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ABSTRACT

In his 1976 article, "Grammars of Style: New Options in Composition," Winston Weathers calls for a Grammar B, an alternate set of conventions which govern the construction of whole compositions. He urges compositionists to look beyond the "well-made box" and consider other options for compositional patterns and discourse structures. Fields such as feminism and cultural studies have presented viable arguments for the inclusion of other structural paradigms, or grammars, as Weathers chooses to call them. However, such alternate grammars are still not widely embraced by the field of composition. Both Lillian Bridwell-Bowles and James A. Berlin have argued for the inclusion of alternative or ordinary grammars in the classroom. Often ordinary discourse is derived from popular cultural artifacts such as print, film, television, advertising, and conversation. (TB)

A Diversity of Grammars:

Breaking the Boundaries of "The Well Made Box"

Paper presented at 1996 CCCC Convention in Milwaukee
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A Diversity of Grammars:
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In his 1976 article, "Grammars of Style: New Options in Composition," Winston Weathers calls for a "Grammar B," an alternate set of conventions which govern the construction of whole compositions. He urges compositionists to look beyond "the well-made box" and consider other options for stylistic materials, methods of organization and development, compositional patterns and discourse structures. Weathers uses the example of literary studies as a place to begin looking for new grammars, but twenty years later, composition studies has many other options which are already emerging as part of our research. Fields such as feminism and cultural studies have presented viable arguments for the inclusion of other structural paradigms, or grammars, as Weathers chooses to call them. However, such alternate grammars are still not widely embraced by the field of composition.

Feminist rhetoricians, especially Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, recognize the exclusion of not only feminist discourses such as personal and emotional writing, but also the lack of vision in academic writing which reflects a "socially and politically situated view of language and the creation of texts" (43). Bridwell-Bowles argues that we must consider such cultural differences as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. She goes on to say that by not taking these differences into account, we foster exclusion. Bridwell-Bowles writes, "Our language and our written texts represent our visions of our culture, and we need new processes and forms if we are to express ways of thinking that have been outside

the dominant culture" (43). These new processes and forms may come from personal writing such as journals, or through experimentation with language and current formal conventions. In addition, as Bridwell-Bowles notes, we can use such experimentation as a way to study and critique the social, cultural, and political implications of our accepted genres-- the ways that they maintain disciplines, institutions, and knowledge production.

Cultural studies theorists share Bridwell-Bowles' views about the social, political and cultural implications of discourse. James A. Berlin, in particular, advocates critique in the classroom. He calls for more concentration on what he terms "ordinary discourse" as a way to begin such critique. For Berlin, ordinary discourse implies those styles, dialectics and forms that students bring from their own cultural experience to the academic experience. Students must negotiate a dynamic wherein they move back and forth between the two forms of discourse (111). Often "ordinary discourse" is derived from "popular" cultural artifacts such as print, film, television, advertising, and conversation. These cultural artifacts necessitate different types of writing processes and forms which academic writing does not accomodate. However, Berlin agrees with Bridwell-Bowles that we cannot ignore these traditionally excluded forms and processes. He writes, "To refuse to engage the ideological dimensions of 'ordinary discourse,' . . . is to acquiesce to injustices that that underwrite class, race, gender, age, and other invidious distinctions" (112). We must teach students how to compose these forms as well as accepted academic ones, and we must also teach students to critique and negotiate them as part of their "lived cultures or social relations" (113). By teaching students ways to produce, negotiate and

interprete cultural artifacts, we can begin to address the differences that Bridwell-Bowles discussed as well.

Bridwell-Bowles and Berlin reaffirm Weathers' twenty year-old argument for a diversity of conventions in the composition curriculum, creating a new urgency for discourse structures that break the boundaries of "the well-made box." These scholars present alternative models of texts which can be duplicated and critiqued in the composition curriculum. Such new genres present different approaches to style, organization, development and discursive patterns; essentially they are contemporary examples of the alternate grammars Weathers describes.

Feminist and popular cultural texts reflect the multiple rhetorics that our students encounter in their daily lives and forms which create alternatives to the "well-made box." In addition, both feminist rhetorics and cultural studies theories foreground the underlying ideological and epistemological assumptions in traditional academic discourse as it is taught through much of the composition curriculum. Bringing these fields together reveals an ongoing need for the recognition of difference as a part of discourse and will hopefully extend Weathers' call, not just for a "Grammar B," but for a diversity of new grammars.

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