side by side Benjamin Franklin's admission that the word *colonize* was "bad" and Edward Rothstein's assertion in the *New York Times* that *incentivize* is "boorish bureaucratic misspeak" (25 Nov. 2000)—a stylistic concern that may seem as outdated in a few decades as Franklin's concern seems to us now. This does not mean that our stylistic preferences are unprincipled or that we should not pay attention to those of our audiences. But we are also allowed to ask about the who behind the stylistic preferences that have been canonized in authoritative guides.

We make choices all the time based on what we think is appropriate and on how we wish to present ourselves. I believe that language choice is part of the same process and that the one fundamental goal of teaching grammar and style is to give students more—and more informed—choices.

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Radical Teaching: Politics in the Classroom

To the Editor:

We appreciate that Gerald Graff made teaching a main focus at the 2008 convention and in his presidential address on "courseocentrism" (124.3 [2009]: 727–43). We agree with much in his longstanding critique of the self-enclosed academic course. But it seems strange that he casts radical teachers as leading proponents of the privatized classroom. This letter is not the place to survey how radicals are actually doing classroom work these days. We suggest that radical teachers seek to combat the structures—contemporary capitalism and the corporate academy—in which Graff locates the roots of courseocentrism.

In any case, we believe his address conflates the broad issue of noncommunicating courses with a narrower one that conservatives placed on the culture-war agenda twenty years ago: the charge that liberal and radical instructors force their views on students. On that second point, we note that between his address and the short piece he wrote for a forum on "radical teaching now" in *Radical Teacher* 83, Graff uses the word *indoctrination* six times in connection with our pedagogy, *bully* five times, and *brainwash*, *coerce*, and *immoral* once each. He infers from our phrase "helping students become radicals," which appeared in our introduction to that forum, that we see all students as latent leftists. However ill-chosen this phrase may be, we hold that the democratic teaching most radicals do helps guard *against* pedagogical authoritarianism. If students have some control over curriculum and class discussion and in making sense of the ideas and texts they encounter, they are unlikely to be or feel bullied by the instructor. The radical classroom, even when private, is not the teacher-centered one in which Graff imagines us lecturing didactically with little awareness of students' views and no acknowledgment of our own intellectual commitments. In fact, that characterization could apply better to Graff's model of debate with an opponent. On the surface, it doesn't seem like a bad idea to invite conservatives or centrists into our classrooms or to coteach with them. But without progressive teaching methods, that model just places two contesting authorities before a class of passive witnesses. In that scenario students might not feel bullied by a single instructor, but we doubt that they would feel welcomed into the academic conversation.

As for the issue of noncommunicating courses: radical teachers conceive our educational work as taking on the widest possible range of beliefs and ideas. This means looking not only beyond the "individuated" course but well beyond the liberal arts curriculum, which we take to be the narrow space of argument in which Graff wants students to engage. That restriction overrides some familiar truths about the context of learning and teaching. To wit, the United States university teaches the status quo of recent capitalism in any number of ways. The curriculum overwhelmingly underwrites it, as is plain once one looks beyond some critical teaching and curriculum within the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Consider engineering, information technology, law, accounting, agriculture, business, and so on, which occupy a lot more of

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college students' time than do arts and sciences. Consider the community college curriculum, which accommodates as much as possible the needs of regional employers, offering students preparation for jobs constituted and organized by capital. Consider also the for-profit universities, whose job-oriented project draws in a larger portion of students each year. And bear in mind that in addition to the weight of capitalist necessity that presses on higher education in these contexts, thus naturalizing so-called free markets, traditional higher education is itself distributed through markets, articulated with other markets (labor, intellectual property, science for profit, and so forth), offered to students as a way to shine up their labor power for premium sale, and endowed with social meaning chiefly in terms of strengthening the economy.

The context for our teaching, in any serious discussion of its politics and morality, must also include primary and secondary school education, whose funding and structure have been justified almost exclusively, in recent decades, by the imperatives of a skilled workforce, a larger gross domestic product, and competitiveness for United States companies in the global melee. Add to that commercial culture's shaping of consciousness, the policing of our political arena by corporations, the teachings of family and church, and it seems unnecessary for radical teachers to stage classroom debates with right-wingers.

So "teaching for social justice" (which indeed should be a chief goal of a democratic system of education, right up there with the enrichment of life and culture) requires critique, demystification, and teaching about power. We pursue these "radical activities" as ethics, job rules, and the practical needs of our students permit. We do not need a David Horowitz in the classroom to make this effort fair, so long as we are honest with students about our own commitments and respect theirs, which means creating and maintaining a classroom where our students can comfortably question our ideas. Given the weight of the teachings against social justice that our students experience, it may be quaintly optimistic to speak of "helping them become radicals." But if this phrase means helping our students understand and change the roots of the systemic problems that impact their lives, this goal is as urgent as ever.

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Reply:

The criticisms of mine that Jacqueline E. Brady and Richard M. Ohmann respond to were directed at a passage in their editors' introduction to a "Forum on Radical Teaching Now" in *Radical Teacher*. Brady and Ohmann wrote, "What are the conditions for teaching radically in 2008? For opening students' minds to left, feminist, anti-racist, and queer ideas? For stimulating them to work for egalitarian change? . . . What pedagogies have the best chance of helping students become radicals?" Brady and Ohmann now concede that their phrase "helping students become radicals" was "ill-chosen," implying as it does that they "see all students as latent leftists." Having offered the concession, however, Brady and Ohmann brush by it as if it were trivial while ignoring or dismissing what disturbed me about their comments.

Brady and Ohmann's language did seem to imply that they see all students as latent leftists and that treating students as potential political converts is a legitimate goal of teaching. Though they admit their words were ill-chosen, they don't quite reject the equation of education with political proselytizing. They might have said, "Of course Graff is right that it's unethical and unprofessional for teachers to use the power of their classroom to try to convert their students, but. . . ." Maybe they would say this—I like to think so—but they don't, leaving ambiguous to me, at least, just what the objectives of radical teaching are.

If anything, Ohmann and Brady seem to defend the pedagogical goal of helping students become radicals when they imply at the end of their letter that the only problem with their

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