

Learning to Rival

A Literate Practice
for Intercultural Inquiry

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Unwarranted narrowness of thought has long been a theme of critical rhetoric. Aristotle identified commonplaces and enthymemes as arguments which allowed rhetors to rely on unspoken and perhaps un-speakable assumptions, without revealing or examining their parochial origins. Kenneth Burke more harshly called attention to the "terministic screens" that lead to selective attention and systematic inattention. Current cultural criticism even more pejoratively targets ideology as narrowed thought that maintains the interests of the empowered classes.

On the productive side, various rhetorics have encouraged rhetors to engage in truth-seeking dialectical inquiries, to reach out to different audiences with different assumptions, to reach beyond the self-reproducing conflicts and destructions of unchanging terministic screens, and to seek novel solutions through divergent thought. Even cultural critique has been seen as the beginning of formulating new thoughts from a higher state of consciousness.

Linda Flower, Elenore Long, and Lorraine Higgins in *Learning to Rival: A Literate Practice for Intercultural Inquiry*, provide a technical means for carrying out the long-desired goal of opening minds, providing alternatives, breaking down cognitive and cultural barriers, freeing writing from congealed forms. The technique they propose, seeking rival hypotheses, "rivaling" as they call it, is eminently portable and translatable, taking on new forms as it moves from site to site, fitting the motives and needs of individuals in novel circumstances. This book explores the origin of this technique and follows it in its transformations

through multiple sites of exploration and experimentation in the classroom, in the professions, and in the community.

By experiment Flower, Long, and Higgins do not mean a controlled seeking of narrow conclusions. Rather they mean experiment as John Dewey meant it, a seeking toward new forms of life through our active and reflective intervention. By planting a means for generating multiplicity within situations, these investigators examine the power of rhetorical practice to transform the academic and public spheres. By seeing how people use the rivaling tool, Flower, Long, and Higgins discover the many things the tool is good for, and what goods flow from its use.

Their own investigation sensitizes them to the great diversity of motives and meanings within different communities. Part of the experimental way of knowing is coming to appreciate and nurture the difference enabled by the tool they share. Rivaling, they find, is a way to open up minds. But where those minds open up to is something we cannot control, nor should we want to control what people do once their minds are opened. For the world in its creativity continues to rival all our expectations. This is the wonder of pragmatist democracy, as Dewey appreciated.