

1-1-2002

## Response to Comment on "Ghosts: Liberal Education and Negotiated Authority"

Gwen Gorzelsky

Wayne State University, [g.gorzelsky@wayne.edu](mailto:g.gorzelsky@wayne.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

[A Comment on "Ghosts: Liberal Education and Negotiated Authority"]: Responds

Gwen Gorzelsky

*College English*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Nov., 2002), pp. 214-215

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/englishfrp/14>

This Response or Comment is brought to you for free and open access by the English at DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Research Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

**GWEN GORZELSKY RESPONDS:**

**T**hanks to Donald Jones for his thoughtful, trenchant response. It's especially helpful because I'm still thinking through the questions raised in "Ghosts." In the spirit of Jones's call to negotiate authority in scholarship as well as in classrooms, I'll undertake such negotiation here.

Jones points out—rightly—that I don't show readers enough about how students can use the tools of a liberal-arts education to become better professional practitioners. Thus I don't enable "readers to experience vicariously how this negotiated authority is to be enacted." As a result, I "[remain] in an authoritarian relationship with [my] *College English* readers." While I didn't intend to establish such a relationship, I take Jones's point that my limited demonstration nonetheless does so. As he suggests, the problem is that the article makes broad theoretical claims without enough concrete demonstration. Exploring a written form that better negotiates with readers is a worthwhile project. I use this reply to attempt it, first by acknowledging Jones's key points and second by using them to offer an alternative direction for the piece. I agree with Jones's call for more explicit negotiation—and depiction of negotiation—in scholarly work. I also agree that I don't depict enough classroom negotiations for readers to see how, as instructors, we all might negotiate authority with students. As Jones says, I don't "suggest in enough detail how other students can be encouraged to equal Rox's achievement." He suggests I "could have described how I plan[ned] to revise [my]

opening classes" and persuasively uses Vincent to show how I might have done so.

My own course revisions haven't centered on using Vincent because, for various reasons, I haven't taught the same texts or assignment sequence since the course described in "Ghosts." Rather, I'm reworking my earlier critical pedagogy, as I explain in an article in progress, "Changing Direction: From Pursuing Critical Pedagogy to Reducing Teacherly Desire." I draw from it to show a negotiation of classroom authority in the spirit of Jones's suggested revision. In "Changing Direction," I begin with the resentment often generated by critical pedagogy, as an approach students rightly perceive as an effort to change them. Next, I show that *self*-revision—including a teacher's self-revision—can more effectively promote change in small systems like the classroom, depicting my shift from critical pedagogy to an approach that promotes awareness and lets students determine the results and uses of such awareness.

I explore this shift by describing a sophomore/junior-level general education writing course I'm reworking. Here I'll explicate an assignment from that course to provide the detail Jones says is needed to show how negotiated authority could actually work. Students will work in groups of four to conduct the broad historical research for this assignment, but they'll write their papers individually on different biographical subjects. The text of the assignment follows:

You've been asked to write an article for a quarterly glossy magazine that explores culture through people's in-

dividual stories. The next issue will focus on linking historical perspective with current issues. The editor has invited you to compose the lead article for this issue. She'd like the article to include two parts. Part 1 will use a biography format to explore one specific aspect of your subject's life. It will show how some key historical circumstance shaped your subject's attitudes, actions, and values about that aspect of life. (Your subject may be anyone from a family member to a well-known figure.) Part 2 will use a personal reflection format to explain how a current circumstance shaped *your* perspective on your subject. To make the article both readable and educational, you are to explore one theme in both Part 1 and Part 2. Finally, the editor would like you to combine a narrative voice, where appropriate, with an analytic voice.

Choose one historical circumstance as the subject for everyone in your group to research. That way, you can divide up some of the historical research you'll need to do for the project. Each group member should choose a different person whose life was significantly affected by this circumstance.

This assignment negotiates with students by framing itself as the kind of professional assignment they might actually encounter. In doing so, it respects their educational goals. Further, its collaborative format honors the limits on students' time and energy by allowing them to share some of the research required. In addition, the assignment poses a real-world problem for students to solve. As a result, it respects their need to see the practical application of what they are

learning. Thus it *demonstrates* the value of the work students are asked to do, rather than merely *asserting* that value, as often happens when assignments are framed in strictly academic terms. Finally, the assignment asks students to examine the role of culture in individuals' lives while leaving them to draw their own conclusions about the relative significance of social forces and individual choice.

Yet the assignment also honors a number of my instructional goals. It asks students to examine the relationships between cultural circumstances and people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors; in critical pedagogy's terms, it asks students to explore how people are formed as subjects. It prompts students to reflect on how their own experiences have shaped their perspectives on a particular topic, their biographee. It also positions students to experiment with integrating academic argument into other written forms, namely narration and reflection. Finally, it encourages students to link personal interests and attitudes with academic research and writing. Thus it respects both students' and instructor's goals.

I offer this explication to respond to Jones's call for specifics and to enact the negotiation he advocates for scholarship and teaching. While he may not himself choose the approach I've described, I hope he'll acknowledge the effort toward negotiation, both in the assignment described and in my reply to his response.

Wayne State University