods of education) could be useful for their “humanizing effect” (p. 731) on composition teachers’ practices in the classroom. Indeed, there is a humanizing move away from psychometrics, however, such a move also requires a more careful scrutiny of the student subject; a more sophisticated knowledge about who, exactly, students are; and the development of strategies for students to reveal something of themselves within writing.

The stage was thus set to invoke psychology in the pedagogy of interest. Psychology had always had roots in composition (or vice versa), and as interest became more prevalent an idea in addressing student pedagogy, we see individualizing versions of psychology, those that sought to analyze the subject, inextricably linked. Pitkin (1940) speaks about interest and psychology together in his *The Art of Useful Writing*, a book designed to give “sound advice to the student and the man in the street on the techniques of effective writing... devoted to highly practical exercises in story construction, in logic, and in psychology” (NCTE, 1940, p. 304). Under the heading “The Psychology of Useful Writing,” Pitkin explains that one of the most effective means of putting forth an argument is to make sure one is interesting—begin writing with an interesting story, he suggests, and slowly tie that story into the argument being made. It would seem that here, Pitkin is describing the psychology and interest of readership rather than author. However, as we have seen earlier, having interest and *being* interesting operate mutually. As the student engages interest to complete a paper, so too must the student engage the

reader by producing something of interest. This relationship is made clear when Pitkin explains how one might engage the interest of a reader:

Most of us lose the keen edge of wonder all too early. We drag through the years taking for granted a million marvels. As the house cat eyes the moon in her inane complacency, so most men contemplate their cosmos with empty minds. Void calls to void. But a few rare spirits go on itching as long as they live... he who lives and dies in the midst of astonishments has the scientist's mind—if not his training. For the elect, then, you may write about the wonders of nature, about inventions, about odd facts and queer events... The itch to know will bring you readers. (p. 138)

“Interesting writing” is not simply a matter of discovering what might interest the reader. It is a matter of adopting a “scientific mind,” a particular disposition toward the world and then sharing that disposition with readership. To be interesting, one must be interested, and must unveil those interests. While this may or may not be sound advice, we must also keep in mind Pitkin’s readership: his book, according to the NCTE, falls into a category of “for students,” which means that his readers’ readership would be the college English professor. Useful writing, from a psychological standpoint, means adopting an orientation of composing one’s interests for the teacher of English.

Pitkin is not the only scholar who suggests that interesting writing is the result of one’s psychological orientation. Only a year later, Sailstad (1941) suggests that one must approach conversations with “psychological ease” and developed a “conversation lab” (p. 381) for his writing course. To develop this psychological ease, students were expected to take concurrent courses in psychology, including courses titled “Individual Orientation”

and “Social Adjustment,” which Sailstad claims were “more concerned with finding practical applications to the personal problems of youth than in building up ‘pigeon hole’ jargons to make possible the easy construction of smoothly efficient objective examinations” (p. 382). Over the course of thirty years, we see what appears to be a reaction to the initial uses of psychology in college writing. Sailstad, like Brigham (1932), is careful to call attention to how individually oriented this version of psychology is, how it does everything but pigeon hole the individual into particular types. Knowing oneself, claims Sailstad, allows for a kind of reflection that is not evident in the early (psychometric) uses of psychology in writing. Students who have learned to orient themselves individually and adjust themselves socially should already be in a state of psychological ease. This is because they have the skills to reflect upon themselves and make adjustments when they discover “personal problems” within themselves. We see how such a way of thinking about student psychology allies itself with the “personal” kinds of writing assignments described by Dudley (1939) and Green (1940), the psychoanalytic, biographical approach that lays bare the writer’s soul (White, 1941). It is through revealing oneself that one is able to find faults with oneself and begin the work of reorienting or readjusting. Psychological ease comes when one knows oneself, but in the case of “personal problems of youth,” such laying bare must be guided by those that decide what counts and the “right” orientation and adjustment, namely, the professors overseeing the entire project.

At the same time that composition’s use of psychology justified certain pedagogical strategies, it also invalidated others. While a pedagogy based on student interest began to preclude rote memorization exercises and workbooks, the field of

psychology offered justification for doing so. We see this in both Ford (1942) and Wykoff (1943), who are particularly critical of textbooks that encourage drilling exercises in college English. Ford, whose piece is called “The Menace of the Freshman English Workbook,” argues that such exercises are in isolation, divorced from other disciplines or meaningful activities, “it creates the psychological attitude in the mind of the student that language correctness is a thing apart, a special phenomenon designed primarily to give the English teacher something to do” (p. 66). Unlike the psychology of Pitkin (1940) and Sailstad (1941), such drill practices lead to bad psychological habits, creating associations in the student mind that are unwanted. It comes as no surprise, then, that Ford suggests turning to individualistic methods for teaching. As for the grammar instruction that workbooks were supposed to provide, Ford suggests that the teacher again assume a pastoral role, examining with “generous and painstaking aid” students’ writing, helping them to correct grammar mistakes on an individual basis. Wykoff (1943) similarly stands against workbooks and drilling exercises, although his rationale differs from Fords in that Wykoff invokes a more quantitative, psychometric version of psychology as his basis:

If there is any especially weak point in our teaching of reading according to the methods indicated by such books as these, it is the same weakness—as the psychologists are fond of telling us—of most of our college English teaching. We assume, theoretically, that all college freshmen are equally well prepared and more or less equally intelligent, that all are capable of fulfilling the requirements of our courses. Practically, we know better. In composition, for example, many colleges have separate classes for the

superior and the inferior students, but the middle group, ranging in test per centiles from 20 to 70, is certainly not homogeneous (p. 248).

Surprisingly, it is through statistical measures that had all but been thrown out by composition that Wykoff is able to make his case against textbooks. Psychometric testing tells us that students do not all operate on the same level; there are, first, extremes, those in need of specialized courses, but there is also a bell curve of disparate ability, to which no one textbook can address itself wholly or efficiently. Here, a psychometric model becomes justification for those tenets of the pedagogy of interest, rather than the simple gatekeeping mechanism that it had been years prior. Students must be dealt with on an individual basis, a lesson that seems to be punctuated by both Dewey and Freud. This, however, means that there can no longer be catch-all kinds of assignments or assessments of the type that current-traditional rhetoric has been accused of harboring for years.

Still, many compositionists saw a need for grammar instruction in composition, despite the fact that psychological influences suggested that grammar drills were not adequate to teach students. Recognizing that sentence building “is the natural, psychological approach” to teaching grammar (Salisbury, 1936, p. 358), many composition teachers sought to understand what psychology might say about the teaching of such a traditionally rote subject, and we begin to see research emerging on grammar and language instruction driven by psychological principles, rather than untheoretical workbook drills. Flesch (1946), for instance, advocated the use of linguistic and psychological rules to teach grammar in his composition classroom. In particular, Flesch was concerned with the jargon often taught to students of science, business, and law (bureaucrats), and he wanted to teach them to use simpler language. To do so, “the writer

has to know something about the structure of language in general. He should know about the gradual development of languages... about the place of contemporary English in this development; and about the structure of languages that have gone further than English in this process of simplification and ‘stream lining’” (p. 471). In this case, psychology can be used in such a way as to describe how the mind processes and builds linguistic features (anticipating the cognitive movement that would come nearly forty years later). This can also be seen in Bryant (1947), who takes a relativistic stance to grammar teaching. She claims that grammar is often seen as one of the “last strongholds of the logician, the last of the sciences where certainty is thought to reign” (p. 407). However, she spends much of her time showing where logic does not apply in English grammar, provides several examples of where English grammar is “deficient” compared to other languages, and explains the “psychology” behind grammar mistakes. She closes by noting that grammar is not, in fact, governed by logic, but by social conventions, and concludes that “the importance of psychology has come to be recognized in almost all activities involving human relationships” and “that psychological principles are at work constantly in determining the form and direction of our speech” (p. 412). Such an observation plays nicely with those of Wykoff (1943) and Sailstad (1941), and suggests that grammar is relative to its purpose—we must consider the various individual stances of each student.

However, derivative of this psychological approach is the ability to more meticulously parse out and understand the way one uses language. Before the 1940s, students’ use of grammar was simply right or wrong. By suggesting that grammar is a social function connected to one’s individual psychology, we may now say much more



about individual types of students: where they are from, familial upbringing, how they think. The subjective makeup of the individual becomes an object of study (Foucault, 1977/1995). Although there was clearly a conscious effort to stray away from typifying students using psychometric testing in composition, the move to radical individualism still typifies, albeit in a different way. In the same way that biographical writing offers an inroad to the students' subjectivity, psychology becomes both justification *for* and a mode *of* disciplinary technology. It is justification because approaching students on an individual basis is now simply objectively better than other methods of pedagogy. Psychology, a rising star of the sciences, dictates it. But it also becomes a disciplinary technology in itself in that this individualism allows for correcting student behavior in the space of the student's mind. If something is wrong, if something needs to be changed, it is in the psychological processing of the student. But with this observation, we see immediately how a pedagogy of interest was able to arise and how much overlap exists within the professor's role as disciplinarian, on the one hand, and pastor, on the other.

To be an English teacher, notes Fullington (1949), means understanding "the nature of man," and to do so, "we must go to many fields of knowledge: economics, political science, psychology, genetics, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, religion" (261). The suggestion, it seems, is that the English teacher not invest so much into English or writing itself, but that the English teacher become something beyond, a studier of human sciences in general. This sentiment appears several years earlier in Wykoff (1943) who states that studying students in composition coursework requires that "we should have to depend for considerable assistance on our colleagues in education and psychology; indeed, we might make more progress if we make them the principals and

ourselves the assistants in preparing such an experimental program (p. 253). With the introduction of psychology, we see how pastoral the instructor of composition is to become. This instructor not only tends the flock, but must know the habits, desires, and subjectivities of those in the flock to anticipate their psychological needs and lead them to “greater” heights. Based on the literature produced at the time, we might even suggest that college composition was a kind of smokescreen, as it seems that the last concern for composition teachers was their ability to teach writing. Rather, the concern was how well they could assess, psychologically and socially, the character of the students in their classrooms. Composition, under the pedagogy of interest, was no longer about producing writing students, but about producing a subject that, incidentally, could write. Students must have something interesting to say, they must be able to say the right sort of thing under the right conditions, and skilling and drilling was not a way to produce this. Instead, students’ psychology must be explored by the composition instructor and “tweaked” to produce what was considered to be effective writing.

**Education.** It is also clear, even by looking at psychology’s influence on the development of composition, that education as a field was also largely invoked. Dewey is generally considered to be an educational psychologist, and even in many of the quotations above, we see both education and psychology mentioned in the same breath: teachers of composition need training in both education and psychology (Brower, 1942; Wykoff, 1943), and to be an effective educator for composition studies means giving attention to student psychology (Bader, 1936; Breck, 1923; Bryant, 1947; Brower; Marsh, 1916). Given this attention to education, it means that like psychology, composition was seen as something other than, but potentially governed by, rules existing

in the educational discipline. Indeed, Witherspoon (1939) makes it clear that education existed agonistically alongside other disciplines in higher education at the beginning of the 40s, claiming that “educational theorists have long since proved to their own satisfaction that subject-matter and departmental organization are the *fleurs du mal* of the educational flora” (p. 562). Education had been making of itself a kind of meta-discipline, and other programs of study needed the input of education to be effective. Of course, we see pushback to this idea. Witherspoon stands as one example, but in the field of composition, perhaps the largest example of such pushback was written by Wykoff (1939) in the second issue of *College English*. Writing an “Open Letter to the Educational Experts on Teaching Composition” (although these experts are not specifically named), Wykoff expresses his disdain for the claim made by educational experts that grammar and spelling have no relation to writing. He asks, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, for advice on how to teach composition *sans* grammar instruction, hyperbolically deifying educational experts as all-knowers and scientific researchers while denigrating his own profession, referring to compositionists as “pedagogic pretenders” and “academic proletarians” (p. 146). A year later, Wykoff (1940) articulated his grievances with the field of education more thoroughly: in sum, he was largely critical of the reductive, statistical methods that educational researchers used to gather information on students’ reading and writing abilities, as well as the distance that educationalists were able to maintain from the field they were studying. His problems with education seem to echo the sentiments of Seely (1930), who ten years earlier made similar claims about the field of education, a “pseudoscience” which had gleefully adopted and vandalistically manhandled statistical and scientific measures (p. 234).

While Wykoff's (1939) piece is clearly critical of the educational discipline encroaching on composition studies, it suggests that there was a conversation emerging between education and composition nonetheless. And when Wykoff ironically and sarcastically ends his piece stating that compositionists "look to you [educational experts], and to you only, for guidance and assistance in the solution of our compositional problems" (p. 146), it is difficult to tell the degree of irony that he employs. Despite the standoffish nature of his "open letter," there is a challenge being issued to education, one that almost necessarily asks the discipline to weigh in on compositional affairs; his tone demands some sort of response from educational researchers, and what is more, looking at his later work, it would seem that Wykoff is not entirely against education having influence over composition. We have already seen that by 1943, he is willing to "depend" on those in education for theoretical input. Ten years after his "Open Letter," he suggests that all composition teachers should have some familiarity with "general educational theory" and further suggests that compositionists "adopt a more scientific attitude toward the details of [their] work" (Wykoff, 1949, p. 320) by adopting the scientific researcher identity that he had negatively thrust on educational experts a decade prior.

And Wykoff is not alone in building a dialogue with the field of education. Many saw the issue of pedagogy in composition as one that simply could not be surmounted by composition studies itself, that pedagogy was a matter for educational research. Ringnalda (1939), for instance, claims that "the whole problem of teaching Freshman English lifts itself into a universal problem of college education" (p. 139). Fountain (1940) suggests that to improve the state of the English classroom, there must be a serious examination of the training that teachers "get in teacher-training institutions and a

widespread current theory of what education is” (p. 321). Echoing these sentiments is Morrison (1941): “the real need on which required freshman English rests is the need for training in language as an instrument of reading, thinking, and writing. This is an immense task. It is a task of education in general... not of an English department considered as a body of scholars devoted to a particular and specialized field” (p. 787). Despite Witherspoon’s (1939) and Wykoff’s (1939; 1940) complaints, it seems that education had indeed set itself as a kind of meta-discipline, one that might have implications for the teaching of all other disciplines, and many compositionists were eager to see what it could do for their own field.

The issue—the reason that composition needed to rely on education—was that composition as a discourse had not defined for itself a distinct pedagogical approach. Until the approach involving student interest had arisen in the late 30s and early 40s, composition had been based on the idea that students should simply produce correct writing: “instructors were not to make the themes interesting, but, rather, to make them correct” (Elliot, 2005, p. 14). However, if this was the only goal articulated for college composition from the outset, there was no science behind producing such correct themes. As composition became widespread throughout the nation, there was a need to re-examine the goals of composition—not simply to make students produce correct writing, but to determine methods that led to the production of correct writing. Leading up to the 1940s, we see several scholars lamenting the lack of pedagogical direction in composition. The first article ever published in *The English Journal*, a journal accepting essays written on all topics of English at all levels of study, focused on the question of teaching college composition. This certainly suggests that the issue of pedagogy in

freshman composition was central to English studies shortly after the turn of the century. In his article, Hopkins (1912) examines the state of the composition teacher, who has been generally pulled from teaching literature courses with no additional training or guidance. He calls for a movement beyond “that ignorant or careless dependence upon tradition and the merest guesswork” (p. 7) that had been driving composition teaching for nearly thirty years. In the same issue of *The English Journal*, immediately following Hopkins’ publication, is another by Lewis (1912), which focuses on various aspects of English teaching, including composition studies. Lewis wonders if there is a cohesive aim in the English course. He acknowledges that one of the broad goals “is, first, to secure power in oral and written expression” (p. 9), but noting that students do not seem to be securing this power, queries “have we aimed at the wrong thing?” (p. 11). He concludes by asking if all English teachers even agree as to the aims and methods of teaching English concerning composition and writing. In short, if having students write correctly could be considered a definite aim of composition, despite the broadness of that aim, then there was no vision or agreement about how to make this happen; effective teaching of composition was, as Hopkins suggested, merely guesswork.

This attitude, one proclaiming that the work of teaching composition is poorly defined, continues into the next decade. McCaslin (1925) argues that the prospect of teaching students to write correctly is “stupidly superficial,” on the grounds that in actuality, “there isn’t any such thing in itself as the teaching of composition; it is only the organon of all subjects” (p. 111). If this is the case, composition exists far beyond themes written in a classroom called Freshman English; it is a habit of mind, one that needs substantial thought and collaboration across disciplines to attempt to teach. As such,

grading criteria vary substantially. Henry (1928) is at odds regarding the fact that “objective” standards are beginning to make their way into assessment of freshman composition. Such standardization removes teacher autonomy, he believes, and dampens the connection between student and teacher. This is in direct contrast to Pooley (1928), who wishes that composition standards could be more scientific and precise. Howes (1928) is unsure of what topics (if any) should be assigned to freshmen as they develop their themes (although he concludes that they should simply write from their own experience, anticipating the coming student/interest-centric pedagogical movement). The point of rapid-fire summarizations of each of these pieces is to suggest that before 1930, composition was lacking in any kind of substantial direction in terms of its aims, methods, and by extension, pedagogy. The late 1920s begin to identify a problem of pedagogy, one which the 1930s must begin to solve.

In 1930, Seely, though distrustful of the statistical side of education, recognized a need for the English instructor to receive teacher training and articulated a need for English instruction and education to overlap. If we take McCaslin seriously, there can be no such thing as a pure composition instructor. The compositions instructor must also be an educationalist: “simply having a college subject-matter expert will not do” but “neither will the educational theorist. Our instructor must be competent in both directions” (Seely, p. 241-242). Such an observation about a need for composition and education to overlap makes way for similar observations that would come later, many of which are highlighted at the beginning of this section (Fountain, 1940; Morrison, 1941; Ringnalda, 1939; Wykoff, 1943; Wykoff, 1949). If composition was an organon, a process of thinking that spoke to all disciplines, not simply a paper that could be deemed correct or incorrect, then

it needed to join forces with another organon, another meta-discipline that could give some form and substance to the otherwise elusive and formless field of composition.

The question that remains as we examine education's influences on composition, however, is how exactly *did* education influence composition? What did composition hope to attain from education? And what exactly counted as a field of education, apart from the educational psychologists such as James and Dewey, who were the educational experts that Wykoff (1939) addressed in his open letter? Turning to Williams (1940), who asks "Who Should Teach English," we begin to see what qualities the English faculty saw as necessary for educators of composition. For Williams, having a psychological background is far from enough. Instead, Williams proposes as the ideal teacher a scholar "who knows his country, appreciates development and change, and forecasts demands of the future; in short, he contributes more to the life of the student" (p. 408). It is this final idea, that of contributing to the life of the student, that Williams capitalizes on for the rest of her article: "His intention and desire are to help students express themselves in written English and through expression to live more largely in at least cubical dimensions" (p. 409). Additionally, this teacher has an eye for relevance in student lives. His students will, upon graduation, know how to write a proper business letter, and this teacher will not "tie up composition with literature" (p. 412), knowing full well that literature does not contribute to student lives. Instead, "life is their province, through which they are guided in observation, thought, originality, and joy in expressing life" (p. 412).

If not directly named, the ties to the developing pedagogy of interest are clear in Williams' (1940) piece. Invoking student life means that the professor must know student



life and must craft assignments designed to allow student to tell their lives, an observation which I have already made in the previous section of this chapter. What is still less clear is how this ties to the field of education. Did the field of education have prescriptions to attain the ideal professor as he [sic] existed in Williams' view? To a degree, it would seem so. While Williams loosely invokes educational theory to define the ideal professor, Spencer (1940), although taking issue with the prescriptions of education, nonetheless provides us a more clear sense of what the field was prescribing at the time. In defining the responsibilities of the English composition professors, Spencer cautions professors in how they understand the dictum originating in educational studies that teachers focus on students' individual experiences. If understood too liberally, he claims, this approach prescribed by education can promote egotism within students, making their own interests the most important aspect of their perceptions. They learn to care only for themselves. Further, Spencer is concerned that educational theory removes autonomy from teachers:

The educational theorists, who emphasize the interests of the pupil at all costs, have given the teacher an inferiority complex which he must overcome. But it can be overcome only if the teacher, as an individual, has as full a consciousness as possible of what he is doing and avoids that concentration on the immediate and practical which the educational theorists would have us foster in our pupils. (p. 592)

We thus begin to see, both in Williams and in Spencer, ideas emerging from educational discourse, none of which should be surprising; namely, students must be seen as

individuals, their interests must be foregrounded, and the immediate and practical should take precedence over any other kind of work.

Unfortunately, it is not so simple as to accept, as Williams (1940) does, or reject, as Spencer (1940) does, the best practices coming from educational philosophy. Indeed, best practices in education would support both Williams acceptance and rejection of certain educational approaches because, as Sensabaugh (1943) notes, “conflicting aims of education in general tended to obfuscate the specific aims of studies in English” (p. 32). On the one hand, an educational system that prescribes training individuals for professions or trades requires a particular approach to teaching English. But “a system which emphasizes the development of man's human capabilities and potentialities, on the other hand, requires a curriculum quite different” (p. 32). The problem, Sensabaugh claims, is that educational discourse prescribes both approaches, which leads to confusion regarding composition's place and aims when seen in the service of a broader educational project. Sensabaugh's solution is not particularly illuminating: “composition and speech should develop skills in speaking and writing and should develop clarity of thought, without which there can be no sound judgement” (p. 34). However, we see how both aspects of educational discourse—vocational training as well as development of the mind and cultivation of the individual—might be drawn upon by this broad statement about the nature of writing. Skills in speaking and writing certainly apply to a vocational end, while clarity of thought and sound judgement seem to contribute to the project of developing an individual holistically. While Sensabaugh's solution lacks specificity or deep insight to the disjunction appearing in the field of education—vocational training vs. human development—it is important that he identifies the disjunction. At this point in history, if

composition will allow itself to be guided by educational discourse, it must now determine what influences of education it will adopt and how its own aims should be guided by the aims of education.

In 1946, McDowell attempted to reconcile the various moves and ideas developing in educational discourse with the college English curriculum. Acknowledging that education was beginning to move to a general model—that is, education was feasibly accessible to everyone rather than the elite—he suggested an educational model based in self-election, wherein students could determine their own aims, rather than take a series of prescribed courses. American education, he states, is fraught with complexity and contradiction, much of which stems from the college’s liberal tradition of cultivating the human mind, on the one hand, and the needs of the general population to have technical and vocational training, on the other. Rather than choose one approach, McDowell suggests expanding the curriculum, primarily in the area of “the use of contemporary instruments for everyday communication by all students” (p. 354). With an expanding job market and expanding student interests, the composition curriculum must offer students choices for writing. It becomes “the obligation of higher education to train students in all varieties of communication” (p. 355) and the obligation of English departments to begin collaborating with other disciplines to determine the various potentials of student needs. He concludes by noting that “If English insists on maintaining strict departmental autonomy, both general education and we ourselves will lose heavily” (p. 357). It may be that some aims of education are irreconcilable with each other, but the concept of a general education requires various aims, some of which may be highly disparate, as this disparity in aims allows for a diversity of individuals to pursue those aims. A similar

observation is made by Perrin (1948) who notes that progress over the course of the 1940s had led to general social pressures for education, especially to develop more up-to-date pedagogical and curricular approaches. To keep up with the progress being made (and demanded) in education, Perrin suggests consideration of individual needs—advancement is defined by individual’s aims, not overarching prescriptions from disciplines.

We see, then, that as composition began borrowing from educational discourse, education itself began to experience problems in determining its own aims. Even at the beginning of the 1940s, composition was unsure of its relationship with education, seeing education as statistically driven, unable to understand the work that composition was doing. However, with unclear pedagogical aims itself, over the course of ten years, composition could pair with education, and the two disciplines could attempt to determine their aims together. What is perhaps unique regarding the place of both psychology and education in composition is the fact that composition scholars explicitly named these disciplines in their work, making obvious that composition was using them to justify its own practices. However, without expressly naming it, composition literature in the 1940s begins to adopt terminology from another discipline, namely, medicine, as a way to situate problems that were occurring in composition studies and as a way to provide medicines, or solutions.

**Medicine.** Composition has a history of using medical language and parallels to medicine to describe issues in writing. For instance, Hitchcock (1912), during the first year of *The English Journal*’s publication, creates an extended medical metaphor when he states that “red ink is to our profession as drugs are to the medical profession” (p.

273). He continues to use the medical analogy by suggesting that compositionists need to clean out the medicine cabinet (red ink corrections on papers), saving the use of these drugs only for ailments that absolutely require them, and he provides a dozen suggestions for assignments and classroom practices that might limit the need for intense correction. And even here, as early as 1912, Hitchcock briefly suggests that one softer remedy is allowing students to choose topics that interest them, although he does not provide the suggestions for capturing student interest as we see in later pieces. Moving forward nearly thirty years, possibly the strongest example of medical discourse appearing in composition studies can be found in Fountain (1940), characterizing weak writing in college as a disease. He provides a “diagnosis,” suggesting that it begins in high school, although he notes that high school teachers are in a situation making it difficult to prepare students from college, being stretched too thin and asked too much. He also notes that several “remedies” exist, including remedial, non-credit classes and more exclusive enrollment criteria.

These metaphors suggest that in addition to the psychological and educational discourses, medical discourse could be used to describe the behaviors and habits of both students and professors in the composition field. Further, juxtaposing both Hitchcock’s (1912) and Fountain’s (1940) metaphors suggests that there were two different ways of conceiving of the problematic disease of bad writing. Hitchcock characterizes the burden as a kind of malpractice: as doctors rely too heavily on drugs to treat symptoms of rather than cure a disease, so too do English professors rely on overcorrection. A drug may reduce a fever or suppress a cough, but the disease is still present within the patient. The cure is superficial. Just so, students can read editorial notes and change their papers

accordingly, but the disease that creates the bad writing still exists inside of them. In this case, the problem is not with the disease or the patients *per se*, but with the professional's approach to treating it. Fountain, on the other hand, would appear to place the problem of bad writing more squarely on students, and in sore need of an effective remedy. While these readings may seem similar, there is far less consideration of the doctor/English professor's role in treating the disease in Fountain's piece. While the doctor/English professor may be skilled at alleviating the disease, the responsibility lies within the student to want a cure. As the pedagogy of interest begins to develop into the 1940s, medical terminology continues to be used (admittedly) spottily in composition literature, but it remains nonetheless. Throughout the decade of the 1940s, this dichotomy exists problematizing either the curriculum or the student.

We see bad writing viewed as the root of a disease in pieces such as those written by Campbell (1942) and Poley (1944). Campbell describes a scoring rubric which she hopes will show a student's weaknesses in writing, so that "he could easily remedy that by conforming to the rules of manuscript and presenting a neat paper" (p. 402). Poley (1944) similarly discusses a "remedy" to meaningless and lazy repetition in student writing, namely workshopping examples in the classroom with students, allowing them to share their thoughts on improved writing. Based on these examples, it is no surprise that this is roughly the time period that we see "remedial" English courses becoming widespread across colleges (Ritter, 2009). The name itself suggests that the course is able to remedy a disease, that it can remedy the writing that the students are afflicted with. These classes were designed to help students who are in some way "retarded" readers and writers in college (McCallister, 1944), those who have been diagnosed with a disease of

the mind. Indeed, these students are characterized as having an ailment (McCloskey & Hornstein, 1950) that is curable through intensive sub-freshman courses in English writing.

It is important to note, however, that these “retarded” or “laggard student[s]” (McCloskey & Hornstein, p. 331) have not been medically diagnosed as deficient. It is purely from their writing that they adopt this diagnosis, seen as medical and/or mental patients. The remedial English course is “remedial” in the most literal sense of the word; it offers a cure, or remedy, to the disease of bad writing. The very name “remedial writing” begins to blur the metaphor of doctor and instructor in the capacity that teachers start to resemble doctors beyond mere analogy. They now may behave medically, diagnosing this illness, albeit the illness is limited to one of writing. They are also able to remediate, to offer remedies, to this thing seen as a disease. The fact that the name of the course bears “remedy” means that instructors literally may function as doctors in a limited capacity, and moreover, that this is acceptable, as they may now publicly be understood as remedy experts.

However, as the 1940s progressed, we see that many thought of bad writing as not just the problem of an ailing student—rather, it is a symptom of a greater disease, namely ill-defined or “bad” pedagogical approaches to English instruction. We see such an example in Adler’s (1941) address to the NCTE, for instance, wherein he laments the erasure of liberal education in the United States and its connection to English studies. This erasure, he claims, is due to too much specialization in English, as well as an overly positivistic/scientific approach to teaching. He cites a rising interest in semantics as an example of “a wrong or inadequate *remedy* for bringing [liberal education] back to life”

(p. 657, emphasis mine). The same year, Scudder and Webster (1941) suggest that historically, freshman English courses “did little or nothing to attack directly the ailment which they had in the first place” (p. 494). Ford also (1942) appears in this discussion, and again it is possible to highlight his distaste for the Freshman workbook, which promotes the “disease” of mass drilling, whose “remedy” is a return to an “individualistic methodology” (p. 66) of teaching. Far later into the decade, we still see the idea of pedagogy as diseased, in need of medical attention. For instance, Trezevant (1948) notes that there exists a lack of coherent direction in the English curriculum, a situation which calls for increased conversation about the objectives, activities, and outcomes of the writing and literature classrooms, for only then can “we hope to remedy some of these deficiencies” (p. 187). In these cases, we see how medical language was being operationalized during an influx of critical consideration toward writing pedagogy over the course of the 1940s. The curriculum, as well as the way to teach the curriculum, were sick, in need of a cure or remedy.

Although there are two markedly different ways of diagnosing the illness of bad writing, the remedy looks similar. There is a clear focus on the students’ wellbeing, and it is the teacher/doctor’s job to determine a way to help the student overcome. As part of this desideratum, there would need to be a change in the ways that the individual teacher approached college English as well as the curriculum as a whole. Even in the first case, where the sickness is seen as existing within the student, the cure for the disease of bad writing seems to lie in the way that the teacher teaches, including the technology (Campbell, 1942) or therapy (Poley, 1944) used to address the disease. We may liken remedial English to the creation of a new ward in a hospital, one designed to remedy an



emergent ailment identified as plaguing the college campus. In all cases, it becomes the job of the teacher/doctor to cure the patient of the malady, and the job of the composition curriculum as a whole to guide the teacher/doctor in this practice.

The emergence of medical terminology in composition reflects, on a number of levels, a change in the way that writing was conceived. As an ailment, bad writing is capable of being cured; only thirty years before, when intelligence was the indicator of writing ability and vice versa, the prescription was much more drastic: the patient would either cure him or herself over time, learning how to write well, or die in the process, forced to leave school altogether. Now, through some kind of intervention, writing could be treated. Additionally, the introduction of medical language suggests something of a pandemic quality to the issue of bad writing. The very fact that it could be medicalized within the composition assemblage—described pathologically, given prescriptions, that it could lead way to new remedial approaches—means that that it was recognized nationally as, first, a universal concern, not limited to only some colleges and universities, and second, as something that teachers could actively attempt to fix. And while this medical discourse marks a change in the way that writing could be thought about, it also aggrandizes the problem of bad writing; speaking about writing as a disease in need of curing creates an exigency around the issue. A curable disease plaguing the discipline to which one is married insists upon consideration and that action be taken to rectify the issue, to purify the discourse once again. In this way, the introduction of medical discourse to composition both reflects changing ideas about writing pedagogy and spreads this way of thinking across the discipline. It is a problem that needs to be addressed immediately; but it is a problem that is now capable of being addressed.

#### **Part 4: Composed of War**

Even as composition was developing the terminologies and epistemologies it should adopt from other disciplines, we see another historical force shaping the composition-assemblage. During the entirety of the 1940s (and beyond), it was impossible for the discipline to ignore the rise of Nazi Germany and the returning veteran students that came after Hitler's fall from power. Referring to the war, Glicksburg (1942) notes that "the question is not whether the war should be allowed to invade the sacred precincts of the school; it has already done so. No walls, no locks, no edicts, can keep it out. The problem is rather what the English teacher should do for his pupils—the nature of the responsibility he must bear" (p. 707-708). And indeed, as the 1940s progressed onward, we see a growing discussion in the role that English should or did play during the war. Further, in 1944, the United States introduced the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, or the G.I. Bill, which created the possibility for thousands of returning servicepeople to attend college that likely would otherwise have not (Thelin, 2011). As such, there was a new, specific kind of subject that needed to be specially addressed in college writing classes: the veteran. This is all to say that during the 1940s, the events of World War 2 greatly shaped the movement of composition. Not surprisingly, given that the war occurred concurrently with the rise in the pedagogy of interest, the war also had its own influences over the ways that interest (and by extension, engagement) was conceived of in the composition classroom.

**Creating a democratic subject.** Barring a few minor examples, the first piece of college English literature that seriously addresses pre-war Europe appears in a 1935 issue of *The English Journal*, in a publication entitled "National Socialist Youth in Germany." In this

three page article, Brunauer (1935) explains that the youth of Germany has been indoctrinated by the Hitler regime, that in Germany, such indoctrination is nearly impossible to avoid. Though it is clear that she is not an advocate of Germany's move to national socialism, her piece is not particularly critical of Hitler or the Nazi party, and she only briefly mentions education in Germany to note that much of the curriculum had been altered for the purpose of advocating national socialism since Hitler's rise to power. We must wonder, what exactly is this piece doing in *The English Journal*? It does not concern literature, writing, or for that matter, an English speaking country—at first face, it seems quite out of place. Yet, it was produced with the intent of publication in *The English Journal*, and it was received (and published) without commentary to situate or introduce it. What could be its purpose, and why does it appear in this venue?

If we consider the pedagogical turn that was about to occur in composition, that of interest and, though the term was not used, student subjectivity, something about this tirade on the Hitler youth begins to make sense. Brunauer's (1935) point is that many of the youth in Germany had no choice in their support of Hitler; they are a product of their culture. The developing situation in Europe became a way to voice a position on the formation of the subject, one deeply sociocultural in nature, suggesting that one is a product of one's culture rather than a necessarily autonomous agent. It would only be approximately five years later that Dudley (1939) Green (1940; 1941), and Weisinger (1941) would propose composition assignments both designed to interest and engage students on the one hand and cut to the heart of their social makeup on the other (as discussed in Part 1 of this chapter). Brunauer's piece is not in actuality about the war at all. The war is simply a backdrop for her writing. Instead, her piece provides the

beginnings of an epistemo-pedagogical movement in composition studies that suggests students' knowledges are a product of their cultural and historical backgrounds. The takeaway of this observation, one that may be used in composition studies, is that to know and understand students, we must find a way to understand their individual backgrounds.

Of course, the war provided more than an occasion to posit foundational beliefs about the nature of subjectivity. In the years leading up to the war, we see a marked interest in providing a democratic education for all students, and we begin seeing discussion around the creation of basic writing courses for those students who were struggling in regular composition courses to promote such democratic values (e.g. Fountain, 1940; Taylor, 1938; Tilley, 1940; see also Ritter, 2009). Nazism and fascism, and the impending war in general, provided a justification for holding these democratic values, and this began to guide the English and writing curriculum. The war became a rallying cry for teachers of English to unite and fight for democracy. As Rand (1936) states "we English teachers justify our existence by trying to think and by teaching others to think. We must think harder and straighter, and as we do so we cannot help having thoughts that are dangerous to fascism" (p. 218) and later, "if our loyalty to the good traditions, to real democracy, is to count, we must become active members of those organizations that are working against war and fascism" (p. 219). By adopting these human centered and democratic values, by simply harboring democratic thoughts, English teachers become a force against those values that would be harmful to democracy, in this case, fascism. Thus, only a few years later, as a symposium of 20 recognized thinkers in English studies (Shattuck et al., 1942) decided when queried about

college English's place in the war, there must be a "tremendous emphasis upon fostering our American ideals" (p. 93) in the literature and composition classrooms.

Indeed, looking at composition literature that appeared during wartime, it would seem that English teachers saw themselves as important defenders of democracy from the evils of axis powers, even if they were not immediately on the frontlines. This defense did not necessarily take the form of actions, but attitudes, particularly those attitudes underpinned by a strong humanism— not Foucault's (1966/1989) understanding of humanism which scitentifies the individual, but a humanism that focuses on human rights and dignity. For Rogers (1940), teaching writing in an urban university fulfills a responsibility to democracy because "a democracy under present world-conditions cannot survive with out persons who can read and write—read and write accurately as a mirror of intellectual integrity—and who have the humane values of tolerance, understanding, and sympathy" (p. 405). Rogers' phrasing of "present world-conditions" is almost certainly a reference to the events occurring in Europe, for at the time, these events stood as the largest threat to democracy. By teaching, understanding, and sympathizing with the vocational, heterogeneous masses that comprise the urban university classroom, Rogers sees himself (and all English teachers) as upholding an intellectual integrity that can only be found in a democratic society, one in direct contrast to the fascist and totalitarian powers that were taking hold in Europe. Hogrefe (1940b) similarly sees English teachers as defenders of democracy, but to truly defend, she notes that there must be a coherent and uniform philosophy adopted by all who take up the cause. She proposes "creativity" as a unifying philosophy: "we believe in creative reading, writing, and scholarship; in creative teaching; and we may try to teach so as to develop these attitudes in others. If we

really believe in a democracy, which must be developed slowly with courage, patience, and a willingness to share with others, we are applying a creative philosophy to government” (p. 598). This philosophy of creativity she contrasts to “a totalitarian state” (p. 595), one which seeks to destroy rather than create. In Hogrefe’s statement, we may draw parallels between her wording and Rogers’—where Rogers has “understanding,” Hogrefe has “patience;” where Rogers has “sympathy,” Hogrefe has “willingness to share with others.” In these two pieces, there is a clear move toward empathizing with students as a democratic ideal, all justified by the existence of a separate state that stood against both empathy and democracy.

But perhaps the strongest example of these democratic values directly opposing the perceived war-time values of axis power appears in a 1942 statement released by a symposium of English teachers addressing the topic of “English in wartime” (Pound et al., 1942). In this piece, nine teachers of the college section of NCTE were queried as to the responsibilities of the English professor while American was at war. The nine responses, each approximately a single page long, purportedly contain a “unified and obviously representative character” (p. 495). Echoing Hogrefe (1940b), there is an agreement that college teachers of English must begin “concentrating on what should constitute our essential work in peace as well as in war” (p. 497), one of those concentrations being a commitment to a “liberal education” (a phrase which appears several times throughout the publication). It is not entirely clear what is meant by liberal education for the symposium on English in wartime, although we might suppose that it appeals to a highly Victorian sentiment of knowledge for its own sake (Arnold, 1869/2001; Newman, 1852) underpinned by value existing in the capacities of

individuals to learn. Beck (1944) suggests that a liberal education is driven by the desire “for a broad and integrated view of human nature in all its individually and socially creative aspects” (p. 135), and this is in direct contrast to neoliberal tendencies of vocational training. Ogden (1944) suggests that a liberal education has six aims, two of which are developing knowledge of the “ruling values of Western culture,” (p. 267), which Ogden identifies as democratic and Christian, and knowledge of “the possibilities of human life” (p. 270), suggesting that

Whatever a liberal education might be for the English symposium (Pound et al., 1942), this liberal education is clearly linked to human-centric practices that may be tied to college composition. Pound et al. suggest that such a liberal education could entail:

“composition courses [that] might dwell upon the humane tradition, for by studying it we shall arouse enthusiasm for it and thus keep our students' minds on the long view and the larger issues. They will have more than enough stimulation to hate. We must compete, with a vital, sincere, and enthusiastic affirmation of the worth of the individual” (p. 498).

The war thus simultaneously creates a need for and affirms those values embraced among English and composition teachers at the college level; this has less to do with actual curriculum (and certainly nothing to do with the frontlines) and more to do with the way that teachers saw/valued students. Assisting in the war effort did not require any particular action on the part of English teachers. It simply meant adopting democratic and/or liberal ideals, embracing those values that were distinctly *not* totalitarian or fascist. And entailed within the adoption (or maintenance) of democratic ideals was the adoption of sympathetic, and empathetic attitudes toward students. Being democratic meant seeing

value and potential in each individual student. Of course, this is not to say that such an attitude was not already being entertained by English professors. We have already seen in part 2 of this chapter, for instance, that there was push away from psychometrics and beliefs about static intelligences even before concerns over European politics swept the United States—although if there were any doubt, in 1945, Baker blatantly states that adopting statistical measures, statistically determining students' intelligences, and reducing them to a number was to be no better than Hitler.

Even as far back as the late 1800s, there was some concern within composition studies over how to view students, and pushes were being made to approach the student subject holistically and un-deterministically. But In the late 30s and 40s, such beliefs came to a head. It became imperative to reaffirm such beliefs, to move them to the forefront of pedagogical activity because democracy was compromised by the war in Europe: “democracy is a way of thought, a belief in the spirit and worth of man... the knowledge that man is a thing of dignity and nobility whose vast potentialities are as yet undeveloped must pre vail in our teachers' hearts and minds if democracy is to be salvaged from the chaos of today” (Williams et al., 1942, p. 579). We might argue, however, that this move was more than just a way of thought to be adopted by teachers. Maintaining a democratic attitude toward students means enacting a democratic attitude, and in the pieces referenced above, we see prescriptions for interacting with students in a democratic way; teachers are told how to value the noble potentialities of man [sic]. There was a wide acknowledgement within writing studies that students were entering college underprepared (Fountain, 1940). The prescription was to meet these students with patience, sympathy, and understanding. The war thus created another kind of subject for



the teacher to become: they were to become caregivers that saw all students as learners, recognizing that students came from assorted contexts, had unique individual stories, and offered a gently had as students tried to climb the ranks of academia. To be or do any less was to align with the political beliefs of the developing axis power—devaluing students was enough to make one a Nazi.

And with this caregiving attitude, professors were more than ever prepared to enact a pedagogy of interest. To appreciate students in the ways prescribed by democracy meant knowing, understanding, and valuing their interests because, as social subjects, their interests were a part of them. Looking at Brunauer (1936), we see how this interest in interest stood in direct contrast to America's understanding of then-German pedagogy. The picture that Brunauer paints is one of children conforming under the Nazi banner, being produced like automata, never able to reflect on the propaganda being fed to them because it was all that they knew. The extreme opposite was to develop care for the individual student and, as seen in the previous chapter, to act as psychoanalyst, getting to the makeup of the individual—. The Nazi model was top-down; therefore, America's model had to be bottom-up. If caring about the individual student was democratic, then so was a pedagogy of interest; indeed, one could not happen without the other.

This is not to say that with a developing interest in interest, there was not some degree of propaganda and/or indoctrination occurring in college composition courses. With the democratic shift that brought such focused attention to the individual subject, we cannot imagine that there were no strategies designed to mold a democratic subject. And, as the war offered a call for a democratic approach to teaching English (that is, belief in students, care for students, sympathy with students), it also affected the

curriculum by insisting upon the promotion of such democratic values in students. This is all the easier done if we take Brunauer (1935) seriously, believing that the political leanings of students are largely due to the contexts from which they spring. Thus, the events in Europe created a backdrop upon which to create not only an interested, interesting, and writing subject, but a *politically* interested, democratic writing subject as well.

Of course, the creation of such a subject must occur before college. We see how a pedagogy of interest is activated even at the level of high school, and by 1936 (well before America entered the war), this pedagogy is tied into politics and the crafting of a democratic subject. Two articles published in *The English Journal* (Rand, 1936; Rand & Fisher, 1936) describe a survey on the reading interests of high school students, in which students were instructed to ask questions about topics that interested them. Rand and Fisher provide a rationale for the survey:

The purpose of having the pupils ask questions was to find out what interests them. In the wide assortment offered by the newspapers, what do high-school pupils choose? Are more of them interested in radios than in airplanes? More in economics than in sports? Which are the popular sports? It was thought that perhaps a guide might be chartered for the makers of curriculums and for those who direct the reading of pupils. (p. 25)

The purpose of this exercise seems to be an explicit discovery of student interests, which might range to any number of topics. However, the piece becomes quickly political, as Rand notes a third of these students were interested in international affairs, politics, and

war—in sum, the growing situation overseas. With this observation, we see how Rand and Fisher are able to enmesh politics and interest. This creates a sympathetic reason to bring the political into the classroom: there must be a focus on students interests, students self-report an interest in politics, therefore, there must be a focus on politics in the English classroom. In other words, the argument presented in these 1936 pieces is that student interests and politics were one in the same—and if teachers are to teach to student interests, this means teaching politics, specifically, a version of politics that demonizes those political movements that would undermine the political affiliations of America (democracy). And we see how quickly a “neutral” examination of student interests becomes politicized, leading to the promotion of a certain brand of democratic values: the conclusion of Rand’s piece is not a summary of student interests, but a tirade against fascism, the “wolf in sheep’s clothing, howling about democracy while destroying it” (p. 219), which must be identified and ferreted out of the American system of education: “We must diagnose fascism in its incipient stages as it manifests itself in our school” (p. 219). For Rand, fascism takes many forms in school, from teacher pay cuts, to school closings, to militarism in schools, but if students are interested in politics, then they must necessarily be made aware of these practices, how these practices represent fascism. But most importantly, they must be turned into democratic citizens to counter that which is undemocratic.

Rand (1936) and Rand and Fisher (1936) described the interests of high school students, and made a connection between interests, politics, and democracy under the backdrop of fascism and Nazism in Europe. However, by the time America entered the war, we see how such connections drove curricular creation in college writing classrooms

as well. In the first section, we have already examined Green's (1940) "Significant Theme Content," in which he argued that college essays should focus on student experiences. He provides eponymous examples of student essays in which the student had little to say, including "The Decay of Democracy" and "The General Staff: Pure Fascism." These are not appropriate for themes, he argues, because freshmen do not have enough experience with the topics to say anything of import about them. His solution is not simply to have students write about themselves, but to write about themselves in a way that ties the abstract ideas in the above titles into students' daily experiences. With the backdrop of the war, there is a need for students to identify democratic and fascist ideals in their own lives, because "we shall not fill our jobs as instructors in Freshman English better than by asking the student, by direct means or indirect, to define his own place in the economic, social, and political order... who knows something of himself knows something of the world" (p. 699). For Green, student experience was an important tool to leverage in composition for two reasons: it provided material that the student could be interested in writing about—that is, it created within them a desire to write—but with the right pedagogical guidance, it also made them more aware of the political happenings of the world. During the war, there was a special interest in the political subject in the English classroom, one which could be accessed through student interest. Students could examine themselves in relation to fascism and democracy, and begin to reflect upon how those ideas might affect/have affected their lives. Thus begins the work of forging democratic subjects in the college compositions classroom.

We see a similar theme in Boothe (1941), who speaks specifically about the typical college student in Iowa, a state where "healthy life... means enjoying the

privileges of democracy in a community exceptionally favorable to democracy” (p. 361). After a lengthy discussion of the friendly nature and general ambition of the typical Iowa student, he provides the pedagogical approach that underlies the Department of English at Iowa State Teachers College: “appealing directly to the interests and attitudes of our students, such a plan must help them cultivate their imaginative ability, whatever it is when they enter college, as much as possible up to the time when they begin their advanced courses” (p. 361). However, a major aspect of this curriculum, founded in student interest, is teaching students about American democratic idealism and the struggles of being an individual in the United States on the grounds that “that such a grounding in American idealism and the conflicts of present-day America will prove to be immensely valuable to our college students as they grow in understanding” (p. 365-66). Students “write continually” on literature that highlights the American individual: *The Prairie Years*, *Walden*, *The Red Badge of Courage*; each of these stories provides an example of the independent and courageous American citizen standing for American values. Such an idea is extended by Bellafiore (1942), who, to “mobilize the spirit of youth” (p. 318) suggests a reading list of patriotic verses and biographies of American heroes, as well as compositions prompted by the topics: “The Meaning of Democracy,” “What I Can Do To Help in National Defense,” and “The Kind of World I’d Like To Live in After the War” (p. 319), inspired by readings such as The Bill of Rights and The Gettysburg Address. These readings represent the attitude that all democratic subjects should have when apprehended by the “conflicts of present-day America” (Boothe, p. 365). Boothe’s description of the Iowa student—eager to learn, “favorable to democracy,” suggests that such a curriculum indeed engages students; they are primed to

be democratic subjects, and such a curriculum provides inspiration to be so while inspiring them to write on the subject.

Yet another example is in the work of Weisinger (1941), who argues that composition needed subject matter beyond grammar and the rules of language. He states that “the freshman can be expected to have an interest in his work” if the work emphasizes “how men try to devise ways of living together more harmonious” (p. 693). Stated another way, this means that Weisinger suggests “as the subject matter of a course in freshman composition a consideration of the theory of democracy” (p. 689), complete with a unit on fascism and communism. And again, Smith (1941) claims that now, more than ever, “it is imperative that we give special attention to the proper choice of materials for the purposes of influencing human conduct and building interests and habits of significance for American life” (p. 109) within students of English (at all levels). While this final piece does not explicitly refer to the events occurring in Europe, all of these pieces suggest a clear link between student interest and democracy. In the case of Green (1940), Boothe (1940), and Weisinger, an interest in democracy is assumed—any American student will necessarily be drawn to matters of democracy, and thus this will be an engaging subject. However, there would be no need for a curriculum based on democracy if students already knew all that there was to know of democracy. This interest must be cultivated, as Smith suggests. Further, students must reflect upon and know what it is to be a democratic citizen. Hogrefe (1940b) states that “only in a democracy, as contrasted with a totalitarian state, are we permitted to train students to choose. Only people who learn to choose and to express their choices can be sure of keeping a democracy” (p. 595).

However, as students are consistently exposed to literature expressing the value and nobility of the democratic subject; as they hear about the evils of fascism; as they are asked to write about what it means to be a democratic subject under the duress of a system that has clearly embraced democracy, how much choice is actually afforded to the student? The pre- and early-war composition classroom became a propagandized space, one that could only engage, only be used by, a student willing to be molded into a democratic subject. We must also keep in mind that this study is limited to a focus on freshman composition—it does not address the many pieces that describe the role of the English literature classroom and the war, discussions which abound in *The English Journal* and *College English* during the 1940s, and which, with little doubt, push such a democratic agenda.

**Propaganda.** And while the compositional space was clearly propagandized during this time period, we also see a burgeoning interest in the students' ability to recognize and critically examine propaganda. Between the release of *The English Journal* (1912) and 1938, 140 pieces were published using the word “propaganda.” Only a handful of these addressed the idea of propaganda related to the first war, and few of them actually addressed the topic of propaganda in depth. Indeed, upon analysis, many of these pieces use propaganda to simply refer to targeted, commercial advertisements. Between 1938 and 1952, however, 260 pieces were published using the word, and this is when we begin seeing “propaganda” regularly appearing as a keyword in the publications. This count also excludes pieces in *College English* that addressed propaganda, as *College English* only offers a post-1939 count. What this suggests is that during the time of the war, propaganda becomes a political concern—in 1936, De Boer

uses the term synonymously with targeted advertisements, and even as late as 1938, we see it defined by Cantril in a fairly innocuous way: “propaganda is expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined” (p. 217). Cantril does mention the widespread use of propaganda during the first World War, but this is only in passing. However, by 1941, we see “propaganda” associated with strictly political aims. Arnold (1942), in reviewing Rogers, Redinger and Haydn’s (1941) *Explorations in Living: A Record of the Democratic Spirit*, describes their book as a special kind of propaganda, meaning “not the ceaseless repetition of slogans intended to deaden the critical faculties, but the presentation of varied and rich affirmations of the value of love, liberty, the opportunity for unity in diversity, the encouragement of growth and change which democracy has for its goal” (p. 424). The astute observer will note that such affirmations of democracy, including values of love, liberty, and the opportunity for unity in diversity are themselves rather dead and repeated phrases, especially in light of the many other English instructors of the time that held such a deep connection to exactly the same democratic ideals—precisely the type of propaganda that Rogers, Redinger, and Haydn were said to oppose. We see a similar statement in Pound et al. (1942):

We must not teach hatred, jingoism, or propaganda. We must insist that no emergency is so great as to justify abandoning the larger truth. The greatest emergency, on the contrary, is the present threat to liberality and intellectual freedom. Our task is to preserve and champion the only values that can save the world after the present fever has been purged. (p. 498)

And again:



Our first sharp "No" to the question, "Can the teaching of English remain unchanged by our entrance into World War II?" must not lead us headlong into the office of a ministry of propaganda. We must not forget that we are educating young people not for the next three years alone but for their entire lives. If students must be quickly conditioned for the war years, let the social scientists undertake that job. Our subject must influence personality on deeper and more permanent levels. One of our duties is to keep our students, now more than ever before, in the great stream of humane Christian culture which comes from the past. (p. 501-502)

And, from a different symposium on "English in Wartime," there is yet another mention of democratic values contra propaganda: recognizing the dignity of humanity "is an effective means of preserving and extending democratic principles and institutions. In making this emphasis we are not stultifying ourselves by becoming propagandists" (Williams et al., 1942, p. 581).

We must wonder what is meant by "propaganda" in these two passages if not the indoctrinatory practices which they refer to and celebrate. Would not the most effective propaganda be that which instills values into individuals "for their entire lives"? That political ideology that does not appear as such, but which instead is seen to represent a "larger truth"? Much like Rogers, Redinger, and Haydn, there is no critical reflection on these values. As American values, they are simply correct; they are fact. We must thus redefine propaganda for the purposes of the English curriculum (and beyond) during wartime. Propaganda is, as Brunauer (1935) observes, what Axis powers produce, certainly not something that would occur in the United States. Propaganda becomes

synonymous with that which promotes beliefs contrary to American values, and therefore false. We see, in Taylor's (1942) definition of propaganda, the idea of falsity: "It is a systematic scheme created by one person or a group in an effort to persuade people on insufficient grounds to believe what it wants them to believe or to act to its advantage" (p. 562). If this is the case, propaganda also becomes anything which threatens "truth" in the American way of life, anything which may threaten the building of democratic subjects. However, especially in Williams et al. (1942), there is something oddly defensive in the way that propaganda is juxtaposed to an American values system. Why bother to explain, as they did, that English teachers are not becoming propagandists if there is no basis for the suggestion to begin with? In all of these pieces, why do we see, in the same breath, mention of both democratic, humane, and diverse values on the one hand, as well as the concept of propaganda on the other? In attempting to distance themselves from propaganda, these scholars create a discursive proximity, where, within the same pages, within the same sentences, democratic values and propaganda cohabitate, becoming one in the same. It may very well be that the humanistic and democratic ideals that such scholars sought to promote became, ironically, a fascist tendency in themselves.

This contradiction explains the sudden interest in propaganda in English during wartime. We have seen a sudden interest in the subject, or the individual who can be manipulated through the discourses that he or she interacts with. The English curriculum, which we have seen tied to democracy and humanization, must produce subjects with the same values. But propaganda, that which is proposed to be contrary to those values, is an introduction to a different discourse, one which threatens to create a subject different from that of the aims of freshman English. Taylor (1942) is quick to point out the power

that propaganda “has in shaping the lives of men, their beliefs and their actions” (p. 555). Thus, students must be taught to recognize and criticize this propaganda (Cantril, 1938), all the while embracing the democratic ideals that are, in their own way, a propaganda being uncritically produced by English departments. The goal is to present to students one type of propaganda to demonize, all the while naturalizing the propaganda of democracy and humanism.

This is done by practically introducing specific kinds of propaganda into the freshman English curriculum. In an effort to show students different rhetorical situations, Hooper (1943) suggests introducing freshmen to examples of “muddled and crooked thinking” (p. 306) including propaganda. While he does not state specifically where tis propaganda will come from, however given the ways that propaganda was generally characterized by English departments negatively as “a systematic scheme created by one person or a group in an effort to persuade people on insufficient grounds to believe what it wants them to believe or to act to its advantage” (Taylor, 1942, p. 562), we may suppose that it is in some way related to the war, likely an example from Axis powers.

**The returning service-student.** Out of the war, we see a new kind of student subject emerging—one with interests (and therefore) needs different from the average, friendly, driven student in Iowa, or indeed, any student that had been on college campuses for nearly 30 years: that of the military student. This point is made especially clear in Hatfield (1944), who presents the results of a questionnaire created by *College English*, sent to the directors of 225 English programs across the country (95 responded), to determine the needs of servicepeople returning from the war. He opens his findings

with the question: “are the needs of these servicemen the same as those of peacetime freshmen?” (p. 200). His answer:

Fifty respondents say that they are. For them, within the limits of time and special conditions, the problems are just those which we have been trying for decades to solve. But their replies to other questions show that their "Yes" to this one is only relative—a recognition of the essential humanity inside the uniforms and a fear of hasty innovations. Forty-two respondents say that these servicemen do have special needs. As we shall see, the personnel of the classes differs considerably from that which we usually have. Moreover, the men are facing an indefinite period of wholly abnormal and crucial activities. (p. 200-201)

Hatfield is quick to dismiss over half of the responses to this question—that the veteran student has the same needs as the typical student—so that he may speak about this student as something different, requiring a new or modified pedagogy. Many composition scholars of the time also seem to want to differentiate.

The desire to differentiate should not be surprising. It was a new time in the United States for higher education in general, in no small part due to the returning service student. Especially after the war, there was an influx of students attending school, leveraging the newly minted G.I. Bill. Of course, college campuses had been open to military and veteran students during World War 1, and even the first war had driven some discussion of composition. Ward, (1918) for instance, claims that basing a composition course on the historical events of World War 1 could provide much needed material for the course that would lead to “continuity of thought and interest” (p. 207). What follows

in Ward's pieces is a list of potential topics based on the war that students may write about, including causes of the war, America's role in the war, creating and training armies and navies, industrialization, and the Red Cross (among others). However, Ward's treatment of World War 1 in the composition course differs drastically from the way the next war would be treated nearly 30 years later in composition. Ward's piece is a roundtable topic, a suggestion for material that may interest students given how close many of them were to the events of the first war.

We may contrast this to White (1944), who considers specifically the needs of students returning from the trenches, characterizing them as appearing "at first particularly puzzled, confused, and not a few of them rather disillusioned by the turn of events abroad since these young persons appeared on the human scene" (p. 444). White continues to characterize veterans as holding strong and prejudiced opinions that must be curtailed when given written expression. Further, during discussions, "the teacher has some obligation to stimulate a sense of values, on a comparative basis, and to draw practical lessons from the good and bad thought and speech habits of members of the class" (p. 445). They are further short of attention, and as a result, often "it will be difficult to confine the trainees to the type of subject specified for a particular day" (p. 446). What we see now that was not present in Ward (1918), is a consideration of how the war produced a new kind of student and how the composition class (and teacher) would have to accommodate them. These students, "puzzled" by an academic environment, and "keenly conscious of their own academic deficiency" (Dias, 1946, p. 550) needed to be engaged in a different way than their civilian counterparts because they brought different ways of thinking, being, and doing into the classroom. White argues

that teachers would have to move more slowly with them, use a gentler hand to guide them, and, in many ways, lower expectations. A similar representation exists in Lynde's (1945) "A Plea for the Under-Educated Veteran." Here, Lynde suggests that those veteran students most in need of an education will be unable to reap the benefits of the G. I. Bill "for lack of suitable training courses, geared to meet their needs and deficient scholastic attainment" (p. 153). And again in Bond (1946), arguing for a need to implement formalized remedial English programs in college: "many of the students taking advantage of the G.I. Bill of Rights will not make a satisfactory mark on an English placement test... since the remedial-English student will be with us for some time to come, we may just as well accept him" (p. 466). He further notes that veterans' "greatest weakness is in the field of English" (p. 466).

The way of characterizing veteran students is markedly different from the characterization of civilian students of the same time period. Whereas a number of compositionists in the early 40s were willing to see and expound upon potential in civilian students, the discussion of veteran students resembles the deficit model that composition saw closer to the turn of the century. But while student engagement at the dawn of the millennium has become the catch-all solution for student achievement, we see student interest filling a similar role in regards to both the functional civilian student and the deficient veteran. White (1944) notes that "the new Army statements for the course in English in the Army Specialized Training Program accent reading, expressing of views, interpretation, writing, and speaking on topics of common scope and interest" (p. 446). Lynde (1945) claims that "steps must be taken by English teachers, both in planning courses for men in this category and in developing teaching materials of value

and interest to them” (p. 153). Bond (1946) claims that the veteran has greater need than civilian freshmen in English for “for interesting and straightforward factual writing” (p. 469). All of these cases represent literature that paints the veteran as somehow intellectually inferior, certainly not ready for postsecondary education; and yet, each of these pieces suggests that a way to move beyond this is by engaging veteran’s interests. While literature from *The English Journal* and *College English* provides the veteran student his own category, the way to teach veterans to write does not differ from the grander discussion of writing pedagogy that has already existed for nearly a decade.

But while interest became a major pedagogical philosophy for veteran students just as it had for civilian students, some differences were present—namely, veterans were characterized as having different motivations and interests than their civilian counterparts. While much of the literature characterizes returning veteran students as deficient in various ways, they are also characterized as ingenuitive, practical, mature, and driven. Pennington (1945) notes that veterans come to college with a “very definite purpose: learn some trade so that they may start again in life on a little higher plane than they were when the war interrupted their peacetime way of life” (p. 38). He suggests that generally, the trade is a vocational one: mechanical, woodworking, electricity, etc. When these topics appear in their writing assignments, veterans can “get right down to business” (p. 38), and they accept having to take English courses knowing that fundamentals of reading and writing will help them in future vocational endeavors, “so they go to work with a will and, sometimes, with real ingenuity” (p. 38).

Others make similar observations. Bond (1946), for instance, who insisted that veterans needed a specialized class in English remediation, noted that veterans were

predisposed to a certain kind of writing. We see, for instance, how Bond combines the idea of “interesting” and “straightforward and factual” (p. 469) writing. He does not define what exactly this type of writing is, but we might speculate that it is potentially technical or journalistic. It is void of any flowery language or extensive metaphor, concerned, like the veteran, with getting the job done. If we take him at his word, and this reading is correct, it would seem that what interests veterans writing that is both concerned with and conveys as efficiently as possible a technical or at least practical end. The NCTE provides a vague but similar characterization of veteran writing. A survey given to English departments of 35 schools that catered to returning service-students found that veterans “expect us in composition and literature to deal with the problems of the world we now live” (NCTE, 1945, p. 208). One of the respondents to this survey notes that these students are often technically and vocationally inclined, and their “interests are low in English as a tool or as a liberalizing course” (p. 211). Shuey (1947) provides two examples of what she considers to be successful work written by veterans: the first example is “an excellent piece of work on the murder of Robert Potter, secretary of the Navy of the Republic of Texas” (p. 106) and the second is a report on Kemp Morgan tales as they appeared in oil fields in the Southwest. According to Shuey, the latter student travelled to interview workers in the oil fields to develop his theme.

Given the ways that veterans were characterized at the time, we see how such assignments as those described by Shuey (1947) might speak to their interests—in the case of the first example assignment, it is easy to see that there is a connection to the armed forces, as the content of the assignment refers to the navy. We might also imagine it written as a kind of investigative report, providing facts around the murder. In the



second, there was clearly a vocational angle, one that might be beneficial for the production of “good mechanics, farmers, carpenters, welders” (Clark, 1946, p. 241), especially given that the writer might have forged connections with those working in oil fields. Similar suggestions appear in Weigle (1944), who proposes that writing assignments for those in the air force focus on “how to do something, such as making a cot, or saluting correctly, or resuscitating an apparently drowned person. Another composition lesson teaches a student how to write a military report on a bombing mission” (p. 272). Again, we see how such assignments both concern something that the military student is already familiar with and something that invites an uncreative approach to writing. The way that these students are largely presented in the literature is that they are less likely to produce philosophical or literary work as compared to their civilian counterparts, bearing in mind that scholars such as Dudley (1939), Hogrefe (1940a), and Buckner (1940) celebrated the creativity and abstract potential of civilian students. Instead, veterans’ motivations and interests lie in attaining vocational jobs such as those above, and they used college writing courses exclusively for that benefit, as opposed to interest in the humanities: as Hatfield (1944) is quick to note, “literary description and narration are not required of these boys becoming military specialists” (p. 201). Given the characterization of returning service students, such topics were outside of their interests.

And yet, as soon as we lay out the argument that this is the sum of veteran students—that despite their deficiencies, their writing is mechanical, direct, and vocationally oriented—we find examples to the contrary. Partridge (1945), writing in *College English*, points to the richness of Royal Air Force slang, which he describes as

“virile and vigorous, graphic and picturesque, irreverent (for the most part) yet not irresponsible, often humorous, occasionally witty... debonair and insouciant. Youthful, it is sometimes imitative and sometimes almost truculently original and independent” (p. 26). Rather than denigrate the language used by veterans, he provides it unique character, appreciating its qualities. Others also describe the humorous and intentional affordances of veterans’ language in their writing, as well as their potential for emotional and poetic expression. Shuey (1947), while providing examples of essays written by veterans clearly driven by industrial and vocational interests, also suggests that veteran writing can be interesting. Especially when writing from experience, they can produce writing that is “is far from the hardy high-school hangover, ‘My Hobby,’ or the perennial ‘My Favorite Pet.’ At Centenary College the mass of freshman themes today have vigor, individuality, and a maturity that merit careful reading. Most of these come from veterans” (p. 106). For Shuey, veterans provide a much needed reprieve from writing that she clearly perceives as hackneyed, a drudgery to slog through. Not only do they produce original material, but they do so articulately, and it becomes a pleasure to read for both of these reasons. Finally, Bishop (1947) also echoes this sentiment, saying of veterans that “their compositions show originality both in material and in treatment. Sometimes they write of their experiences, but more often they put into words their own thoughts and feelings” (p. 429). What we see in these observations is a direct contrast to other dominant representations of the veteran student at the time. In a few short years, we find a discourse built around the veteran fraught with contradiction: they are at once intellectually deficient and strong problem solvers; their writing is simple, to-the-point, all business, but also rich, engaging, and emotional.

What are we to make of these disparate representations of the veteran student and writing? The first that veterans are driven by the simple, the technical, the practical, and on the other hand, a presentation that celebrates their language and sees them producing powerful, even poetic pieces regarding their experiences? The simple answer, it seems, is that veteran students provide a kind of representative microcosmic trajectory of the subjectification of the composition student in general. Characterized initially as deficient, a move was made to engage their interests, which in this case was constructed of a certain kind of writing, brief and choppy, around issues of mechanics, the technical, and vocational. However, many examples existed to thwart that simplified understanding of them. This is generally what happened in composition over the course of the late 30s and 40s regarding all students: a move was made away from the model of intellectual deficiency to a model that embraced the interests and potential of students, a model which was eventually forced to consider the abstract philosophical merit that students held in their experiences and views; and what better topics could exist to engage students in their writing? The fact that veteran students experienced a subjectification and pedagogical trajectory designed to address their needs that was so similar to civilian students (albeit in a significantly compressed timeframe) tells us that ultimately, veterans, too, are simply students. The same tools designed to create a kind of student, create the needs of that student, and address the needs of that student were also used to create and address the veteran student, with very little change in packaging. By the beginning of the 1950s, we see little discussion of veteran students in the light of a population needing to be understood and treated as apart from their civilian counterparts.

But what does this observation mean for the idea of interest? In short, Interest could not actually account for the veteran student. It was simple enough to envision a subject driven by neoliberal ideals of career attainment, and suggest that their writing reflected this. However, examples of different veterans exploded this idea—they could very well be interested in philosophy, literature, and in general the values in expressed in the humanities. We begin to see where a pedagogy of interest fails to be able to subjectify or account for the assorted interests of veteran students. During the war, the pedagogy of interest was used to anticipate student interests as a whole: interest in democracy, interest in the news, interest in political affairs, interest in vocational studies. But if veterans, in fact, simply represent the larger student body as a whole, this means that the entire pedagogy of interest begins to fall in on itself, unable to withstand the weight of the assorted and potentially nuanced interests that *all* students carried with them.

### **Part 5: Where and How is Power?**

**A Compositional Dispositif.** We have seen various moves in the 1940s to foreground a pedagogy of interest, and we have seen some of the effects of this foregrounding. This sudden interest in interest occurs concurrently with an interest in the knowing and shaping of student subjects through their writing. There is an overt recognition within the field of college English that subjects are malleable and manipulable, not the product of a static intelligence, but the product of assorted discourses speaking both within and without individuals. It is also during this time that America felt the need to defend itself from fascist and Nazi camps appearing in Europe. There was a need, now, not to shape just an interested academic subject, but a democratic one to boot, one that would stand for democracy, pluralism, and humanism. All of this

occurs during a backdrop in which psychology, education, and medical discourses/disciplines offered advice on how best to educate the subject—if not explicitly, they could at least be used to justify practices occurring in writing studies at the time in the service of a larger project.

Composition exists at the center of a gridwork of discourses, disciplines, political affairs, and desires. This begins to anticipate, for Foucault, the *dispositif* wherein composition resides, the junction of disciplines (Foucault, 2006) or the “ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault, 1980., p. 194) that came together to form composition and its conceptualization of engagement in the way that it emerged in the 1940s. By determining where and how composition falls in this gridwork, we may begin to do the work of understanding power relations within composition. Herein, I examine the ways that disciplinary and pastoral power come to be used and justified within composition, based on composition's relationship with other disciplines. After examining these types of power, I look at broader conceptualizations of power, namely bio-power and governmentality, both of which are concerned with the behavior and subjectification of larger populations, rather than individual relations.

**Disciplinary and Pastoral Power.** Part one of this chapter largely examines the shifting conceptualization of pedagogy in composition as student interest begins to take center stage. As the discourse of interest emerged, we see the roles of and relationships between teacher and student change; with the changing relationships, new kinds of power is activated and allowed. Before the 1930s, we might argue that writing instructors took a

rather sovereign role in the classroom. Like a Roman emperor, they gave a proverbial thumbs up or thumbs down to student work, a summative and total assessment of the student's writing ability. There was no concern for the student-subject beyond the subject's ability to produce writing that followed generally formal conventions and portrayed grammatical competency. The teacher's ability to pass or fail a student was a gross display of authority typical of sovereignty, located in one central figure that demanded the respect of lower subjects.

This all begins to change under the model of composition as interesting. When interest is synonymous with writing about the self, the instructor occupies a more pastoral role, helping students to discover something of themselves while they are learning to be more skillful writers. In fact, the figurative religious language of the "pastoral" is invoked by Witherspoon (1939), referring to students as "disciples." Smith (1940), recognizing such a change in pedagogy, notes that now the philosophy of education "centers attention on the growth of the pupil and not the attainment of standards set from without" (p. 147). Fostering this growth, she notes, requires an intense study of pupils, understanding who they are and how to best lead them in the classroom. As noted in part one, this is also highly pastoral in scope, as it requires students to tell of themselves, or to confess. This view of the writing professor as a kind of guide for the not-yet-interested (but they will be!) carries into the 1950s, and is expressed well in Osborn (1949): freshmen in composition "possess the raw material. What kind of thinking is dormant in it? What can be done with it? That is the responsibility of the college teacher... the purpose of college composition courses, after all, is not to confirm already acknowledge ability, but to develop the interested student into a thoughtful and sensitive human being (p. 105-106).

In all of this, the composition teacher becomes a cultivator of the student, a shepherd for the flock, preparing them for life beyond the composition course.

We have seen in part two of this chapter that the telling of the self should not seem an interrogation, but a psychologically therapeutic exercise for students. Using psychology as a means to justify actions within composition almost necessarily invites the understanding of writing as a kind of therapy. In this way, the teacher takes on another role that overlaps with the pastor, that of therapist. If we take Green (1940; 1941) or Hogrefe (1940a) seriously, and assume that writing about the self is enjoyable; and if, as part three of this chapter suggests, the best way of differentiating American education from that of the Nazis and fascists was to individualize education for each student, allowing each student to feel uniquely important; then the composition instructor must design assignments that are at once psychologically probing and revealing, but also relieving, allowing students a venue for self-expression. As the pastor-therapist, the teacher must navigate the dispositif of composition to develop the kinds of assignments that will help prepare students for the next level (life beyond composition) while catering to their individual sensibilities, all the while influenced by the various discourses with which composition associates, and personal beliefs about what students may need. Considering all of this, on a broader level, composition driven by a pedagogy of interest and pastoral power insists that the teacher develop a new attitude toward students. Under the past model, wherein sovereign power was displayed and a description of which begins this chapter, the student had to align his or her interests with those of the professor. Under the new model, the opposite is true; professors now must concern themselves with the interests of the student, caring about and for the student and the

student's interests, prescribing specific plans of action based on individual student interests. The composition professor must now be as interested as the student, in the student.

This change does not necessarily upset the authority vested in the composition professor, however, as we also see disciplinary power becoming more pointed within the relationship between student and teacher. Fulkerson (2005) notes that under a compositional model which is so student centered, "what we come down to is that the writing in such a course will be judged by how sophisticated or insightful the teacher finds the interpretation of the relevant artifacts to be" (662). While the professor may act as pastor, the professor also acts as a judge of character. The "relevant artifacts" under investigation are the students themselves. The pastoral leader also becomes an arbiter, one that is disciplinary in nature. Regardless of how well a student has articulated and justified a particular subject position, the instructor may deny that a student wrote with sufficient sophistication or insight. The composition teacher was once guided by a set of arbitrary and subjective principles, as Campbell (1939) complained, for assessing the quality of writing. But this writing was divorced from any consideration of who was writing—the focus of assessment was the writing itself. Now, the writing must be interested, interesting, and in some way a representation of the character of the author. While the principles of judgement are still largely arbitrary, what is judged is now not simply the writing, but the character of the writer, which under the emerging pedagogy of interest is necessarily enmeshed in the writing. This makes the once pastoral instructor a disciplinarian more than ever before. By asking students to openly express beliefs, goals, values, the pastoral instructor, in addition to helping students "begin as freshmen the



process of intellectual and psychological maturing” (Baker, 1943, p. 145), is also able to safeguard a broader academic Discourse from those subjects that do not fit the aims, goals, and values of that Discourse. Under the pedagogy of interest, a model of instruction that seems to provide authority to students, we still see a disciplinary gatekeeping agenda, even for those teachers who would seem to be most humanely oriented toward their student subjects.

For there is a paranoia among composition teachers about “setting free the incapable and maladjusted” (Williams, 1940, p. 406). There is a sense that teachers of composition are judged for allowing the “wrong kind” of students progress in academia. Morrison (1941), in building a case for required freshman English courses, argues that freshman English does not belong to the English department *per se*, but the school in general. It prepares students for what is to come. But, under Williams, preparing the student appears in two different ways: on the one hand, students must be capable of meeting the needs of the academy through their writing. We see this in Dudley’s (1939) piece, wherein one of the goals of freshman English is to reduce “slovenliness and illiteracy in the writing of our students for other departments beyond the freshman year” (p. 26). At a basic level, students must be able to follow standard conventions of writing, lest the teachers of freshman English were not doing their jobs. On the other hand, students must also be adjusted. “Adjustment” is where disciplinary power elides with the pastoral. In composition, in addition to learning the mechanics of writing, student must learn to articulate “the logic of human emotions, the concept of moral causation” (Morrison, 1941, p. 790) but at the same time, these articulations must be “an extension of [the student’s] own voice” (p. 791). The composition instructor, through engaging

students' interest in writing, is allowed access to students' subject-identities, and must both judge and shape the character of the writer to fit with a broader discourse of academia. It is not enough that students write well; they must now think in the right way to move beyond college introductory courses. Through exercises in autobiography, creative writing, and theme writing prescribed by the teacher, the student ideally learns to adopt habits of thought valued in the academy. We thus come back to Fulkerson's (2005) concern, that the teacher-subject may arbitrarily judge students as adequate or inadequate based on the ways that they cast themselves in writing. This is not to say that such gatekeeping did not occur beforehand. But what was kept from advancing was very different: whereas it was initially the writing itself that might hinder a student, it is now the subject written that measures the student worthy of promotion.

All of this may be seen as disciplinary because the student must perform and embody a kind of prescribed behavior. The student, rather than showcasing knowledge simply about writing, must showcase knowledge proving that he or she is capable of integrating into a larger academic community. Ideally, students will embody the values that the instructor attempts to instill them with, taking on a new kind of academic, writerly subjectivity, even when the professor is no longer judging. The student learns to manage his or her own writing, as the prisoner learns to manage his or her own behavior, transforming into a subject under the discipline of writing or good citizenship, respectively.

**Interest as a technology of power.** To reiterate a definition developed in the third chapter, a technology of power is an idea (e.g. punishment, repression), which may be met through various techniques, designed to produce behaviors and attitudes within

the subjects who are subjected to that particular technology of power. In a genealogical analysis such as this, we must ask what kinds of student subjects were desired, and what strategies were developed to produce those kinds of subjects? As we look at the evidence, the immediate answer seems to be that there was a desire to produce an interested student subject. But this answer begs several questions: interested in what, and to what end?

Upon closer scrutiny, the problem was not that students were not interested in anything—indeed the pedagogy of interest can only exist if students already have interests that such a pedagogy may be exercised upon—but that students were not skilled writers. Interest, then, is neither the ends nor exactly the means, to produce skilled writing subjects.

Interest is a mediating idea that may be used to reach the ends of skilled writers; in itself, however, it is not an actual strategy or technique, but an idea used to justify techniques used within the writing classroom to make students better at academic writing. In this way, interest becomes a segue between writing exercises, assignments, and classroom practices on the one hand, and the goal of improving student writing on the other.

Certainly, during the 1940s, there were practices developed (or justified) through this idea of interest.

And certainly, we see new strategies emerging to satiate the concept of interest, particularly the autobiographical essay (Dudley, 1939; Hogrefe 1940a; Green 1940; 1941). To be sure, this is an ingenious strategy that allows for the newly developing pastoral and disciplinary powers vested in the professor to play out. In the composition classroom, students were already expected to write, and students would have been well aware of this expectation. Thus, there is nothing at all suspect in asking students to produce an essay. When the essay becomes autobiographical, it is in the name of

leveraging student interest—this new technology—so that students will now have substance to write about, to give them something to say, the absence of which heretofore had been seen as a problem in student writing (Blackmur, 1941; Wykoff, 1941). Not only that, but under interest, students will want to engage in this writing activity. It is not drudgery anymore, but, at least in theory, an enjoyable activity, certainly preferable to the earlier sorts of assignments that had students copying from great writers, drilling grammar, or writing about topics that they had little to say about. Interest enables this strategy to occur while producing writing (and writers) of substance. When we adopt interest as the technology that molds the written assignment and produces students who are perceived as more competent, the autobiographical assignment appears natural and welcome, even if it objectifies and subjectifies students in a way that had never been tried in the composition classroom before.

Indeed, interest becomes the justification for all of the aforementioned strategies developed within composition classes during the 1940s: the writing assignments that students are given, the ways in which they are deployed, even the attitudes that teachers are now supposed to maintain toward their students. But, as have also seen, this technology produces more than students that are invested in their writing. It produces students that adopt patriotic mentalities, develop a proclivity for groupwork, and display academic behaviors beyond their composition classroom. All of these developments are mediated through interest: students are interested (or they should be interested) in the state of their nation. Thus, research regarding the war or democracy will allow them to write more fluidly, all the while producing more knowledgeable democratic citizens. Students should be involved in groupwork as they will feel more interested in the

ownership of work that they produce within the group, but it will also acclimate students to working with other members. Students must become good writers because through this they will develop their interests, and continue deeper into their studies (as skilled writers) as they progress through their college careers. Interest becomes the hinge through which different strategies may produce a kind of student subject.

**Bio-Power and Governmentality.** But why was it necessary to produce such student subjects in the first place? After analyzing the ways that pastoral and disciplinary power existed in the relationship between students and teachers, as well as the technology of interest that justifies the strategies developed to produce such a subject, we must look at the rationalities that contributed to the emergence of those kinds of powers—in other words governmentality. An analysis of governmentality must examine the compositional dispositif at a macro level, looking at what desires shifted the discourses to intersect as they did. What forces established the sayable, knowable, and doable in composition during the 1940s? What subjects needed to be produced from composition and higher education in general, and to what end? One place to begin answering these questions is to examine the emergence of the “proministrative state,” or the post-World War 2 state driven by “consensual, pragmatic, and expert-driven policy-making” (Balogh, 1991, p. 23). It is during this time of pragmatic policy-making that the United States government began to form partnerships with colleges and universities, placing higher education at “the crossroads of state-society relations—between citizens and the state... completely beholden to neither party but expected and committed to serve both” (Loss, 2012, p. 15-16). With this observation, we see a network of political discourses in place, aligning their goals to a particular end: in particular, the end of World War 2 saw the emergence

of the Cold War, and at this time, more than ever, the United States needed skilled experts for manufacture, industry, and invention; in short, the United States needed specialists. As a result, higher education received unprecedented governmental funding, as well as unprecedented admissions (Lazerson, 1998). In fact, it was not until well after the war, in 1947, that the Department of Defense and the Office of Naval Research adopted policies to begin paying overhead costs to universities conducting research for them (Knezo, 1994). These facts suggest that the government saw a need for research, development, and training immediately after the war; the strongest example of this is found in the GI Bill, developed as a collaboration of The Veterans Administration, The Office of Education, and the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Labor, which created the opportunity for thousands of returning servicepeople to attend college (Munsey, 2010; Thelin, 2011).

What were the rationalities that saw such a need for this kind of development? What allowed higher education, at the beginning of the 1950s, to have a virtual monopoly over the creation of specialists (Lazerson, 1998), and why was there such a push to make specialists out of servicepeople? While the common historical belief about the GI Bill is simply that the United States government wanted to give back to its servicepeople by helping them to attain an education, Loss (2005) is skeptical of this view in history. This is not to say that veterans did not deserve an education, and certainly many veterans were able to advance themselves in the workforce as a result of college accessibility (Loss, 2005; Lazerson, 1998). However, this is only one potential reason for the GI Bill's inception; Loss (2005; 2011) suggests that certain beliefs about the nature of war, the veteran, and needs of the United States created problems that could be solved by the

introduction of the GI Bill. Perhaps the strongest example of this was concern over veterans' psychological adjustment to society after the war (Loss, 2005; Rose, 1989; Watson, 1978), particularly "problem reactions" troops may exhibit toward the end of the war and reorientation into civilian normalcy (Stouffer et al., 1949, p. 552). After World War 1, it was common practice to provide a pension to shell shocked soldiers as a way to help them reintegrate, but by 1925 "psychiatrists began to doubt the wisdom of providing pensions, because they believed pensions reinforced disability" (Pols & Oak, 2007, p. 2136). After World War 2, the emerging belief was that to reintegrate in a healthily psychological way, veterans needed busy themselves with various projects and to engage in regular social interaction (Loss, 2005; Loss 2011; Pols & Oak, 2007; Stouffer et al., 1949). The GI Bill, in providing ease of access to college programs for veterans, followed psychological prescriptions for dealing with returning soldiers and their mental health.

Another consideration that led to the GI Bill was the fact that it was difficult to predict what servicepeople would actually do upon returning home (Stouffer et al., 1949). Many soldiers indicated that they were unsure of their postwar plans, which was problematic for the individual veterans, but the state as well. What might veterans do with their time? As noted by Stouffer et al., there was concern over soldiers becoming less disciplined after returning from the frontlines, identifying with enemy sentiments, and in general, feeling that they got a "raw deal" from the Army (p. 565). There was a need, then, not to produce a loyal democratic subject in the veteran, but to maintain one. Allowing veterans to do as they please while embracing a laissez faire attitude toward them could, in fact, be harmful to the United States as it might breed an un-American subject. The GI Bill was thus not so much a gift to returning soldiers as it was a means of

sating them, of keeping resentment to a low. Preoccupation was not only important to helping veterans psychologically readjust, but to psychologically readjust as American citizens. It was also theorized that a greater education could help soldiers rationalize the war that they were a part of. According to Loss (2012), “failure to provide adequate knowledge about the war was cited as a key explanation for the significant increase in soldier neuropsychiatric breakdowns, which according to one report, were running 60 percent higher than during World War I” (p. 104). An education could help them to understand why they had engaged in the conflict that they had been a part of, again a strategy to minimize resentment on the part of soldiers. By making education more accessible for veterans, it was easier to determine where veterans would go, how they would spend their time, generally to keep tabs on them, all the while creating productive middle class specialists that could be proud of their previous war efforts while continuing to contribute to the Cold War efforts. In this way, veterans remained soldiers fighting in a war long after World War 2 was over.

Herein, we see how bio-power is active within the relationship that existed between the American post-war state and veterans. Mass education becomes a medically viable solution to insanity, helping soldiers overcome shellshock and reintegrate into society. It is a bio-power rooted in a kind of disciplinary power, to be sure: soldiers must remain committed to American beliefs in democracy, and they must engage in a specific kind of training to do so, namely, that of college education. This will create a well-behaved subject, in the same way that the panopticon might create a well-behaved prisoner, embodying the behavioral codes of the society in which they exist. In *Psychiatric Power*, Foucault (2006) describes disciplinary power in the military as “the



general confiscation of the body, time, and life; it is no longer a levy on the individual's activity but an occupation of his body, life, and time. Every disciplinary system tends... to be an occupation of the individual's time, life, and body" (p. 47). We certainly see this sort of power in play as we examine the reasons for the GI Bill's creation. It seeks to occupy the veteran's time by prescribing a way of life and habits of mind. But it moves beyond disciplinary power in its scope. The GI Bill is no longer about the "*individual's* time, life and body;" this power reaches into the broader realm of bio-power, as education is now specifically about the management of *all* soldiers' bodies, examining at all times where they are, what they are doing, how they are acting, rooted in a generalized prescription for psychological health. The role of education is now to produce a citizen that is healthy both for the citizen's self and for the nation.

The same sentiment—that of creating a healthy and productive democratic citizen—drove education for civilians as well. In general, as Schlessinger (1949) notes, during the cold war years, the United States was engaged in a war over "the minds and hearts of men" (p. 9) so that it could "defend and strengthen free society" (p. 10). Certainly, the GI Bill was designed with this goal in mind, but this war for the minds and hearts of men went beyond veterans. All citizens, even non-US citizens, were valuable soldiers in this postwar America, and institutions of higher education became middle class corals (Loss, 2012), sites where great numbers of U.S. citizens could be reached. To this end government, provided unprecedented funding for university expansion (Boland, 1969; Lazerson, 1998). While this led to more enrollment in the university setting, it was not necessarily for citizen's individual advancement, unless that advancement in some way benefitted the overall goals of the U.S. government. As Boland (1969) notes:

The focus of federal interest on the uses of higher education for national development meant a concentration of support on specialized areas of training and research --largely within the physical sciences--with little effort to develop a more comprehensive higher education program. The government did not, that is, concern itself with the welfare of higher education as a whole; it did not have a specifically "educational mission." Rather, individual government agencies utilized the expertise and facilities of higher education institutions in the pursuit of their own programs... (p. 19).

Two of these programs were the Surplus Property Act (1946) and the Information and Education Exchange Act (1948). In both cases, money was generated to allow U.S. citizens to travel abroad as well as to educate foreign citizens under the U. S. model of education. William Fulbright, a supporter of these acts, stated that they existed "for increasing our understanding of others and their understanding of us" (Loss, 2012, p. 125). As the Cold War developed, it became more important than ever that those outside the U.S. "understand us." Through such globalized education, the U.S. government could attempt to build sympathies with individuals in other countries, ensuring the perpetuation of democratic, rather than communist, ideals.

As we might expect, these desires, knowledges, and regulations affected the writing and composition curriculum. Within America, the government began constructing beliefs and knowledges around what it meant to be a good citizen as well as how these good citizens should be educated. It is this knowledge that began to guide education and composition curricula. Turning again to veterans as an example, Loss (2005; 2012)

describes literacy programs for returning servicepeople, many taught by college and university professors. For instance, the government developed a literacy program around *Meet Private Pete: A Soldier's Reader*, a literacy workbook designed to engage soldiers, justified through the idea that it spoke to their own experiences *as* soldiers (Sticht, 2009). Such material was assumed to be, as has been the theme of this entire chapter, *interesting* to them. While this reader as well as the entire program was a military “fly by night” project (Loss, 2005, p. 878), it was thought that this approach would make material more accessible to soldiers. Despite the fact that this reader was designed to teach functional literacy skills to soldiers operating at roughly a first grade reading level, the idea of speaking to soldiers’ experiences was adopted by the college composition classroom. In this example, we begin to see how composition was influenced not only by disciplines such as education and psychology, but by perpetuations, needs, constructions, and prescriptions of the state. If, as noted in section two of this chapter, education was at odds with itself, unsure of whether the end-goal of schooling should be students’ vocational training or holistic cultivation; and if college composition was also plagued by this disagreement, unsure of what assignments would best prepare students for a future beyond college; it was not because these disciplines were speaking only to one another, essentially in a vacuum. This disparity arises from the fact that the United States needed to produce cultivated citizens that could at once be loyal to democratic ideals as well as vocational specialists, out-producing enemies overseas. The writing curriculum, as well as the conversation around the curriculum—that which was thinkable and sayable about the curriculum—was formed from concerns about a globalizing world in which new kinds of wars, enemies, and politics were emerging.

We may begin to see how all of this is tied to the larger concept of capitalism. Foucault (1978) has suggested that the guiding knowledge of governmentality is the political economy. This rings true within the analysis of interest/engagement in composition studies. If student engagement was a means to differentiate the United States agenda from Nazism and fascism, then specialization and creating a need to attend college was a means to differentiate the dominant ideology in the United States from that of the Soviets, namely communism. At the end of part 2 in the section on educational influences, education was developing conflicting philosophies, with apparently disparate aims: cultivate the individual and the mind in the mode of liberal education, on the one hand, or construct a productive and vocationally oriented subject, on the other. The resolution to this, as suggested by compositionists (Sensabaugh, 1943; Mcdowell, 1946; Perrin, 1948), was that students should be responsible for their own interests—they needed to determine how to cultivate themselves. This concept of self-direction rings true with the concept of capitalism: students should be personally accountable for their education. Providing students choice would appear to provide them assorted possibilities in self-development and is a student-centric model. However, this places a new burden on students, one embraced by the concept of capitalism, that of personal responsibility. Should students not cultivate themselves correctly—that is, if they do not make the choices to become the kinds of individuals they hoped or to secure the kinds of jobs they desired—it is their own fault. Whether or not this approach to individuals is just is not of interest to this study. What is important to note is that, provided with opportunities to succeed, students make their own decisions, which, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is a uniquely American institution.

It is in this way that college composition, at the end of the war, was complicit with the larger capitalist enterprise that was the United States, and this helps to shed light on the ways that governmentality functions. In general, there existed a discursive construction of that which was anti-American: fascism, and later, communism. Americans at all levels needed to be democratic subjects standing against these values. What was knowable, sayable, and doable within higher education, within even composition classes, was that which rang true of an American subjectivity, one democratically and capitalistically driven. Here was a knowledge (*savoir*) that existed in all facets of American political technology, underlying the educational discipline, laws that were soon to be put into place under McCarthyism, the (re)formation of higher education, the desire for all citizens to become specialists and the driving force to admit more college students than ever before (including and especially veterans), and even military funding to research: America needed to outpace, outdo, and differentiate itself from communist forces in Eastern Europe, to define itself through capitalistic production. In this way, governmentality represents an ethos, the beliefs of a state that allowed for the practices in one small facet of it, namely, composition, to follow certain practices. Within the purview of these practices was a manifestation of a pedagogy based on student interest, or engagement, which, as we have seen, allowed for the creation of an interested/engaged democratic subject, a subject that exposes his or her social and cultural backgrounds and beliefs to the writing instructor, one acted upon by psychology and education, typified by medicine, and ultimately deemed to be a subject operating within or without the bounds of the established priorities and necessities of the state.

## CONCLUSION

While this analysis of the 1940s tells a story of student interest in composition—as well as the myriad discourses and forces that allowed it to emerge as it did—it is not yet clear how this is a genealogy of engagement *per se*. For Foucault (1977/1995), a genealogy is a history of the present, as well as a history of emergence and descent. As such, it is important to consider the ways that the past appears in and shapes the present concept of student engagement. We have descended into a time before engagement was called engagement. How, then, has this concept of interest emerged into the present and shaped itself into engagement? We have studied the discourses and disciplines that incubated the concept of interest, and allowed it to hatch into, what may be contested, is that current concept of engagement. Further, if it is the case that engagement, like interest, is not simply a humane matter, but one derived of various institutional and social needs, various prescriptions from various discourses, and powers that may be underlain with less than humane aims, we must consider what is to be done with student engagement as we move forward. **Making the Past Present—and Vice Versa**

Bean (2005) provides four primary indicators of student engagement: critical thinking, making writing personal writing, writing wherein the teacher acts as a coach or guide, and groupwork and audience considerations. While published long after the 1940s, we see how each of these indicators of engagement begin to appear in the pedagogy of interest. To strengthen this point, I show how each indicator appears in several works over the period of the 1940s, both in the beginning of and later into the decade, and then compare these early pieces to a contemporary work that may be described as ascribing to

a pedagogy of engagement. Each contemporary work comes from the more recent *College Composition and Communication* journal. Further, each contemporary piece was chosen for its public, representative function: each piece is a convention address or conversation among composition scholars that may be said to represent the larger state of the field. This is designed to show how the pedagogy of interest is intimately tied to what we now call engagement and to suggest that far from being a simplified, un-pedagogical period of current-traditional rhetoric, the 1940s represents a shift in pedagogy that even contemporary engagement scholars may be proud of.

This is not to suggest that any sort of progress has been made as far as pedagogy is concerned. The emergence of engagement, as I argue below, is simply an extension—or even the renaming—of an already existent concept, one which has been in play since the 1930s, namely interest. Rather than progress, this implies stagnation. But was the concept of interest itself, when it first emerged, a progressive move to something better than what had been? The analysis above suggests that it was not. It does not build upon a past, or show a linear trajectory from/to. Instead, it emerges from unexpected needs, what we might call a series of accidents: dispositions brought on by a war, fear of fascism and communism, the prescriptions (and resistance to) of a brand of psychology, a sudden need for specialist training, an influx of new bodies in desks. Interest becomes a strategy, as we have already explored, a technology of power that helps to regulate, control, and produce subjects, far from the notion of betterment that seems to drive research on engagement now. But if this is the case, it is necessary to first show how engagement is simply a rebranding of interest as it appeared many years ago.

**Critical thinking.** Bean (2005) describes critical thinking as an engaging activity in which students think through a problem and learn to clarify their ideas in writing when attempting to solve that problem. The idea of developing clearer, organized, and critical thinking appears in many of the pieces addressed in chapter four of this piece, and we may conclude that even in the 1940s, instructors of writing wanted students to think critically. Developing clear writing was both an indicator that students were developing these critical thinking skills as well as a means of practicing to sharpen these skills. Wykoff (1940), for instance, notes that although “there is constant adjustment of the content of the various compositional courses to suit changing needs... somewhere along the way compositional students learn how to use the power of thinking and to organize thought” (p. 434). Here, Wykoff suggests that whatever composition does, it is designed to help students sharpen their thinking, perhaps to even develop a meta-awareness of the ways that they think. Like Bean, Hogrefe (1940b) ties the idea of problem solving to the idea of thinking as she describes a composition class at Iowa state college, which “aims to give students skill in thinking about issues which involve controversy” including the skills “to detect vague language or a need for definition, to recognize emotional appeals (including the writer's bias and his own bias), to analyze unstated assumptions, and recall and use facts in thinking about a problem” (p. 602-603). In these early pieces, we see how instructors of composition were thinking about thinking—specifically, how to foster critical thinking in their classes, especially around the idea of problem solving.

While Wykoff (1940) and Hogrefe (1940b) seem suggest that critical thinking and problem solving need to appear in the composition curriculum, later pieces attempt to create a model for the teaching of problem solving. Salisbury (1942), for instance,



suggests that critical thinking and problem solving typically begins in writing: the student “merely follows the writer's thinking. He performs the first step in thinking... The subsequent steps of clarifying the problem, collecting additional data, grouping these data around the problem, making comparisons, and drawing conclusions, he carries on also through the medium of language” (p. 186-187). What begins in reading becomes a process of problem solving as the student begins to think about, articulate, and write through the problem. Four years later, Smith (1946) claims that the teacher’s role in the composition curriculum is to “make habitual with their students certain methods of approach to the problems of expression and certain processes of thinking common to many types of communication” (p. 336). To this end, she proposes using Tyler’s logical model of problem solving in the composition classroom. She does not provide citations that clearly indicate what work of Tyler’s she is referring to, however in 1949, Tyler’s landmark *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* was published, and this provides us a sense of what Smith may be referring to in her own piece; it is, incidentally, remarkably similar to the model that Salisbury suggests near the beginning of the decade. Tyler provides steps to help students develop problem solving skills, including “sensing a difficulty or question that cannot be answered at the present, identifying the problem more clearly by analysis, collecting relevant facts, formulating possible hypotheses... testing the hypotheses by appropriate means, [and] drawing conclusions” (p. 69). In this case, the understanding is that problem solving can be approached scientifically; there are steps to make a student a good problem solver, and they are deeply tied to the scientific method. It should also be noted that in all of these pieces, the authors at some point

mention the need to attend to students' interests as well. Critical thinking/problem solving is not isolated, but intimately tied to the concept of interest.

Based on these examples and the fact that composition scholars in the 1940s were attempting to create a science of problem solving, it is possible to see how the “engaging idea” of critical thinking as described by Bean (2005) was a deep concern for those practicing composition even then. Further, as these examples show an alignment with the concept of activating students' interests, we see how interest and critical thinking/problem solving are deeply connected. Moving forward to the current decade, we see how such ideas are explicitly used in the service of “student engagement.” Artze-Vega et al. (2013) for instance, refer to Bean's text as a “perennial favorite” for composition pedagogy and suggest that it should be “required reading for all faculty, especially those challenged to explain how *engaged learning* and *critical thinking* can be activated” (p. 180, emphasis in original). In this piece, each of seven authors describes their individual perspectives on faculty development, both in the field of composition and outside. One of the authors, Gerald Nelms, describes making coursework more active and engaging by having students write through problems. I do not mean to exhaustively cover all contemporary pieces that address critical thinking in college composition—indeed, that is easily too large a project for any one person to surmount. Rather, Artze-Vega et al. represent a group of thinkers in the composition field of composition for whom it seems the idea of problem solving as described by Bean is necessary for all faculty development as well as promoting student engagement.

If this is the case, it means that critical thinking/problem solving did not appear near the end of the millennium as a sudden means of making students engage in their

writing work. Instead, it simply took 75 years for Artze-Vega et al.'s (2013) to be published, addressing critical thinking as a central concern for professional faculty development in composition work, despite the fact that critical thinking was a pedagogical concern from some of the earliest publications of *College English*. During a time that has historically been written off as bereft of pedagogical theory in composition, we see the seeds of this idea being planted. Students must be taught how to think critically, so much so that over the course of the 1940s, we see step-by-step methods to problem solving being proposed by Salisbury (1942), Smith (1946), and Tyler (1949). What is more, critical thinking is only one indicator of student engagement under Bean's model; the other three appear just as strongly in composition literature across the 1940s.

**Making writing personal.** For Bean (2005), one means of engaging students in writing is to provide them opportunities for expression as well as “linking course concepts to students’ personal experience of previously existing knowledge” (p. 123). Students will engage in writing when they have a personal stake in the topic that they are writing about. This attitude is adopted by many early pedagogues who advocate a place for student interest in the composition classroom. Nowhere is this stronger than in Green (1940), who describes the two hypothetical situations, one of a student writing an “objective” economy paper versus an economy paper that is rooted in personal experience:

That term paper on marginal utility for Econ. 52 may turn out to show a very imperfect understanding of economic principles, and considerable confusion in thinking, if the student roams at will over the continent or becomes lost in a bog of abstraction and theory. But if Richard Johnson,

Jr., applies it to an analysis of the fortunes of Johnson's Drug Store, corner Grand River and La Salle, both he and his instructor may come to see that even the principle of marginal utility does not operate in a vacuum; and Richard, at least, will see that every economic principle stands in some direct ratio to human weal or woe. (p. 697)

For Green as well as Bean, making writing personal can lead to a greater understanding of material as students are able to see something of themselves in the contents that they write about. Indeed, in the previous chapter, there were explicit links made to the concept of personal writing and the concept of student interest, such as autobiography in Dudley (1939), Digna (1940), and Baker (1943). In these pieces, students become interested in writing when they are allowed to write about that which they know.

In the later 1940s, the concept of personalization remains strong in composition literature. We have seen it, for instance, in literature addressing returning service persons as a way of keeping them interested in writing and English studies (e.g. Pennington, 1945; Shuey, 1947). But even outside of the militarized student, the concept of interest and personalization continue to abound in the literature (indeed, it is hard to think of an interest that is not, in some way, personal). Again, Smith (1946) appears in this conversation, claiming that “the need for each student to express himself in ways that are original and satisfying to him personally must be provided by the curriculum” (p. 340). Wykoff (1946) links the idea of interest to the personal, describing a grammar correction assignment in which he has students, as a group, workshop sentences from their own papers on the grounds that “the correction of such a series of sentences is more interesting and effective than the correction of a similar number of impersonal exercises

from the handbook” (p. 139). Hotchner (1949) describes a classroom approach that “combines a personal essay with the simple elements of research” (p. 339), which he describes as accessible to students due to its personal elements while introducing them to the new concept of performing research. The purpose of these examples is to suggest that the concepts of personalization and self-expression are familiar pedagogical tools in teaching college composition across the decade of the 1940s.

As we move into the post-millennial period, we see the idea of personalization playing out in an address from Tinberg (2014) at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. He suggests that it is through personal writing that individuals can formulate and discover something of who they are. Specifically, he describes Paul, a returning veteran, who was hesitant to write about his experiences for fear of being judged:

I saw an inventive, if still developing, writer attempting "self-determination" while at the same time engaging his private experience for public purposes. Who was I - who have never seen war except through the mediated imagery of book and film - to prohibit a veteran, for whom the "creature" was not lost but rather whole and tangible, from conveying his rich experience? The fact is that Paul needed to write and write and write and to do so from his vantage point as a returning, wounded vet - as if under a moral imperative. His goal was not to make himself feel better. Rather, he was busily working to make a self. (p. 336)

We see Paul “engaging” his private life as a way of creating what Tinberg all but states is interesting writing, and it is through this relevant, personal experience that Paul is able to

learn—in particular, he learns about himself. Much of this seems to be what composition scholars of the 1940s were getting at. In fact, we see it suggested on more than one occasion that returning veterans write about what they know, in particular, warfare, as a way to keep them interested in their studies and to progress through college. It is true that Tinberg shifts the conversation forward to a degree—instead of learning about course content such as economics, as Green (1940) suggests, the purpose is to reflect and personally construct a subjectivity for a public to read. Still, the purpose that Tinberg identifies in his address is not entirely new. Dudley (1939) suggests autobiographical writing because the student will discover that “the past is interesting to himself, and then, gradually and somewhat to his surprise, that it is interesting to others” (p. 23).

We see, then, that even at the beginning of the 1940s, the idea of personal writing was at the pedagogical forefront, to keep students “interested” in their work, rather than “engaged” in it, although at this point it is becoming clear that based on Bean’s conceptualization of engagement, the two are nearly synonymous. We also see how audience plays into the concept of interest/engagement over the course of years—Dudley (1939) notes that what is interesting to the student may become interesting to others, and (Tinberg) suggests that there is always presentation in writing, and one must consult with oneself for the purpose public address. The concept of audience is also a marker of writing engagement for Bean (2005), and in the 1940s, we see more scholars than Dudley attempting to use the concept of an audience and group writing for the purpose of keeping student interested in their writing.

**Groupwork and audience.** Several composition scholars of the 1940s write about the merits of workshops, writing groups, and authentic audiences as a means of

raising interest in writing. Just so, the concept of groups in the writing classroom is another of Bean's (2005) engaging ideas. Essentially, writing is a social activity; we do not write simply to create a product, but to have that product read by others. We see the idea of socialization in/through writing appear in Drennan's (1940) "Workshop Methods in Freshman English." Drennan describes her first assignment of the course, a personal theme, however students are "told beforehand that they will be asked to read their themes in class for criticism by the class" (Drennan, p. 532). Here, the stakes are raised as soon as the assignment is given; students are made aware that their writing will be critiqued by their peers, and thus they must tailor their writing not simply for a teacher giving a grade, but for others that may judge them. To maintain a helpful and constructive attitude within the classroom, she tries "to make them see that we are all good friends working together" and attempts to build what she refers to as a "social unit" (p. 533). The rest of her piece describes how groupwork can be used in grammar instruction, outlining activities, and vocabulary building. On the other hand, groupwork can also be productive for research based writing. Digna (1940) describes having students vote on a research topic together (on that interests them) in her writing course. These students are then able to help each other develop research questions, find research materials, and talk through difficulties with one another. Between these two early composition scholars, we see that groups both create a support network and an audience that can keep the student interested and engaged in writing activity.

Later in the decade, the ideas of having students work in groups and considering audience when writing remain. For Perrin (1947), audience considerations in composition are a "maximum essential." He states that "most of the time our pupils should be engaged

in actual communication... Teachers of written composition should develop a corresponding 'reader contact' and relentlessly fail papers that seem to be written in a vacuum" (p. 357). What topics should students then communicate about? The simple answer, according to Perrin, is that students will "have plenty to say to their own group" provided that the "matters [are] of interest or concern to them" (p. 356). In the 1947 meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, it was made clear that students will improve in their writing and critical thinking "if English teachers provide them with normal situations for genuine communication, if we give them a better understanding of language as a social institution and a psychological process" (NCTE, 1947, p. 272). Both McKee (1947) and Magalaner (1948) entreat composition instructors to "give them an audience" in their eponymously named article, and Magalaner notes that it is only when students consider the interests of their audience ("neighbors") that they will produce interesting work. Similarly, Angus (1948) notes that when a student feels "that a local group might be interested in reading [his paper]... he will attack his research problem with industry and enthusiasm" (p. 193). Finally, McGaughey (1950) sees groupwork as a psychologically sound practice, one in which students can feel greater pride and accountability for their work. While she varies the means of creating small groups in her classroom, one of the primary ways of grouping students together is via shared interest. Based on all of these examples, we see how audience considerations and groupwork were widely discussed pedagogical constructs, largely intermingled with the concept of interest.

And as we move forward in time, we see that groupwork/audience concerns still have a prime spot in composition pedagogy. In his exemplar award acceptance speech,



Winterowd (2010) notes that while writing is an excellent mode of self-expression, in the academy writing “has a public function that binds us to an ethical ‘contract’ with readers... we'll provide all of the information that readers need to understand and critique the writing... and our writing will be as readable as we can possibly make it in accordance with our purposes” (p. 502-503). He continues to suggest that it is the writing teacher’s job to help students see the joy in critically thinking about their writing purposes and creatively developing a means to meet that purpose. This joy, he concludes, is often found in writer workshops. Given that the award that occasioned Winterowd’s speech “represents the highest ideals of scholarship, teaching, and service to the entire [composition] profession” (CCCC, 2018), we may surmise that the concept of expressing oneself to readership, or an audience, still holds significant weight in the field.

Winterowd does not actually refer to engagement *per se* in his speech, however the concept of enjoyment in writing seems to get at a similar idea. It is the teacher’s job to foster this attitude in students, and it can be done through both workshops and simply allowing students to envision an audience during writing activities. Such activities are designed to make students value and even want to write, to captivate them, we may even say, to engage them.

Thus, audiences, groupwork, and the social aspect of writing have been pedagogical practices throughout the last 80 years of composition, and continues into the current age. During the 1940s, writing for others increases students’ accountability and encourages them to write pieces that may be interesting to others. In this case, the concept of interest becomes a product of the subject, rather than a means to create or determine a subject, but it is still a device that drive the pedagogical approach. Moving

forward, at least based on Winterowd's piece, social aspects of writing should increase enjoyment in the activity. In both cases, the idea exists that an audience changes how students engage with their work, producing greater motivation to write and better writing as an end result.

**Teacher as coach/mentor.** The final marker of engagement is perhaps more difficult to identify in pedagogy as it refers to an attitude that teachers should have toward their profession and students. In the engaged classroom, the instructor's feedback should be constructive rather than critical, and the instructor must take an active interest in students as well as display a demeanor congruent with that interest. Most of the pieces examined in this project touch on the "teacher as coach" concept in one way or another, however in this brief section, I explicitly point to instances where literature in both the 1940s and now address the idea of teacher attitude and, for lack of a better term, "coaching" of writing.

The concept of teacher as coach appears rather explicitly in the second issue of *College English*, in Oakes' (1939) piece on the student-teacher writing conference. She notes that in the writing conference for students of freshman English, often the instructor simply shows students what needs to be corrected in a paper without teaching the student why. The student may sit back while the instructor does the work on the paper. Wanting this to end, Oakes advised her students to keep a notebook of errors which they saw appearing on their papers regularly, and come to her with questions about those errors as well as ideas for how to absolve these issues in their papers. Despite the fact that the student was to take the lead in these conferences, "the teacher was by no means passive. Besides listening, she confirmed, checked, advised and... explained new writing puzzles

as they appeared” (157). After taking notes based on the instructor’s feedback, the students might consult these notes “as guide and mentor” (p. 157). Oakes suggests that such a method is empowering to students, for as a result of these conferences “there arises for all students a keener *interest* in their own abilities” (p. 159, emphasis mine). In this early example, the teacher is not a corrector or a disciplinarian per se, but a mentor, one helping students to see that they are capable. And in this example, the word “interest” takes on a motivational aura, wherein students become aware of their abilities and want to push themselves to full capacity. Oakes (1939) provides a practical example for a teacher that may want to become more coach-like. Other pieces written around this time period also encourage teachers to make themselves more human to students, but do not provide specific examples of ways to do this—rather, they suggest a kind of attitude that the teacher must convey.

Williams (1940), for instance, describes qualities of the professor who seeks to capture the genuine interest of students:

Alertness to changing style, the result of changing life; appreciation of vitality; accuracy and spontaneity in his own word hoard; a sense of humor; an eye on the flying ball that is the student—with a pretty sound prophecy of its ultimate landing place—finding the spirit back of each face, and freeing that spirit to grow through expression—these are indispensable... entire pattern. He will demand and he will get the best, rejecting what he knows to be, at first glance, nonacceptable scrip and mechanics. (p. 410-411).

Williams' list continues, taking several pages. Haber (1941) provides a similar, if shorter list than Williams. For Haber, the freshman composition teacher should "be well-informed, sympathetic, fair, endowed with a sense of humor" (p. 292), not to mention have "good will and a wholesome spirit of co-operation" (p. 293), all in the service of "the most important person on our college campus—the one-day-old college freshman" (p. 293). In both cases, the composition teacher has an awareness of students' desires, needs, and what is needed so that they may succeed. This professor is not a drill sergeant, however; in both cases, the professor meets the student with a sense of humor. Despite a sympathetic understanding of student culture, the professor must be fair, must still demand the best work from students. If the professor is to know students and their needs, however, there is a sense that professor must approach each student individualistically. It is certainly for this reason that Gates (1941) suggests English professors adopt the view of the "progressive educationist" (p. 67) by applying a more individualistic approach to education in composition. In all of these cases, it seems that the English professor moves into a role that would be considered engaging by Bean's (2005) standards, both firm but relatable, always attempting to connect lessons with students' motivations.

As might be expected, we see examples of this appearing in the later 1940s as well. We see this idea appearing again in Perrin (1947), when he states that "our position is more that of a coach than that of a teacher" (p. 355). This is because the writing teacher "deals with the whole mind of the student" (p. 355), whereas the more traditional teacher simply fills the mind of the student with facts. The coach-teacher, on the other hand, must show students how their past and present experiences, both inside and outside of school, as well as their beliefs, creativity, and imagination all may be used to write an effective

paper. Creating this sensibility in students requires an attitude on the part of the teacher that transcends that of “teacher,” placing the teaching in a position of “coach” or mentor. Similarly, Pollock (1948) uses a metaphor of the football coach to describe the teacher of English. He states that coaching “is concerned with teaching the student to develop personal skills which he may use in his own way in a certain pattern of social activity” (p. 76), whether that activity be running and tackling or writing and speaking. If this is the case, then “teachers of English need not merely to encourage students to speak and to write, but to teach them the devices which are likely to prove useful in speaking and writing well” (p. 76). In this way, the teacher again moves beyond the role of the traditional teacher, concerned with the correct/incorrect binary, but becomes something of a coach, showing *why* certain actions may be correct or incorrect, rather than telling *that* certain actions are correct or incorrect; this kind of instruction introduces and inducts students into a particular discourse, helping them internalize the material, and it is this approach that seems to make a teacher a kind of mentor or coach, both in the decade of the 1940s and in Bean’s (2005) own presentation of student engagement.

In the 2013 chair’s address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Anson (2013) speaks of the changing climate of college in general, addressing the rise of alternative platforms to the traditional, on-site, four-year university that students may use to receive a postsecondary education. In this address, he presents a fictional dialogue between two professors, one an art historian, the other a director of a first-year writing program. They discuss reasons that students might want to pay full tuition and living costs to a four-year university when commuter schools, online programs, and MOOCs are becoming more available. They conclude that the four-year,

on-site university is particularly good at fostering within students “critical capacities. Habits of mind. Being curious, reflective, imaginative. Appreciating a wide range of ideas, traditions, ways of thinking, ways of being in the world” (p. 336). However, this cannot be done through traditional lecture approaches. Instead, the classroom must include all of the indicators of engagement mentioned above, as well as “the negotiation of revisions in students' drafts, the attempt to enact a constructivist ideology of development, with more time actively scaffolding new knowledge” (p. 337) through one-on-one instruction, as well as providing students agency in their writing, and helping them see how certain kinds of writing may be relevant to the futures that they see themselves occupying. With these principles, it is possible to begin thinking about “about ... students' experiences and the level of their engagement” (p. 341) and not blame students for a lack of engagement. In this contemporary piece, the teacher plays a definite role in fostering engagement, interest, and motivation to learn through a particular disposition, helping students to be imaginative and creative while helping them to understand the rules of writing within the disciplines that they hope to become a part of. It is not difficult to see parallels between this contemporary address and the works of Perrin (1947) and Pollock (1948), all who speak about the writing teacher's role in coaching students in social conventions of writing, keeping writing lively for students, and acting, generally, as initiators, inductors, and mentors into the writing field for students.

In the conversation between Anson's (2013) fictional educators, the writing director suggests that writing studies—not to mention the college campus as we recognize it—cannot survive “if we keep doing the same old same old—the tired lectures,

the boring assignments, the lack of attention to students' development" (p. 337). However, as the analysis in this chapter shows, it is exactly what this hypothetical professor advocates that is the "same old same old." Since the early 1940s, the same criteria that are now identified markers of student engagement are replete in pedagogical discussions within composition. Even during a time when current-traditional rhetoric reigned, a time supposedly bereft of pedagogical considerations, we see a discussion almost identical to the discussion now, based on factors that are now generally be considered best practices in composition pedagogy. We see that student engagement, though perhaps named differently, has existed for approximately eighty years in composition studies, far before Bean (2005) articulated its underlying principles. In short, we have been previously engaged with engagement, building a pedagogy around those tenets that are engaging. If this is the case, and if student engagement still takes a prominent role in composition studies, it means that assignments, attitudes, and pedagogical strategies that may be considered progressive are, in fact, the same old same old. The implication: if we have criticized the past for using unsound pedagogy, if we have accused instructors of writing of narrowly conceiving teaching and learning, if we acknowledge that past practices have not produced the type of student-writing subject that we may hope for—then we must say the same of contemporary practices in composition, as the practices and rationales behind both the past and the present are nearly identical.

### **Student Engagement Moving Forward**

Student engagement is a term that, although problematized for its loose definitions and unclear meanings (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Christenson, Reschly & Wylie

2012; Fredericks et al., 2004; Quin, 2017; Trowler, 2010), has been generally regarded as a recent, student-centered, perhaps even virtuous force in education. An examination of our history, however, shows that student engagement may be none of these things: it has operated under a different name for approximately 80 years; it exists to meet national, governmental, and military needs/desires rather than those of the students that it targets; it allows for new kinds of surveillance and exclusion on the part of instructors. This genealogical project effectively flips the idea of student engagement on its head. A theory of student engagement, seen from this perspective, does virtually nothing for the education of the student or to further the students' goals, and everything for the creation of a kind of student subject, the concept of which exists within academic and political desires. Engagement may still engage the student, and it may seem that the concept of student engagement bends the teacher, the curriculum, even the academic institution to the benefit of the student; to a degree, perhaps it does. However, while engaging, it also entangles the student within a network of discourses and desires that will unabashedly bend the student any which way for its/their own purposes.

But engagement is here, and it is a popular idea in educational and composition studies. What, then, should we do with this term? In light of the information presented in this genealogy, how should we come to understand student engagement? Despite the bleak paragraph above, we must not be too hasty in criticism. Engagement is certainly productive in that it allows instructors to produce a certain kind of subject. The fact that this occurs is neither necessarily good nor bad. Under a pedagogy of engagement, students may be able to complete college more easily. Studies suggest that under a model of engagement, students are less likely to drop out of school (Astin, 1999; Christenson,



Reschly, & Wylie 2008; Nguyen, 2011) and it has been suggested that student engagement is a useful model to employ when working with minority students (Kuh et al., 2006; Quaye & Harper; Zhang & Kelly, 2011). Engagement may be criticized in the same way that Foucault criticized hospitals, prisons, asylums, etc., but these institutions are now embedded into the fabric of most Western societies, and they serve a purpose that many agree is needed, despite motivations and practices that may, upon closer examination, seem to be dark or manipulative.

Perhaps one direction, then, is to suggest a new form of student engagement that has only been hinted at by engagement scholars, for instance Mann (2001) and Lester and Harris (2015), who take a post-structural approach to engaging students, considering the student as an historical subject. This evolving understanding of engagement would encompass behavior, cognition, and affect, as well as motivation and interest, and as well as acknowledge some of the more hidden implications and consequences that come with the concept of engagement. We might thus employ the term “subjective engagement” to better capture what is happening when employing the construct of student engagement to guide writing practices. In this case, we would acknowledge that engagement is not strictly student-centric—that being engaging requires surveillance of students, as well as the manipulation of students into particular kinds of subjects. In fact, critical/cultural approaches to composition already acknowledge the latter (to an extent), a process which Berlin (1996) has referred to as liberation. However, critical approaches to composition generally imply that this is in the students’ best interest, rather than addressing the fact that the subject which teachers attempt to mold comes, itself, from a place of political desires and ideology (Fulkerson, 2005). A subjective engagement would confront itself,

as both potentially productive and dangerous, as helpful to students but also ideologically driven.

Even as we build a theory of student engagements based on student subjectivity, this must be done with caution for two reasons. First, it is difficult to account for individual subjectivities. The pedagogy of interest was developed around broad statements about student interests: students are interested in writing about themselves; they are interested in politics; they are interested in practical application of skills. A theory of subjective engagement would suggest that to effectively be engaging, each student must be known and must be educated on an absolutely individual basis. This would require surveillance techniques that surpass what is likely for any teacher to achieve, and further would require a teacher to occupy a pastoral and disciplinary role so exaggerated that the teacher would have to learn literally every aspect of each students' life. Then, each assignment would need to be tailored to each student, to speak to that particular student's interests. Certainly, this model may still include critical thinking, personal writing, and groupwork, but the combination of these elements would have to be tailored in a predictive way, a way that would lead to the transformation of a student into a particular kind of writing subject. All of this requires more calculation and work than an instructor of writing could produce. Second, as Alcorn (2002), Berlin (1996), and Rickert (2007) note, subjectivities are not so easily engaged even when a teacher attempts to employ engagement. A subjectivity, comprised of one's historical makeup, cannot be superficially and simply changed into a different subject. Subjects are imbued with strongly held beliefs which can be next to immovable, and there is always a (likely)

potential for resistance on the part of those who are being apprehended by new discourses.

But what if we were to do away with the term “student engagement”? Despite its prevalence in education and composition studies, it certainly does not occupy quite the same place that hospitals and prisons do in the western world, and although its principles have existed for some time, the term itself is a relatively recent invention. Can we move away from it, or shall we say, move beyond it? This is not to suggest that we forego every practice that was once an indicator of engagement. It does suggest a reframing of those practices. Perhaps we need not be as concerned as we seem to be with forging a behavioral, cognitive, or affective link between students and their work. Perhaps students may elect to guide their coursework more than we currently allow, determining what kinds of assignments will be relevant to them, perhaps even letting them self-select a course of study in conjunction with a mentor that helps them to determine such a course. In this way, students become responsible for their own engagement (if we choose to call it that), and while a kind of surveillance must play out in this scenario, it will not be the instructor’s job to survey through course assignments. Further, if engagement actually contributes to the construction of kinds of subjects, perhaps moving beyond engagement would place some degree of agency back into students’ hands, allowing them to engage in greater self-fashioning. Of course, such a move may change the dynamic of the university altogether. It could be students under a model other than engagement would not be compelled to learn in traditional institutional settings, and thus there would have to be more internships or apprenticeships. I suspect that in such environments, engagement looks very different—depending on the kind of internship, engagement may not even be

the core concern. As students are given more agency in an educational world outside of engagement, they may opt for online work or even free tutorials, perhaps even legitimately authentic learning experiences, completely sans the college environment. Whatever the case, engagement has existed in some form for at least 80 years, and it difficult to imagine the university without it—but perhaps now is a time to engage our imaginations and see what we may produce.

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