Annotated Bibliography: Teacher Resource: Mental Disability Rhetorics

**Introduction**

This bibliography focuses on the pedagogical theory behind the human actor in composition settings. The document asks readers to question the rhetorical position they exist in with regard to their students.

Price, Margaret. “Introduction.” *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life,* University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp. 1-24.

**Summary**

In the introduction to her book, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life,* Price notes the existence of her work along with unpacking the specific diction she uses throughout the text. She notes that many topoi, common lines of thought that bear on an individual’s credibility in a specific rhetorical situation, interact problematically with mental disability, namely: “rationally, critically, presence, participation, resistance productivity, collegiality, security, coherence, truth, independence” (5). Price asks readers to consider what participation might look like for a student who struggles to come to class because of depression or for a student on the autism spectrum who struggles to understand social cues (5-6). The rhetorical situation members of the mental disability community find themselves in under the US higher education systems is the exigence of Price’s work. Price specifies the negative situations members of the mental disability community may encounter within the Academe. Students may need to drop out of school or may fail courses; the issues are often invisible (6). Furthermore, Price unpacks her specific use of the term “mental disability” over other terms, such as “psychosocial.” Price notes her intended audience is wide and not limited to members of the Academe.

**Pedagogical Applications**

Price introduces her central thesis: “My aim in this book is to use the activism and theory of disability studies to argue for changes to the ways that academic discourse is understood, taught, written, and evaluated. I believe that DS has much to offer academic discourse, ranging from our ways of understanding classroom practices, to our ways of gathering (at conferences and meetings), to our communication with audiences who have a stake in our work” (7). The text’s central thesis can be understood as a call for folks in the academe to consider and evaluate academic discourse with disability studies. Price notes: “… disability is popularly imagined as a medical ‘problem’ ... one that needs to be fixed (‘cured’) and is cause for sorrow and piety” (4). Educators can help their students by recognizing that disability is not a deficiency that needs to be fixed. The unique aspects of each member improve composition classrooms. Teachers may develop methods for participation that enable students with a mental disability to actively engage. Online discussion boards can be an effective means for discussion that removes some of the “perforce” aspects of oral classroom discussion.

*Keywords: Disability rhetoric; Academics, Mental Disability, Mental health, Critical Pedagogy*

Price, Margaret. “Listening to the Subject of Mental Disability: Intersections of Academe and Medical Discourses.” *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life,* University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp. 25-57.

**Summary**

Price begins this chapter by considering rhetoric, rhetoricity, and discourse. Price notes the limitations of “classical” definitions of rhetoric. She offers her own definition by stating, “rhetoric is not simply the words we speak or write or sign, nor is it simply what we look like or sound like. It is who we are, and beyond that, it is *who we are allowed to be”* (27, italics hers). Thus, the issue at hand is both direr and more complicated than simply “discern available means of persuasion” (25). Price invokes Catherine Prendergast’s “rhetorical black hole,” a phenomenon where people with mental disabilities find themselves without the ability or means to operate rhetorically (26). The concept of the rhetorical black hole can extend to classroom experiences too. Students who are members of the mental disability community may be unable to rhetorically express their concerns or issues within the classroom.

**Pedagogical Applications**

Price calls to James A. Berlin’s work on four types of pedagogy: Neo-Aristotelian (Classicist), Positivists (Current-traditionalist), Neo-Platonists (Expressionists), and New Rhetoricians. Critical pedagogies, such as disability minded pedagogies, would best be described as New Rhetoricians. Price notes the first three, while maintaining distinct approaches, all understand language as a way to truth. New Rhetoricians understand that the language one uses “constructs” that person’s external world and self. Therefore, rhetorical listening is an essential pedagogical task in listening and engaging with people who may (or may not) be members of the mental disability communities. Teachers ought to be mindful of the rhetorical position of their students. Creating a mental disability minded classroom serves students who might not be aware (or able to express) the issues they experience.

*Keywords: Disability rhetoric; Academics; Mental Disability; Mental health; Critical Pedagogy*

Price, Margaret. “Ways to Move: Presence, Participation, and Resistance in Kairotic Space.” *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life,* University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp. 58-102.

**Summary**

Price unpacks her term “kairotic spaces” by reflecting on the classic rhetorical term “kairos,” which she translates as opportune or appropriate timing (60). She notes classroom discussions are one example of kairotic spaces, but the term is more expansive. She provides a set of criteria for determining kairotic spaces: “1. Real time unfolding events, 2. Impromptu communication is required or encouraged, 3. In-person contact, 4. Strong social element, and 5. High stakes” (61). Some other examples she gives are mentor and mentee meetings, academic conferences, and a work lunch. Physical presence and in-person classroom participation can cause challenges for students with some types of disabilities. A challenging aspect of these spaces is the quick pace.

**Pedagogical Applications**

Price notes that instructors' expectations about kairotic spaces can further harm students (and others in the Academe); what is true for some students is not inherently true for *all* students. Instructors should aim to be flexible about kairotic spaces — with the understanding that there is no one catch-all accommodation for kairotic spaces. Gender, sex, sexual orientation, race, class, and specific disability can all impact these spaces. Teachers ought to be mindful of the time given between questions and activities. Before asking questions about a reading giving students a moment with the text or their notes can create a better kairotic space in the classroom. Allowing time for students to review the text or notes can also benefit the overall discussion too. Being clear with instructions and the tasks for the day can aid students too.

*Keywords: Disability Rhetoric; Academics, Mental disability, Mental health, Kairotic Spaces*

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Tavistock Publications, 1972.

**Summary**

Foucault’s introduction begins with his consideration of development of method and discovery as distinct acts. Foucault uses this distinction to question the teleology, or aim, of the past. Foucault questions the epistemological notions of truth. In other words, he is questioning the ability of the “text” to disseminate truth. The implicit question raised in the introduction: “how can the written word express people’s lived truths?” Foucault notes the aim of his text: “In short, this book... it belongs to that field in which the questions of the human being consciousness, origin, and the subject emerge, intersect, mingle, and separate off” (16).

**Pedagogical Applications**

Margaret Price cites this text as she develops her argument in *Mad at School.* A deeper reading and understanding of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* will greatly aid readers in understanding the broader theory Price uses in her argument. Foucault is concerned with the rhetorical prowess of the text to demonstrate truth. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was written after Foucault’s earlier text *History and Madness*; the human actor, along with their consciousness, is a fundamental aspect of how texts are composed. Composition instructors ought to be aware of the epistemological limitations of the written word in its ability to convey truth. Composition classrooms should be full of assignments/tasks that aid students in truth-seeking with the understanding of the limitations and challenges of the written word.

*Keywords: Power dynamics; Rhetoric; Truth; Language; Literary Analysis*