Chapter 9
Disrupting Disruption: Invitational Pedagogy as a Response to Student Resistance

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ABSTRACT
As educators look for productive ways to encourage students to disrupt their deeply held beliefs, they often turn toward liberatory pedagogies. Such pedagogical practices, however, often provoke student resistance to what is seen as attempts at indoctrination to liberal politics. This chapter explores responses to student resistance, especially Kopelson’s (2003) performance of neutrality, and posits instead a pedagogical practice based in the theory of invitational rhetoric, one that asks instructors to (attempt to) relinquish their intent to persuade students. This invitational pedagogy provides a strategy to reduce nonproductive student resistance while allowing for critical inquiry within the college writing classroom.

INTRODUCTION
Early in the first chapter of her 1999 book Feeling Power: Emotions and Education, Megan Boler notes that the classroom is a space that links education and parenting, explaining that both realms are often fraught with struggles for control and autonomy, struggles that many educators label as resistance. In fact, taking the parent-teacher analogy further, Boler argues that sometimes students “may resist the educator’s suggestions, no matter what that suggestion is,” simply (although it is hardly simple) to assert some form of power. The “parental cliché, ‘Do what I say because I know what’s best for you,’” she believes, “is in part an invitation for the young person to rebel and say ‘No, I’ll decide what’s best for me!’” (p. 4). In other words, Boler reads a teacher’s assertion of authority as an invitation for student resistance.
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It is difficult to imagine inviting student resistance in this way, at least consciously. Many educators would say that they encourage disagreement, but this particular form of resistance—disagreeing solely to refuse agreement—seems less welcome. And yet, this sort of resistance can be quite common, especially in classrooms in which students are asked to interrogate their preconceived notions, deeply held beliefs, or adherence to dominant ideological values. In this chapter, I will begin by briefly discussing forms of resistance within the context of critical or liberatory pedagogies, especially within college composition classrooms. Next, I will analyze Kopelson’s notion of a “performance of neutrality” as one response to student resistance, exploring reasons for an attempt at teacher neutrality and the problems with this performative pedagogy. I will then offer communications scholars Foss and Griffin’s (1995) proposal for invitational rhetoric as a more productive theory on which to base pedagogical practice, particularly when attempting to interrogate dominant cultural ideologies. Finally, I will connect what I call an invitational pedagogy to Boler’s notion of a “pedagogy of discomfort” (1995), suggesting that while emotional discomfort is inevitable and even productive, an invitational pedagogy can reduce resistance sometimes sparked by feelings of threat and keep open the lines of communication. In brief, this chapter asks that we disrupt our own ideas of disruptive pedagogies, arguing that sometimes the most radical pedagogy is one that neither directly challenges students, nor performs neutrality, but instead attempts to avoid an intent to persuade in favor of an invitation to understanding.

BACKGROUND

The issue of student resistance in the classroom has garnered a surfeit of responses, in part due to the slippery nature of the term “resistance” itself. Resistance to authority can connote positively, as is the case in much resistance theory, based largely on Freire’s landmark work Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2003/1970) in which Freire details his literacy work in Latin America as a form of resistance against an oppressive social structure. Proponents of critical composition pedagogies (also often termed liberatory, emancipatory, or radical pedagogies), primarily drawing on the work of scholars such as Freire, Giroux (1983, 1988), and Shor (1980), also see resistance as productive. Bizzell (1991), hooks (1994), Kennedy (1999), and Pratt (1991), for example, write about resistance in terms of liberation from hegemonic structures. But, as Welsh (2001) points out, “legitimate” resistance is often imagined as students recognizing and working against dominant ideologies (p. 556-7). When students defy instructors’ efforts to unveil the false consciousness under which the students are assumed to be operating, however, such resistance is deemed less productive (or, more optimistically, simply a step toward more legitimate resistance of hegemony).

None of this is to say that liberatory or radical pedagogies are inherently problematic. Indeed, I am attracted toward their primary goals. I cannot but hope that one result of a university education is a student’s heightened ability—and even desire—to challenge his or her deeply held beliefs. There are, however, a number of teacher-scholars who reject such approaches, particularly within the composition classroom. Critics of liberatory pedagogies have long lamented what they see as attempts at indoctrination in such classrooms—a troubling form of persuasion in which students feel pressured to adopt the politics or viewpoints of the instructor. Perhaps the most (in)famous of such critiques is Hairston’s (1992) scathing characterization of radical pedagogy as one that “puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the students” (p. 180). Fulkerson (2005), too,