



Journal of Basic Writing

Storytelling and Academic Discourse:
Including More Voices in the Conversation

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk

Bridging Literacy Practices through Storytelling,
Translanguaging, and an Ethnographic Partnership

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Cultural-Linguistic Divide in the Era of the Common Core

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Staging an Essay: Play and Playwriting
for Redirecting Habits of Mind

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for Basic Writers Using the TPCK Framework

Shoba Bandi-Rao and Mary Sepp

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Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: hopekcc@aol.com and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in about sixteen weeks.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic-writing or second-language theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing; social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory; grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in non-technical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.



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EDITORS' COLUMN

This special issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* is entirely dedicated to the proceedings of the 2014 Language, Culture, and Society conference which was held at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. The theme of the conference, storytelling and academic discourse, sought to generate conversations around questions that are fundamental for writing instruction: How do we conceive academic discourse? How do our conceptions inform our teaching practices? Are academic discourse and storytelling compatible? If so, what are some points of contact, and how can they benefit our students? How do we take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students as we bring academic discourse—and possibly storytelling—into our classrooms?

While these questions are certainly not new, they are all the more relevant today, given the exponential increase of linguistic diversity that characterizes current demographic trends and given the persistence of a shocking achievement gap. As more and more students find themselves struggling with the demands of college writing—and in too many cases, dropping out as a result of this struggle—it is important for basic writing scholars and practitioners to question traditional conceptions of academic discourse and their implications for access to higher education. The articles in this special issue take storytelling as the starting point for devising innovative theoretical and pedagogical strategies for making academic discourse more inclusive.

In “Storytelling and Academic Discourse: Including More Voices in the Conversation,” keynote speaker Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk contextualizes the theme of this special issue in a series of conversations that have led to theoretical milestones within composition studies. In keeping with the theme, Mlynarczyk’s contextualization is embedded in a story she tells about how discussions of “personal, narrative writing” versus “so-called academic discourse” have shaped her career as scholar, writing instructor, and textbook author. Mlynarczyk became “fascinated with the stories students tell” in the 1980’s, after she began teaching ESL at CUNY’s Hunter College. This fascination led her to question the “false dichotomy” between “personal and academic writing” since the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, she reexamined “influential debates about the relative merits of ‘personal’ or ‘academic’ writing between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae.” This reexamination led to her conviction—which she still holds today—“that students cannot write a strong, convincing argument unless they have first grappled with the subject in a deeply personal way.” In this special issue,

she argues compellingly that blurring the boundaries between storytelling and academic discourse is consistent with a translingual approach to writing instruction “that insists on viewing language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized” (304).

My article, “Bridging Literacy Practices through Storytelling, Translanguaging and an Ethnographic Partnership,” delves further into the notion that “language differences and fluidities are resources” for the acquisition of academic discourse. I tell the story of a learning community I designed to increase success rates among Spanish-speaking ESL students at Bronx Community College by linking an ESL course to a Spanish composition course for native speakers. In addition to teaching the ESL course, I participated in the Spanish composition class as a language learner and formed an “ethnographic partnership with his students” based on storytelling to explore how notions of effective academic discourse at Bronx Community College vary from the notions students had to abide by in the secondary schools they attended in the Dominican Republic. This exploration placed students in the position of experts within academic discourse, made them aware of clashing discursive conventions they need to navigate as transnational citizens, and allowed me and the Spanish instructor to refine our translingual pedagogical alliance.

In “Storytelling as Academic Discourse: Bridging the Cultural-Linguistic Divide in the Era of the Common Core,” Ching Ching Lin takes on the “narrow construct of academic discourse” promoted by this educational policy which “prioritizes argument as ‘the most important skill of incoming students’” and often dismisses storytelling as an inferior form of academic discourse.” Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, she argues that in order to move away from a “false dichotomy” between narrative and argumentative writing, a “dialogized notion of storytelling” should be seen as a “generic template for academic discourse that is flexible enough to represent ‘various points of view, conceptual horizons’ . . . [and] ‘expressive accents.’” To illustrate this point, Lin discusses how she, as a high school teacher serving a multilingual student population, was able to engage her students in a dialogized storytelling process that actually helped them meet the learning outcomes mandated by the Common Core curriculum.

In “Staging an Essay: Play and Playwriting for Redirecting Habits of Mind,” David Ellis and Megan Murtha look at storytelling and academic discourse from the perspective of playwriting. Building on cutting-edge findings from neuroscience, they argue that an excessive emphasis on certain rhetorical mechanics of traditional academic discourse, such as the five para-

graph essay and the use of drills, creates a “mental set effect” which interferes with “the acquisition of the critical thinking needed for college writing.” In order to break this “mental set effect,” they have found it productive to scaffold the process of writing an academic essay with playwriting exercises where abstract ideas are turned into fictional characters which students put in conversation with each other. Using excerpts from their students’ writing, Ellis and Murtha show us that by imagining and embodying ideas through characters in dialogue, students “conceptualize a more cohesive understanding” of the ideas they grapple with in their essays. By doing so, students are able to enter the “parlor” of academic discourse, which, drawing on Burke, Ellis and Murtha conceive as “an imagined physical space where embodied writers or ideas can be placed in conversation with each other.

Shoba Bandi-Rao and Mary Sepp’s article, “Designing a Digital Story Assignment for Basic Writers Using the TPCCK Framework,” brings issues of technology and multimodality into the conversations of this special issue. These authors propose digital stories as a way to bridge the divide between academic discourse and storytelling because in this day and age, a “monomodal approach” to academic literacy, “that emphasizes printed text, reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary,” is not sufficient to meet “students’ discursive needs,” which involve multimodal literacies. In addition, they show that digital stories can be particularly effective in helping basic writers engage with academic discourse by promoting self-efficacy and self-directed learning. Their discussion of how they incorporated a digital storytelling assignment into a basic writing curriculum reveals “multimedia resources catered to the needs of students through the use of images, storyboards, and recorded narratives” and that “these tasks helped students describe with details, organize and develop ideas, and review their writing mindfully.”

While the strategies each article presents for making academic discourse more inclusive vary greatly in terms of theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical approaches, a common thread runs through all the arguments. In order to increase success among basic writers, scholars, instructors, and policy makers need to move away from narrow conceptions of academic discourse that do not reflect the sociolinguistic complexity of our current student population. Whether it be through translanguaging, dialogism, playwriting, or digital storytelling, these articles make the following point loud and clear: far from being incommensurable, storytelling and academic discourse are complementary for creating meaningful intellectual conversations that can include more non-mainstream students.

—**Andrea Parmegiani**, Guest Editor

Storytelling and Academic Discourse: Including More Voices in the Conversation

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk

ABSTRACT: In this article, Mlynarczyk traces her career-long exploration of the relationship between personal, narrative writing and so-called academic discourse. Believing that both are important for college students, particularly students placed in basic writing or ESL composition, she has come to believe that rather than viewing the two as separate modes of discourse, students need to use a “translingual” approach, cultivating “rhetorical dexterity” while they develop as college writers. As concerned teachers and scholars, the challenge is to help students learn to use storytelling appropriately as a way to strengthen their thinking and their writing inside—and outside—the academy. Far from viewing narrative as somehow inferior or subservient to academic discourse, which is often seen as more complex, the author invokes recent scholarship in evolutionary biology, which suggests that the predilection to tell stories lies at the heart of what distinguishes us as human beings. As the university becomes more diverse, it is essential to welcome more voices—and more stories—into the academic conversation.

KEYWORDS: storytelling; narrative; personal writing; academic discourse; rhetorical dexterity; translingualism

The question of the relationship between storytelling and academic discourse is one that has dominated much of my thinking, teaching, and research over the years. Although this is an issue of relevance to us as professionals seeking validation in the scholarly community, to say nothing of more tangible assets such as publication, tenure, and promotion, the discussion that follows will focus primarily on the implications of these varying modes of discourse not in our own scholarly work but for the students we teach—students in basic or ESL writing courses, community college students, first-generation college students—all of the students for whom what is commonly referred to as “academic discourse” is something of a foreign language.

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk, Professor Emerita of English at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, currently serves as Faculty Consultant to the CUNY Pipeline Program for Careers in College Teaching and Research.

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Personal and Academic Writing: A Career-Long Exploration

I first became fascinated with the stories students tell when I was working as an adjunct, teaching noncredit ESL writing courses at CUNY's Hunter College in the 1980s. The students, most of them fairly recent immigrants, had come from all over the world, and they had many stories to tell, stories originating in cultures and communities that came alive on the page as the students began to discover the power their words could have in this new language. Steven Haber, another adjunct at Hunter who had recently completed an MFA in creative writing, was also impressed by the students' stories, and we often met in the office while making copies of student writing that we valued and used in our teaching. Recognizing our shared interest, Steve and I made an appointment to meet and talk further. At the end of this conversation, Steve said, "It sounds as if we're talking about a textbook that uses student writing instead of essays by famous writers." This idea appealed to both of us, and we started to work on developing a proposal for a new kind of writing textbook.

Through a series of serendipitous events, we found a publisher who shared this vision, and we signed a contract to produce the book. The early chapters, which included the students' stories describing important people, places, and experiences in their lives, came together easily. In fact, it was difficult to decide which student essays to include since we had so many compelling pieces to choose from. But our editor at the time wasn't quite as enthusiastic as we were about how well the book was progressing. She warned, "These chapters featuring narrative writing are nice, but your book will only succeed if the later chapters, the ones focused on academic writing, are very strong. That is what teachers want. That is what they need if their students are to succeed in college."

As we talked about the need to strengthen the section of the book that we eventually called "more formal writing," the editor became interested in learning more about what writing teachers had in mind when they spoke of academic writing. She began to ask every professor she met as she traveled around the country, "What does academic writing mean to you?" Her conclusion? "Every professor knows what academic writing means, and it means something different to each of them."

At this time, I had just entered a Ph.D. program in applied linguistics at New York University, and I began to focus much of my reading and thinking on the same question, which became the subject of my first national conference presentation, "Personal and Academic Writing: A False Dichotomy?"

This talk, which I gave at the TESOL conference in San Francisco in March of 1990, was well received and evolved into my first published article, entitled “Is There a Difference Between Personal and Academic Writing?” In this article, I explored my understandings of this question based on my reading and thinking at the time, concluding that there really is a difference between what most scholars then referred to as “personal” and “academic” writing even though the two modes often merged into and supported one another. At this early stage of my career, I was inclined to agree with the nineteenth-century philosopher and psychologist, William James, who professed: “To say that all human thinking is essentially of two kinds—reasoning on the one hand, and narrative, descriptive, contemplative thinking on the other—is to say only what every reader’s experience will corroborate” (qtd. in Bruner, *Actual Minds*, xiii).

In order to illustrate how storytelling—or narrative—differs from what we usually call “academic discourse,” I have included the beginnings of two student essays that exemplify some of these differences. Both essays deal with the same general topic—the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1977. The first essay is a narrative written by one of the ESL students I taught at Hunter College in the early 1980s. When I gave the open-ended assignment to write an essay describing an experience that was important in your life, Xiao Mei Sun knew immediately what she wanted to write about—her family’s experience during the Cultural Revolution. The resulting essay, entitled “Exodus,” begins with Mei sitting in her apartment in Brooklyn after her immigration to the United States. The keys she describes in the first paragraph are the keys to her family’s apartment in Nanjing, China.

I was standing by my desk looking for a book. When I pulled out the last drawer and searched down to the bottom of it, a small box appeared in front of me. I opened it and saw a set of keys inside. They looked familiar, but at the same time they were so strange. Holding the keys, some long-locked memories flooded into my mind, as if they had been released by the keys. I sank slowly into the chair. It was raining outside. The room was so quiet that I could hear the rain pattering on the windowpanes. My thoughts returned to another rainy day.

There were several knocks on my bedroom door. “Wake up, my dear,” Mother’s soft voice floated into my ears. “We need time to get everything done.” I opened my eyes and muttered some

sound to let her know I was awake. It was dim outside, though it was past daybreak. I turned my body; the hard “bed” beneath suddenly reminded me that I was sleeping on the floor. The only thing between me and the hard, cold boards was a thin blanket. I looked around the empty room and remembered that the day before we had sent most of our furniture and belongings to the Nanjing Railway Station, where they would be transferred to Paoying County—a poor, rural place where we were being forced to go. I heard Mother say something again and realized that I had to get up immediately. Suddenly, I loved the “bed” so much that I didn’t want to leave. It seemed softer and warmer than the bed I used to sleep in. I clung to the floor as tears rolled down my face. I wished I could sleep there for the rest of my life instead of going to that strange place. I sighed deeply, wiped my face, and got up.¹ (Mlynarczyk and Haber 42)

The excerpt that appears below explores the same topic using a different approach. This is the first paragraph of a student presentation (written by a group of students working together) on the topic of “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” and posted on the Internet:

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a ten-year political campaign with objectives to revolutionize china with the cultural and political ideologies of Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong launched the Great Leap Forward in 1959, which was a complete disaster. To help bring China out of the economic depression caused by the Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong began the Cultural Revolution in Beijing, China and it lasted from 1966-1976. (The Cultural Revolution) The goal of the Cultural Revolution was to steer China away from the lines of the Soviet model and into its own form of government. (The Cultural Revolution) Mao thus ultimately adopted four goals for the Cultural Revolution. They were to replace his designated successors with leaders more faithful to his current thinking; To rectify the Chinese Communist Party; To provide China’s youths with a revolutionary experience and lastly, to achieve some specific policy changes so as to make the educational, health care, and cultural systems less elitist (The Cultural Revolution). During this time, thousands were killed and millions of people were imprisoned or exiled. In our presentation, we will discuss how the Cultural Revolution began, the advantages, disadvantages and

the effects it had on China during this time. ("Essay on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution")

I suspect that most readers would share my sense that these two pieces of writing are quite different in style and content. If we had to choose which is more compelling, we would probably choose the first, Xiao Mei Sun's personal account of her family's experiences during the Cultural Revolution. But if we were asked which is closer to what is meant by "academic writing," we would be more likely to choose the second, the expository account of the reasons for and goals of this period in Chinese history.

In my early attempts to articulate the differences between these different approaches to writing, the narrative, or storytelling, approach of the first excerpt and the more formal, expository style of the second, the scholar who was most influential in my thinking was the psychologist Jerome Bruner. In his 1986 book *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner distinguishes two basic and different approaches to thinking and writing. The first, which he calls the "narrative mode," attempts to be evocative and delights in particulars. Not surprisingly, the typical example of this mode is, according to Bruner, the story. The second type, which he calls the "logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode," seeks general truths and attempts to convince others. This mode is exemplified by "the argument," whether in speech or writing.

The approach to writing that has traditionally been preferred in the academy is the second type, Bruner's "logico-scientific mode." This preference is based on the idea, still commonly accepted in many disciplines even in this postmodern, poststructuralist era, that knowledge is generated through logical reasoning or empirical studies of phenomena that can be directly observed and measured rather than apprehended through intuition or introspection. Thus, the kind of writing that has been privileged in the academy is writing that attempts to articulate general truths and to support these truths with evidence that can be shared.

Despite the preference for more distanced, less personal approaches to writing, the question of the role of narrative writing, of storytelling, within the academy, particularly its role within composition courses, has refused to go away. In the early 2000s, I found myself being drawn back into these questions, and I began by re-examining the influential debates about the relative merits of "personal" or "academic" writing between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae, which took place in the late 1980s and 1990s. In these conversations, which were eventually published (Elbow, "Being"; Bartholomae, "Writing"), the two scholars defended very different approaches

to first-year composition, with Elbow favoring “personal, expressive” writing based on the student’s own experiences and Bartholomae arguing for more traditional “academic” writing based on critical reading of key texts. Considering these debates from the perspective of someone who had taught developmental writing for many years, I understood Bartholomae’s point that teachers need to help students demystify the kinds of writing they are asked to do in college. But I also felt that Elbow’s type of expressive writing had an important role to play in helping students acquire the kind of academic discourse that Bartholomae valued.

The research I had done for my dissertation and subsequent book on the reflective journal writing of multilingual students (Mlynarczyk, *Conversations*) supported my belief that teachers of students who have not previously developed proficiency in academic discourse need to help students bridge the gap between their own stories and opinions and the more distanced type of writing required for many college courses. One way of doing this is to ask students to explore their ideas first in an ungraded reflective journal before moving on to write about these ideas in the more distanced form often required for college courses. In concluding my 2006 article, I wrote, “I believe that students cannot write a strong and convincing argument unless they have first grappled with their subject in a deeply personal way” (“Personal and Academic” 23). This is a belief I still hold today and one I will explore in the next section.

Where We Are Now

Despite the dramatic changes in technology and, hence, in what counts as writing in the past twenty-five years, the type of writing that is expected and rewarded in most college courses is still closer to the traditional academic argument than to a narrative approach based on the telling of stories. The Common Core curriculum standards in English and mathematics, which were released in 2010 and adopted by a majority of states, not only reflect this continuing preference but may be contributing to it in significant ways. For example, even in the early grades, the Common Core emphasizes the need to increase the amount of *nonfiction* reading students are asked to do, which is seen by the developers of these standards as more “complex” than fiction. To be in compliance with the new standards, teachers from kindergarten through fifth grade need to achieve “a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading” (National Governors Association). In writing, as well as reading, the emphasis is shifting away from personal or

narrative writing and toward argumentation. The section of the Common Core website entitled “Key Shifts in English Language Arts” articulates the reasons for this change:

Frequently, forms of writing in K–12 have drawn heavily from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college, career, and life. Though the standards still expect narrative writing throughout the grades, they also expect a command of sequence and detail that are essential for effective argumentative and informative writing. The standards’ focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice. (National Governors Association)

This increased emphasis on argumentation and “evidence-based writing” seems ironic in today’s world where personal experience and personal stories are constantly celebrated in social media and on reality TV. What does it mean for us in the academy that much (in some cases, most) of the writing students have done before they arrived on our campuses consisted of texting and composing on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms?

Perhaps this is just another manifestation of the disconnect that students experience between their own private worlds and the world of the university with its preference for an “academic” approach. Of course, some students arrive at college comfortable with and proficient in academic discourse. They often come from affluent and well-educated families and have attended academically oriented high schools where this type of language was the norm for school assignments. But for many, perhaps for most students placed in basic writing or ESL courses, academic discourse can feel like a foreign language. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron capture the sense of the divide between the language of the school (in this case, the language of the French secondary school and university) and the language of students’ homes, a disconnect that can have a chilling effect on students:

The divorce between the language of the family and the language of school only serves to reinforce the feeling that the education system belongs to another world, and that what teachers have to say has nothing to do with daily life because spoken in a language which makes it unreal. . . . This rift extends across all dimensions of life, from central areas of interest to the very words in which these are discussed; and it can be lived only with a sense of dualism or in

a state of resigned submission to being excluded. (9)

Although these words were written in 1965, they still ring true fifty years later. Most students who are placed in basic writing or ESL courses at the college level have come to view their home languages as a liability. During my years teaching basic and ESL writing at the City University of New York, I usually asked students to fill out a brief questionnaire on the first day of class. One of the questions was “What is your home language?” Every semester a surprising number of students answered this question with the phrase “broken English.” Clearly, these students had gotten the message that their home language, their mother tongue, was “broken,” not at all suitable for use in the academy. If this attitude finds support in the courses that students take, if teachers insist that students begin by writing only “academic discourse,” that they should never use the word “I” in an essay, that their stories and their languages are not appropriate in college, they will get a very clear and discouraging message: Your language is not valued here, and your stories don’t belong.

Laura Rendón, a woman who worked her way up from poverty through community college, eventually earning a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and embarking on a successful career in academia (she is currently a professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Texas, San Antonio), emphasizes how important it is for students to find a connection between their stories, their languages, their worlds, and the world of the academy. In an article entitled “From the Barrio to the Academy: Revelations of a Mexican American ‘Scholarship Girl,’ ” she writes:

What connects me to my past is what gives me my identity—my command of the Spanish language, the focus of my research, my old friends, and my heritage. What makes Laura Rendón an individual is not only who she is now but what happened to her along the way. What gives me strength is my newfound ability to trust and follow my own natural style and to encourage others to do the same. (60)

How can we encourage our students to develop this kind of trust in their own language and their natural style, which was so important to Laura Rendón, as they work to become more comfortable and more successful in the work, the words, and the world of the academy?

While we certainly cannot change the academy's longstanding preference for the more distanced approach to language commonly known as academic discourse, we, as professors of developmental or ESL courses, professors in community colleges, professors teaching first-generation college students, can set a different tone and control the expectations for language use within our own classrooms. Working with others, we can encourage programs and curricula that view the students' home languages as valuable resources rather than liabilities.

How Do We Take into Account the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity of Our Students as We Bring Academic Discourse into Our Classrooms?

This question, from the Call for Proposals for the 2014 Conference on Language, Society, and Culture at Bronx Community College on which this special issue of *JBW* is based, is a crucial one for the readers of this journal. Instead of viewing students' home discourses as liabilities that need to be "corrected," we can welcome and value them as important resources, a form of enrichment, that will help the students in their quest to acquire a further education and to become contributors to the making of knowledge within the academy. This attitude of openness toward linguistic difference is in keeping with a recently articulated concept in composition studies that argues for "translingualism," an approach that recognizes, even celebrates, the vast variety of forms and functions of language. In a 2011 opinion piece in *College English*, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur advocate a translingual approach that "insists on viewing language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized" (304). While the scholars who advocate translingualism do not specifically discuss storytelling and its possible place in the academy, the model they advocate—the traffic model of literacy as opposed to the archipelago model (Horner 12-16)—is one that recognizes the fluidity of languages and the ways in which language use cannot be easily compartmentalized as, for example, business English as opposed to the English of engineering or the English of psychology (Horner 14-15). In essence, a translingual approach to language is one that minimizes or even ignores an either/or approach to storytelling vs. "academic discourse." This view of language as a living, ever-changing reality is one that eliminates the need to prescribe a particular form of discourse for our students.

Rather than teaching “academic discourse” as a discrete and omnipresent language form used in colleges and universities, we need to help students recognize the flexibility of language, even within the academy, and the constant need to adapt language use to specific times and places. In other words, we need to help students develop “rhetorical dexterity” as Shannon Carter has theorized the task: “The ultimate goal of rhetorical dexterity is to develop the ability to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one” (80).

Working with students in basic writing courses, Carter begins by having students analyze the language practices of a community they know well—for example, high school football or a specific religious community—and then apply these principles as they come to understand the unspoken rules of new discourse communities including the ones they will encounter in the university. This view of discourse and literacy as fluid and adaptable rather than as “autonomous” and unchanging (Street 1-2) offers opportunities for students to draw upon the literacies and languages they bring with them into the classroom—including the resources of their oral language—as they and we “reimagine” what academic discourse could become (Carter 151).

An excellent example of welcoming students’ linguistic and cultural diversity as resources as they work to become more proficient in the languages of the academy is the learning community program at Bronx Community College described by Andrea Parmegiani in his article in this issue. Parmegiani and his colleagues were uncomfortable basing their new program on the idea that these students, all of whom shared Spanish as their home language, were somehow lacking in basic skills and prior knowledge. Instead, they reasoned, “Taking the time to understand the knowledge and skills students bring to our classrooms and how they differ from the skills and knowledge that are required to succeed academically is a much more productive starting place to begin to remove systemic barriers to academic success” (28).

The learning community (Gabelnick et al.; Hanson and Heller) they ultimately designed valued the students’ home discourses in a tangible way. In addition to taking the required, non-credit ESL composition course (taught by Parmegiani), students took a first-year seminar (also taught by Parmegiani), and a Spanish class for native speakers (taught by a professor from the modern languages department but attended by Parmegiani). This was a conscious way of valuing the students’ home language while at the same time strengthening their academic competence in Spanish. The fact

that the ESL composition professor sat in on the Spanish course—a course in which his students’ skills were superior to his own—sent a powerful message. Your home language is welcome in the academy, and there are areas where students, even those placed in developmental courses, know more than their professors. This program design was based on a strong belief that learning should be “bidirectional”; students learn from teachers, but teachers must also learn from their students. Although Parmegiani himself is multilingual, he was not as proficient in Spanish as his students were. Thus, he explains: “In order to participate [in the Spanish course] I had to turn to my students as experts in order to fill *my* lexical gaps” (43).

Another benefit of having the ESL professor attend the Spanish class was that it helped him to empathize with his students’ feelings of inadequacy when faced with an unfamiliar language and cultural expectations. He describes this experience as “Discursive loss,” which increased his empathy for his students’ feelings when faced with academic English in the college classroom. Gradually, Parmegiani’s competence in Spanish increased, leading to other feelings, which he openly discussed with his students: “Exposing both my vulnerability and my capability as a language learner was crucial for building trust and creating a safe space where students were comfortable enough to bring their own struggle with language and literacy into our Academic Discourse” (44). This type of “bidirectionality” between students and their professors is all too rare in the academy, but it is a powerful force for learning and one that is likely to enhance students’ academic success, an undeniable feature of this educational experiment at Bronx Community College.

The idea of validating and rewarding students for their proficiency in other languages and dialects is not a new one. In order to achieve a Ph.D., scholars are required to demonstrate proficiency in other languages. In today’s global economy, knowledge of other languages is increasingly valued in the upper echelons of society. Upwardly mobile parents are enrolling their children in bilingual preschools and language immersion programs (Pergament) and seeking out nannies who agree to speak another language to their children (Anderson). For these families, speaking an additional language is seen as a valuable form of cultural and linguistic capital. But students classified as basic writers are often made to feel ashamed of their Spanish dominance or their “broken English.” This is destructive to learning as Gloria Anzaldúa observes when she states, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language I cannot take pride in myself” (59). It’s time that we, in the academy, find

ways to value and validate as resources the many languages and dialects that students—all students—bring with them to the university.

What Are Some Points of Contact Between Stories and Academic Discourse, and How Can These Connections Benefit Our Students?

This question, also from the Call for Proposals for the 2014 Conference on Language, Society, and Culture, assumes that stories, like other languages and dialects, can be important resources within the academy, an assumption I completely accept. Thus, it becomes important to ask how we can help students use storytelling effectively in their writing. Before I begin to address this question, however, I would like to mention a problem we might encounter as we encourage students to explore points of contact between storytelling and academic discourse. Carmen Kynard, a well-known composition scholar and a professor at CUNY's John Jay College, observed that the black female students in her classes were reluctant to write about topics that made them “feel,” in other words, topics that caused them to experience deep emotion. Writing about these subjects for school made them uncomfortable, and they resisted doing it. They seemed to have learned only too well the lesson that these types of stories do not belong in the academy, that strong emotion should not be a part of academic discourse. Kynard has worked hard, using innovative pedagogical approaches, to break through this resistance in order to find a way to help her students see that some of our most powerful thinking and writing happens when we allow ourselves to “feel.” However, as we work to encourage storytelling in the academy, we need to constantly remind ourselves to be sensitive to students’ possible discomfort with sharing personal and emotion-filled stories in our classes.

We also need to remember that taking advantage of these points of contact between storytelling and academic discourse does not happen without a great deal of thought and care on the part of the teacher and a great deal of effort on the part of the students. Thus, I share Amy Robillard’s concern that writing teachers need to foster “a more complex pedagogy of the narrative” (91), one that “make[s] explicit the dependence of analysis and argument on narrative, and vice versa” (91).

This kind of interweaving of narrative and analysis is encouraged in the Bronx Community College learning community program mentioned earlier. In this program, literacy narratives “blur the boundaries between what is personal and what is academic by allowing students to join criti-

cal conversations about language, identity, structural power relations, and agency while examining their life experience in conjunction with other texts” (Parmegiani 37). Key to this process is the careful way the work is scaffolded and socially constructed within the learning community as students explore their own histories of literacy and relate them to the kinds of literacy they are encountering in college.

A similar kind of work with literacy narratives is being done at Our Lady of the Lake University, an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) in San Antonio, Texas. This program, which received the 2014 Innovation Award for the Teaching of Basic Writing from the Council on Basic Writing,² replaced the previous non-credit ESL course, which used a skills and drill approach in which students “progressed” from sentence to paragraph to essay, with a new approach in which students take regular credit-bearing composition while receiving extra support. The curriculum begins with an autobiographical literacy narrative and includes a series of writings that grow out of this original assignment, culminating in a persuasive essay in which students explore solutions to problems they have uncovered in earlier assignments. As with the program at Bronx Community College and Shannon Carter’s program to promote rhetorical dexterity, this one helps students “gain a better understanding of the discourse communities to which [they] belong, the literacies [they] own, and the ways [they] can use that knowledge to succeed as [they] experience new college/department/degree discourse communities” (Zepeda). By beginning with the stories of the students’ own experiences with literacy, programs such as these help to ground students in what they know best, their own experiences, as they move toward the more distanced analysis that is so often rewarded in the academy.

It is not only students who can benefit from such approaches. Mike Rose, an influential scholar in the field of basic writing with a background in cognitive psychology, has long sensed the power of stories when writing in and for the academy. In his widely read book *Lives on the Boundary*, he weaves together stories of specific students, including his earlier self, in analyzing the problems that underprepared students face, and sometimes overcome, in their attempts to succeed in the university. In a blog post written in 2014, Rose comments on his intentional use of vignettes—stories—in his scholarly writing. In explicating topics related to education, sociology, and psychology, Rose blends the more distanced analysis of the scientist with a more “anthropological” description of the people affected by the social phenomena he is discussing. He explains his writing process: “. . . along with the use of multiple disciplines, I attempt to blend genres, to weave together

analysis with narrative, descriptive detail with exposition.” Having used this method for many years, Rose is convinced that stories are a crucial part of his own style of academic discourse, strengthening the power of his words substantially:

These vignettes are set within a discussion of the history and sociology of underpreparation in higher education. I think that embedding such vignettes into an examination of the conditions that lead to them gives a conceptually more substantial account of underpreparation than would vignette or disciplinary analysis alone. (“Writing about Inequality”)

Surely, Mike Rose has come to an acceptable answer in his own writing to the question concerning the “points of contact between stories and academic discourse.” The possibilities for encouraging students to develop similar “points of contact” in their writing are practically unlimited in this digital age.

One scholar who advocates encouraging students to use digital resources in the composition classroom is Adam Banks, the 2015 chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. In *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, Banks not only extols the importance of digital composing but also illuminates the crucial role of storytelling in black rhetorical traditions. Scholars of composition and rhetoric have been aware of these traditions at least since 1977, when Geneva Smitherman published *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Banks has updated this discussion for an age where the ancient art of storytelling has been enriched by access to digital media. According to Banks, the griots, or storytellers, have long held a position of importance in African and African American rhetorical traditions. He describes them as

the figures who are entrusted to tell the story and, through the practices they employ in recording, preserving, sharing, and even masking the knowledge of those stories, useful figures on which to base an African American rhetoric for a multimedia age that might ensure that new realities do not erase those “ancient rivers” that Langston Hughes reminds us connect young people to elders and ancestors and the Mississippi to the Euphrates, Nile, and Congo. (17)

Recent research in fields such as neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary biology supports Banks’s description of stories as “ancient rivers” connected to “elders and ancestors.” Writing in 2014, the eminent

biologist Edward O. Wilson explains that a key characteristic of human beings' evolutionary success relates to their penchant for telling stories. Humans have evolved a phenomenal memory that enables them to judge the intentions of others and to make predictions of future scenarios: "We instinctively delight in the telling of countless stories about others, cast as players upon our own inner stage" (22). Viewed from this perspective, it is not difficult to understand the deep-seated appeal of today's social media. According to Wilson, the sharp social intelligence of human beings developed as the cerebral cortex evolved:

Gossip, celebrity worship, biographies, novels, war stories, and sports are the stuff of modern culture because a state of intense, even obsessive concentration on others has always enhanced survival of individuals and groups. We are devoted to stories because that is how the mind works—a never-ending wandering through past scenarios and through alternative scenarios of the future. (43)

From an evolutionary perspective, stories are at the very heart of what distinguishes us as human beings. We think in stories. Thus, it would be misguided to attempt to banish them from academic discourse. Writing in a 2003 special issue of *College English* focused on "The Personal in Academic Writing," Amy Robillard defends the use of stories in academic discourse. Focusing particularly on the ways in which stories can help students articulate their relationship to social class, she asks writing teachers to "make more explicit in our own classrooms the ways that narrative and the more privileged genres of analysis and argument interanimate one another" (77). As concerned teachers and scholars, the challenge is to help students learn to use storytelling appropriately as a way to strengthen their thinking and their writing inside—and outside—the academy.

Coda: A Final Word on the Need for Stories in the Academy

In concluding, I find myself going back to Jerome Bruner, the scholar whose work on narrative was influential in my early investigations of storytelling and academic discourse. At the end of his 2003 book entitled *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, Bruner explains that he has grown increasingly dissatisfied with his previously articulated comparative schema in which he categorized discourse as either "paradigmatic or logico-scientific" (Bruner's term for academic discourse) or "narrative." Although he still uses these terms, he states that he no longer sees the two as diametrically opposed.

Instead, his interest has shifted to a new question: “How can we translate from one world of mind to the other?” (101). He asserts that it’s essential to use storytelling—narrative—*along with* academic discourse and cautions, “it is when we lose sight of the two in league that our lives narrow” (102).

Bruner goes on to praise the groundbreaking work of Shirley Brice Heath, who, in her 1983 book, *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, documented how the students in the two different communities she studied (the middle-class white children of “Roadville” and the lower-class black children of “Trackton”) used language. With the very different discourses that were encouraged in their families and communities—the fanciful, storytelling approach of the black children and the more restrained, factual approach of the white children—they were actually creating different versions of reality. Bruner suggests that “we come to conceive of a ‘real world’ in a manner that fits the stories we tell about it” (103). What is important, according to Bruner, is encouraging a diversity of stories: “The tyranny of the single story surely led our forebears to guarantee freedom of expression. . . . Let many stories bloom” (103).

Our students are invaluable sources of this kind of diversity. And it will enrich not only their lives but our institutions as well if we encourage them to tell these stories in the university as ways of supporting and enlarging the scope of academic discourse.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. This essay by Xiao Mei Sun was awarded a Bedford Prize in Student Writing. It was later reprinted in *In Own Words* (Mlynarczyk and Haber, 2005).
2. The Innovation Award is presented annually by the Council on Basic Writing (CBW) to a program judged to improve the success of basic writing students through new and effective practices that have the potential to be disseminated to other institutions.

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Bridging Literacy Practices through Storytelling, Translanguaging, and an Ethnographic Partnership: A Case Study of Dominican Students at Bronx Community College

Andrea Parmegiani

ABSTRACT: This article reports on my attempt to use storytelling as an entry point into academic discourse in a learning community designed to meet the learning needs of ESL students who recently emigrated from the Dominican Republic. Based on research suggesting a correlation between academic success in a second language and first language literacy skills, this learning community linked an ESL course to a Spanish composition course for native speakers. Storytelling constituted the cornerstone of an ethnographic partnership established in order to create a “place for students’ self” within Academic Discourse and to inform the translanguing pedagogical alliance formed with the Spanish instructor. I will discuss the impact this approach has had on students’ success indicators and ways in which it can be implemented in other teaching contexts.

KEYWORDS: translanguaging; bilingualism; academic literacy; learning communities; personal writing.

INTRODUCTION

Providing access to higher education for students who are disadvantaged by structural inequality is a fundamental concern of Basic Writing theory and practice. Addressing this concern entails opening up the ownership of dominant languages, dialects, and Discourses¹ whose mastery is a precondition for socio-economic empowerment. The conversations in this special issues seek to question our conceptions of Academic Discourse and explore the possibility of using storytelling to create points of entry into

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this dominant Discourse for students who tend to be excluded by it. This article focuses on the following question: How do we take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students as we use storytelling to create these points of entry?

This question will be explored through a case study of Dominican students taking English and Spanish academic literacy development courses in a learning community at Bronx Community College (BCC), and whose average GPAs and retention rates turned out to be exceptionally high. While some of this exploration will deal specifically with the learning needs of Spanish-speaking ESL students, especially recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic, the pedagogical implications have relevance for all basic writing students who are at risk of being excluded from higher education because of a gap between their home language and literacy practices and Academic Discourse.

Given the attacks that neoliberal forces have been carrying out against “basic writing spaces” (Lamos 5-6) and bilingual education (Macias), notwithstanding the explosion of linguistic diversity that characterizes current demographic trends in the U.S., we must create pedagogical spaces where basic writers can join Academic Discourse using all of their linguistic resources. The number of Americans who speak a language other than English at home totals nearly 60 million, accounting for more than 20% of the population, and this number will continue to increase. Among these Americans, Spanish is used as a home language by 62% of the population, and the presence of Spanish speakers in the U.S. will continue to grow (Macias 40). In light of these demographic trends, it should not be difficult to see that increasing access to higher education among language minority students, especially Spanish speakers, is an issue of national concern. Unfortunately, Hispanic students—especially recent immigrants who arrive in the U.S. as teenagers—are at a high risk of school failure (Fry “The Higher”). Graduation and retention rates at Bronx Community College, a Hispanic Serving Institution (Santiago), reflect this sad national trend.

As a language and literacy scholar and an ESL instructor, I felt it was important to create a special “basic writing space” dedicated to the learning needs of such a big part of BCC’s student population by formally inviting their mother tongue into Academic Discourse. Writing instructors, especially those who teach at Hispanic Serving Institutions, have a special responsibility to find ways to make sure “Hispanic students’ cultural and ethnolinguistic identities figure prominently in the construction of the writing classroom community” because instructors who do not “aspire to understand stu-

dents' worldviews, behaviors, and ethics can easily thwart students' efforts to succeed academically" (Mendez Newman 17). I will add that especially in the case of Latin@ students who are not native English speakers, writing instructors should also aspire to let their students' first language and literacy practice figure prominently in the writing classroom for two very good reasons. First of all, language plays a central role in the way human beings define themselves and make sense of the world around them (Weedon; Parmegiani "The Dis(ownership)"). It is impossible for me to fathom how basic writers—especially ESL students—could feel that there is room for them in an academic Discursive community if the languages, dialects, and literacies that shape their identity constructions and give expression to their world views are not welcomed in the classroom. Secondly, pedagogically speaking, students whose lives are characterized by complex linguistic repertoires—including monolingual basic writers who need to straddle significant dialectal variation—must draw on all of their linguistic resources in order to succeed academically. This process of "accessing different linguistic features of what are described as autonomous languages in order to maximize communicative potential" will be referred to as "translanguaging" in my argument, as it is often done in composition and language and literacy studies (Garcia 8; Garcia, Flores, and Woodley; Canagarajah "Codemeshing").

This article reports on my attempt to create a basic writing space to meet the special learning needs for Latin@ ESL students by linking one of my ESL courses to a Spanish composition course offered by the department of Modern Languages. The link was created within the framework of a learning community (Hanson and Heller). I argue that in order to understand students' "worldviews, behavior, and ethics" (Mendez Newman), and by so doing, increase access to Academic Discourse, the learning process needs to be bidirectional. In other words, students need to learn from teachers, but teachers need to learn from their students too. This pedagogical principle gave life to an ethnographic partnership based on a storytelling process that focused on students' literacy narratives. This ethnographic partnership informed the integrated pedagogical strategies in the learning community and gave life to a translingual Academic Discourse in which students participated simultaneously as experts and learners. This approach has had a strong positive impact on students' success indicators and has important implications for basic writing theory and practice.

DOMINICAN STUDENTS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Dominicans are the fourth largest Latino group nationwide and the largest in New York City (US Census Bureau). Unfortunately, educational achievement among Dominicans is among the lowest of any Latin group in the country (Utakis and Pita). In 2000 only 51% of Dominicans in the United States who were twenty-five years old or older had earned a high school diploma; only 10.6% graduated from college (Hernandez and Rivera-Batiz).

There are several reasons why Dominican students face particularly strong challenges while pursuing an education in the United States. Reports published by non-government organizations highlight that the educational system in the Dominican Republic is “deeply inequitable, and it reproduces an exclusionary social order” characterized by low levels of academic literacy development among students who are not from a privileged socio-economic background (UNDP 177). Consequently, many Dominican students who enroll at BCC are basic writers in their first language (Parmegiani and Utakis). Once in the United States, Dominicans are often “relegated to under-resourced and underperforming schools, resulting in part from residential segregation” (Bartlett and Garcia 46). In addition, like other Latino groups and immigrants from developing countries, Dominican students often have to deal with challenges related to poverty (Fry and Gonzales), interrupted education (Fry “The Higher”), family separation (Bartlett and Garcia 157), and the expanded financial, family, and educational responsibilities that come with starting a new life in a new country (Bartlett and Garcia).

According to Dulce Maria Gray, an additional explanation for high student failure rates among Dominicans is their resistance to integration: “Most arrive with the belief that their life in the States is temporary; that as soon as they become financially stable, as soon as their children finish school, they will return to the island” (182). While such a sweeping generalization about Dominican students’ alleged lack of desire to integrate is obviously problematic, it is important to keep in mind that many Dominicans in the United States keep strong ties with their country of origin, and this has important implications for schooling, especially in terms of language and literacy. A study carried out at Bronx Community College by Sharon Utakis and Marianne Pita to investigate the Dominican students’ identities at this institution and their implications for ESL writing instruction has confirmed the “transnational” character of this population. In his monograph about Dominican communities in Washington Heights, a neighborhood adjacent to Bronx Community College where many of the students who attend this

institution reside, Jorge Duany defined the term “transnational” as describing a lifestyle “characterized by a constant flow of people in both directions, a dual sense of identity, ambivalent attachment to two nations, and a far-flung network of kinship and friendship across state frontiers “(2).

These studies imply that in order to function within this “far-flung network of kinship and friendship across state frontiers,” Dominican students must not be put in “subtractive schooling” situations,” where academic achievement comes at the cost of a loss of their native language, Discourses, and other fundamental aspects of their identity (Valenzuela; Bartlett and Garcia). In other words, effective schooling for Dominican students must allow them to retain their proficiency in Spanish and in the “ways of thinking” (Gee) that shape linguistic exchanges in their communities.

SUCCESS RATES AT BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Bronx Community College is an open-admission, Hispanic Serving Institution (Santiago) which is part of the City University of New York (CUNY). In Fall 2012, Latin@s made up 61% of the student body (CUNY Office of Institutional Research). About 40% of first-time students report that English is not their native language. While it is important to highlight that not every Latin@ student is an ESL speaker, the vast majority of ESL students at BCC speak Spanish as their first language. About 20% of all the students enrolled at BCC were born in the Dominican Republic; in addition, a significant number of U.S. born students are of Dominican descent (BCC Office of Institutional Research, personal communication).

Most of BCC’s incoming students begin their college career with a strong desire to succeed. According to a survey carried out in 2007, 91% of first time BCC students indicated that they intended to earn at least a bachelor’s degree. In most cases, however, a harsh reality gets in the way of students’ intentions. One-year retention rates for the entering class of Fall 2008 was at 65%; only 20% of the entering class of Fall 2003 completed their associate degree within six years (BCC Office of Institutional Research, “Making” 1). Obviously, graduation and retention rates need to be drastically improved if BCC is to live up to its mission, which is encapsulated by its official slogan: “transforming lives.”

To this end, in 2010, Bronx Community College’s Executive Council identified the need to improve the freshmen year experience as a strategic priority for increasing success rates. As part of this priority, the college carried out a self-study in collaboration with the John Gardner Foundations of

Excellence to identify the most important obstacles that stand in the way of students' completion of their degree (BCC Office of Institutional Research, "Freshman"). Among other factors, the findings that emerged from this self-study highlighted the role of "student dispositions" in creating barriers to academic success. The executive summary made the following statements about students' dispositions:

- a. Students are not well prepared for college success (they lack basic skills, prior knowledge, and effective study skills)
- b. Students are unfamiliar with college expectations, what is required to be successful in college, and how to navigate academic affairs, policies and procedures of the college. Some may have negative views of education and do not trust teachers.
- c. Students have multiple and competing roles (parent, worker, caregiver and financial responsibilities) (Freshman 1).

This study is certainly a step in the right direction, but while there is no doubt that Bronx Community College students often face enormous challenges in meeting academic demands, I am uncomfortable with the idea that they categorically "lack basic skills and prior knowledge." Taking the time to understand the knowledge and skills students bring to our classrooms and how they differ from the skills and knowledge that are required to succeed academically is a much more productive starting place for removing systemic barriers to academic success. Given the ethnolinguistic demographic of the student body, it seemed to me that creating a learning community based on the skills and knowledge that Spanish-speaking ESL students bring to our classrooms could have a strong impact on success indicators at the college level.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE, TRANSLANGUAGING, AND DOMINICAN STUDENTS

According to James Gee, "Discourses 'with a capital D'" involve speech acts but also values and cultural norms which determine whether or not an utterance is considered appropriate in a given sociolinguistic situation.

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes A Discourse, then, is composed of ways of talking, listening (often,

too, reading and writing), acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects in particular settings at specific times, so as to display a particular social identity. Discourses create social positions. (Gee 127-28)

Applying this notion of Discourse to the situation many Dominican students and basic writers in general face in trying to meet college demands points to the fact that their challenges are indeed related not only to second language acquisition, but also to the need to navigate divergent—and sometimes clashing—Discursive practices. The few studies available on the way literacy is conceived in Dominican secondary schools show that expectations around Academic Discourse differ radically in the United States.

What counts as literacy, and which literacy practices are considered, varies situationally and relationally. Thus, a student who has gone to school in the Dominican Republic for many years has experienced a way of communicating ‘in and around writing’ (Hornberg 1990) that is profoundly different from what is expected in the United States. . . . It is not just that English differs from Spanish . . . the language and literacy practices in which students engage vary in the two societies and the two school systems. (Bartlett and Garcia 120)

For example, Leslie Bartlett and Ofelia Garcia have found that U.S. schools put more emphasis “on the development and expression of personal opinion” as opposed to a focus on “specific recounting of factual information” in the Dominican Republic. Also, in the United States, “teachers expect much more independent reading than students normally did in the previous schools” and to consult multiple sources, which students often did not have the opportunity to do in a developing country where access to educational resources is limited (121). Eliane Rubinstein-Avila’s case study confirms that Dominican students might experience a sense of loss when asked to use writing to take a position on an issue and to defend it by using supporting evidence because these are writing tasks that they were not trained to do while developing academic literacy in their first language (584). Linda Watkins-Goffman and Victor Cummings’ study of a Spanish Composition course at the *Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo* found that teaching practices were founded on the assumption that academic literacy consisted of a set of decontextualized skills such as “learning the use of accents, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, and syllabification” (338). According to Judy Kalman and Brian Street, this approach to reading and

writing “as neutral, objective skills that are learned through a progression of ordered exercises and then transferable to any situation” has dominated official discourses on literacy in Latin America “for decades, if not more” (1). (See also Hace de Yunen and Montenegro).

For Gee, it would be almost impossible for an immigrant student who attended a poorly funded school in the Dominican Republic to master Academic Discourse. For Gee, “Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society.” Access to dominant Discourses, “which can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status)” (132), is only granted on the basis of birth into the right set of socio-economic circumstances. Dominant groups “apply rather constantly tests of the fluency of the Discourses in which their power is symbolized . . . to exclude non-natives.” Deliberate attempts to learn a Discourse that a person has not been socialized into from birth can lead, at best, “to partial acquisition” which marginalizes (146). Gee envisions only three possible subject positions vis-à-vis Discourse: “insiders” (people who have had full access to the Discourse by virtue of birth), “outsiders” (people who are excluded completely from the Discourse), and “colonized” (people who occupy a marginal position because they can only claim a partial command of the Discourse) (155). In such a scheme, because recently immigrated Dominican students could never pass “the nativity test,” they could never hope to harness the power that comes with the appropriation of Academic Discourse in English. According to Gee’s logic, the same conclusion could be drawn about basic writers who are native English speakers whose dialects and “ways of thinking” diverge from Standard English and the ways of thinking that are considered acceptable within Academic Discourse.

I do not want to deny that, for many basic writers, taking ownership of Academic Discourse can be a daunting process, especially when this process entails mastering a second, third, or fourth language. Nevertheless, I find the “birth right paradigm” problematic as the only way for theorizing how dominant languages and/or dialects come to be owned (Parmegiani “Reconceptualizing” 360; Parmegiani and Rudwick “Isi-Zulu” 112). Like Lisa Delpit, I find Gee’s assumption that dominant Discourses are simply beyond the reach of basic writers problematic because it can lead to a “dangerous kind of determinism as flagrant as that espoused by the geneticists: Instead of being locked into your place by your genes, you are now locked into a lower class status by your Discourse.” Delpit could not have put it more cogently: “members of society need to access dominant Discourses in order to have economic power” (300). According to her, the way out of this “dangerous

kind of determinism” is to consider the countless examples of human beings who have been able to improve the socio-economic circumstances into which they were born, thanks to their successful acquisition of Academic Discourse.

A second point Delpit finds problematic about Gee’s assumptions is the notion that, especially for women and minorities, the acquisition of a dominant Discourse is likely to require the adoption of “values that deny their primary identities.” I do not doubt that non-mainstream students can face pressure to assimilate as they seek to appropriate Academic Discourse, and that this pressure can have a detrimental effect on the learning process. Nevertheless, as Delpit points out, human beings have the ability to straddle a multitude of Discourses as they create subject positions. Echoing warnings that have been given against “subtractive schooling” for Latin@ students (Valenzuela; Bartlett and Garcia), Delpit points out that the goal of Academic Literacy instruction should not be “to eliminate students’ home languages, but rather to add other voices and Discourses to their repertoires.” To this end, we need a translanguaging approach which places at the center of the learning process those “naturally occurring” language practices which are often hidden “behind the back of the teachers in class” (Cangarajah “Co-demeshing” 401).

Avoiding subtractive schooling through a translanguaging approach is very important for Dominican students, whose transnational lifestyle makes it particularly difficult to be put in a situation where they “feel they have to choose between Spanish and English, being Dominican and being American” (Utakis and Pita 122). Rather than presenting their home language, dialects, and ways of thinking as an impediment to their mastery of English and Academic Discourse, we need to welcome “the complex discursive practices of all bilinguals” (Garcia 53) and use them as a resource to allow students “to perform their learning – reading, writing, listening, discussing, taking notes, writing reports and essays, taking exams – by drawing on their entire linguistic repertoires.” The idea is certainly not to restrict students’ access to dominant languages, dialects, and Discourses by confining them to what they already know, but rather to increase this access by *building* on what they already know.

Finally, before applying Gee’s notion of Discourse to writing instruction, it must be pointed out that students are not as passive with respect to dominant Discourses as his theory implies; on the contrary, students have the ability to challenge and reinvent dominant Discourses as agents, and use them for liberatory purposes. Civil rights movement leaders did this (Delpit 300), and so did prominent Latin@ academics such as Victor Villan-

ueva and Gloria Anzaldua. Again, there is a lot a translingual approach can do to facilitate this process of Discursive appropriation (Parmegiani "The Power" 79). In Delpit's words, to unfold this process it is essential to validate students' home languages and Discourses which are so "vital to [students'] perception of self and sense of community connectedness." Also, if a clash between home and Academic Discourse does indeed occur, teachers must be able to "recognize this conflict" and diffuse it by making sure the Academic Discourse of the classroom "contains within it a place for the students' self" (301). There is a lot translanguageing can do to reduce "the risk of alienation at school by incorporating language and cultural references familiar to language minority students" (Garcia, Flores, and Woodley 52). And there is a lot personal storytelling can do to identify and diffuse Discursive tensions by examining how ways of thinking and using language clash and how these clashes can be implicated in power relations.

CREATING A PLACE FOR "STUDENTS' SELF" WITHIN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE THROUGH STORYTELLING

The debate about whether it is appropriate to make room for the self within Academic Discourse is certainly not a new one within composition studies and basic writing theory, and it peaked with the public conversations between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae which took place in the nine-ties. Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk revisited this debate in 2006 arguing that the boundaries between academic and expressive writing are not clear cut. Far from being mutually exclusive, they actually both play a crucial role in the production of *meaningful* Academic Discourse. According to Mlynarczyk, "it doesn't seem feasible" for basic writers and ESL students to join a Discursive community which mystifies them "without using the primary resource they bring with them to college—their own expressive language, language that is close to the self Students need to reflect on their reading using personal, expressive language in order to acquire genuine academic discourse and not just a pale imitation of their professor's language" (13).

Amy Robillard's call for the need to include students' personal narratives in the composition classroom is particularly relevant for this article. Responding to composition scholars who have criticized the use of expressive writing for turning attention away from pressing issues of race, class, and gender, she argues that in a basic writing classroom, creating "a place for the students' self" through their personal narratives is quintessentially *political*. According to Robillard, in a classroom context which is basically "a middle

class enterprise” (Bloom) and where teachers “have been trained to marginalize the kinds of narrative and descriptive writing tasks which resonate with the working class experience and to valorize the abstract, analytical writing tasks at which the professional /managerial class students excel” (Peckham 273), giving non-mainstream students the opportunity to bring their life experiences into Academic Discourse creates “class consciousness” by allowing students to understand “why things happen” as they “create their own meanings from their own histories.” Similarly, Anne-Marie Hall and Christopher Minnix argue that, far from being politically neutral, “the literacy narratives of our students can challenge power and grant access to Academic Discourse” (64).

Shifting the focus from politics to pedagogy, I would like to argue that creating “a place for the student’s self” within Academic Discourse is an imperative for promoting success rates among basic writers and ESL students. First of all, inviting students to bring their life experience into a prestigious Discourse whose mastery is correlated with socio-economic empowerment is a way to validate who they are and the knowledge they bring to the classroom. Research points to the fact that this is crucial to promote success among students who tend to be marginalized by Academic Discourse because of their racial, social, and/or linguistic background. For Delpit, it is precisely a teacher’s belief in his or her students that can make it possible for non-mainstream students to “transcend the circumstances into which they were born” (298) and achieve what for Gee is almost impossible. But in order to do so, teachers “must saturate the dominant Discourse with new meanings, must wrest from it a place for the glorification of their students” (Delpit 298). Peter Rondinone’s and Mike Rose’s literacy narratives are cases in point which are confirmed by well-known studies on the relationship between teachers’ attitudes towards students’ home languages, dialects, literacies, and learning outcomes (Au; Gregory and Williams).

A good starting point for saturating the dominant Discourse with spaces that welcome Dominican students’ selves in all their cultural complexity is Ellen Cushman, Barbier Stuart, Catherine Mazak, and Robert Petrone’s call to “draw on students’ experiences and backgrounds as resources in order to develop meaningful and congruent pedagogical practices that will foster academic achievement” (205). Geneva Gay argues that in order to bridge the gap between home and school language and literacy practices, “culturally responsive teaching” must use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (29). (See also Morrel; Perez.)

Within the context of a “culturally responsive” pedagogy, inviting students’ personal narratives into Academic Discourse is not only a way to validate who they are, but also an ethnographic tool for instructors to understand the “cultural knowledge” and “prior experiences” upon which learning must be built. This sort of knowledge is crucial for promoting the acquisition of Academic Discourse among Latin@ students.

According to Utakis and Pita, “writing teachers have a special responsibility to understand the Dominican experience” to promote academic success in learning institutions that serve large Dominican populations (120); similarly, Beatrice Mendez Newman argues that “Hispanic students’ cultural and ethnolinguistic identities should feature prominently in the construction of the writing classroom, *regardless of the instructor’s ethnicity*” (my emphasis, 19). I will add that ethno-linguistic differences between the instructor and the students open up precious opportunities for creating ethnographic partnerships that reduce power/knowledge differentials by making the learning process bidirectional. Not only do students learn from their teachers, but teachers learn from their students too.

Forming an ethnographic partnership with my students based on bidirectional learning was a precondition for achieving the pedagogical outcomes I envisioned for the learning community. Fulfilling my aspiration to “understand students’ worldviews, behaviors, and ethics” (Mendez Newman 17) and to “saturate the Dominant Discourse with new meanings” (Delpit), could not have possibly happened without learning from my students, who obviously know more about their world views, languages, literacies, and Discourses than I do.

INVITING THE MOTHER TONGUE INTO A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Learning communities, as defined by David Hanson and Jacob Heller, can be described as “small groups of students who take clusters of courses together with both the faculty and the students teaching and learning together.” Clusters share a common theme and a range of integrated activities “to provide greater coherence, develop a deeper understanding . . . and encourage student-student, student-faculty and faculty-faculty interactions” (1). There is plenty of evidence that learning communities have a positive impact on students’ success rates, especially among basic writers; studies have shown that “students’ socio-economic status had less effect on their achievement gains in schools with collaborative teacher communities”

(McLaughlin and Talbert 9).

Learning communities have been offered at Bronx Community College under different configurations for several years, but until Fall 2013 there were no clusters linking Spanish classes for native speakers to ESL courses. I felt this type of cluster could potentially improve success rates dramatically among Spanish speaking ESL students (Parmegiani and Utakis). First of all, study after study has demonstrated that support for students' home languages leads to higher educational achievement in a second language (August and Shanahan; Genesee; Lindholm-Leary). Secondly, as we have seen, reports compiled by non-governmental organizations suggest that many students who arrive at Bronx Community College from the Dominican Republic are basic writers in their first language, and hence they are in great need of Spanish Academic literacy development. We have also seen that there is a wide gap between the rhetorical expectations that shape Academic Discourse in U.S. colleges and in the schools students attended in their countries of origin. Hence, as Bartlett and Garcia recommend, I felt it was important to give Spanish-speaking students an opportunity "to develop academic literacy practices in Spanish that are similar to the academic literacy practices in U.S. schools" (22). Last but not least, given the central role language plays in identity construction, it was clear to me that creating a nurturing pedagogical space to develop ESL students' mother tongue would be a powerful way to create a space for students' self within Academic Discourse.

The learning community cluster in Fall 2013 comprised an advanced ESL class that I taught (ESL 03), a Spanish class for native Speakers (SPN 122) taught by Dr. Alicia Bralove-Ramirez of the Department of Modern Languages, and a First-Year Seminar (FYS), an extended college orientation course for freshmen students, which I also taught. In addition to teaching ESL 03 and FYS, I sat in SPN 122 as a participant observer and language learner.

ESL 03 is the third course in the remedial sequence for non-native English speakers, and while its focus is preparing students for academic writing, all language skills are developed. If students pass the exit examination, which consists of an essay question they have to develop by making connections between their personal experience and a book they read in the course, they have two more levels of remedial instruction: English 09 and English 02. Some ESL 03 students are able to skip one of the subsequent levels if they perform exceptionally well in ESL 03 or ENG 09.

FYS courses were first introduced at BCC in Spring 2012 to improve success indicators (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno). Because this initiative turned out to be successful (Parmegiani "Inviting"), and because

courses that “orient students to U.S. school communities” are particularly helpful for ESL students (Bartlett and Garcia 9), I decided to include it in the learning community cluster.

FORMING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTNERSHIP

As I designed the learning community as a “basic writing space” (Lamos 5-6) for Spanish speaking students, it was clear to me that in addition to inviting the mother tongue, I had to form an ethnographic partnership with my students in order to achieve the pedagogical outcomes I envisioned. As we have seen, “aspiring to understand students’ worldviews, behaviors, and ethics” (Mendez Newman 17) is crucial for helping basic writers take ownership of Academic Discourse. There was no way this aspiration could have been fulfilled without creating a bidirectional learning process which put my students in the position of experts on their own Discursive practices.

It was also clear to me that my participation in the Spanish composition course as a language learner would bring more depth to the ethnographic partnership I was seeking to establish. First of all, putting myself in my students’ shoes by trying to engage with Academic Discourse in a language that I am not fully proficient in provided me with precious insights into the challenges students face in their struggle to master Academic Discourse in English. In addition, I felt that putting myself in the role of a language learner vis-à-vis my students, whose command of Spanish was infinitely stronger than mine, would amplify the bidirectionality of the learning process. Also, showing an interest in students’ first language was a way to show interest in who they are and their cultural heritage, which again, is a factor that was found to be crucial for including basic writers into Academic Discourse. Finally, my participation in the Spanish course and my frequent meetings with the Spanish instructor allowed for a greater level of curricular integration that would not have been possible had I not watched the learning process unfold in the Spanish class right in front of my eyes.

THE ROLE OF LITERACY NARRATIVES

A process of personal storytelling was essential for the ethnographic partnership. Given my need to learn as much as possible about the linguistic resources of my students, a lot of this process consisted of literacy narratives, or a form of storytelling “that foregrounds issues of language acquisition and literacy” (Eldred and Mortensen 513). Literacy narratives can take the shape of formal, published autobiographies, but they can also emerge

through “ordinary people’s conversations about their daily lives. . . and in the classroom talk and writing of the students” (Soliday 512). Literacy narratives constitute an ideal point of entry into Academic Discourse for ESL students and basic writers in general for several reasons. In Hall and Minnix’s words, they can constitute a “wedge to create a space for our students in the world of academic literacies” (60). They create a place for the students’ self by recognizing the value of their languages, literacies, and life experiences within the dominant Discourse. They blur the boundaries between what is personal and what is academic by allowing students to join critical conversations about language, identity, structural power relations and agency while examining their life experience in conjunction with other texts. They provide teachers and students with opportunities to examine the different Discursive conventions that students must be able to navigate as they move across different sociolinguistic domains. Not only can this examination help students master aspects of Academic Discourse they find baffling, but it can also help them build the sort of “rhetorical dexterity” (Carter) they need in order to feel like it is possible to acquire the dominant Discourse without having to renounce fundamental aspects of their identities.

The storytelling process that led to these narratives consisted mainly of informal conversations about how students were expected to read and write in their countries of origin (in most cases, the Dominican Republic), and how they are expected to read and write at Bronx Community College. In the ESL course, these conversations were prompted by questions I posed to the class based on what I had learned from the literature and from the stories my previous students had shared with me. For example, I asked questions such as “What happened the first time you had to write an essay in the U.S?” “Are there things your professors expect you to do here that your teachers in your home country would not agree with?” “Besides having to use a second language, are there other challenges you face when you have to write an essay for your professors at BCC?” Students answered these questions in groups and through informal writing assignments in which personal narratives were often used to support and challenge different positions. In the FYS course, students delved deeper into this storytelling process with the help of two peer-mentors who guided them through a series of reading, writing, and speaking activities. As part of these activities, students had to use their own literacy narratives to validate, challenge, or problematize some claims made by Bartlett and Garcia about how Academic Discourse is taught in the Dominican Republic. These activities culminated in a metacognitive journal assignment in which students had to write a multi-paragraph reflection on

whether they experienced different expectations around Academic Discourse as they moved from the secondary schools they attended in their country of origin to Bronx Community College. Students had the opportunity to draw on this journal assignment for their final FYS project, which was a letter addressed to a future FYS student in which graduating FYS students discussed the impact this seminar had on their college experience. The following literacy narrative excerpts were taken from the writing assignments described above.

STUDENTS' VOICES: NAVIGATING DIVERGENT ACADEMIC DISCOURSES THROUGH LITERACY NARRATIVES

The literacy narratives of my students confirm what the literature suggests: regardless of the language of instruction, the ways of using language that are considered appropriate for Academic Discourse in students' countries of origin differ significantly from what is expected of them in U.S. colleges. First of all, thesis driven expository essays, which are arguably the cornerstone of college level Academic Discourse in the U.S., did not feature prominently in students' development of academic literacy in their mother tongue. In the stories they shared, several students recalled a sense of total loss when they were asked to write an essay for their English placement test, and the reasons for this went beyond the fact that the essay in question had to be written in a language students were not proficient in.

"In the Dominican Republic we didn't do essays"

One student illustrated the idea that students' difficulty with academic writing in English go beyond second language acquisition with the following story.

When I first came to the States, I didn't know English. The first time I came to BCC they told me that I had to do an essay. I didn't even know what an essay was. Fortunately, the teacher knew Spanish and told me that an essay is an "ensayo," but I told her that I didn't even know how to do an "ensayo."

In a similar narrative, another student made the point that for some Spanish speaking ESL students, understanding what is expected from them when they are told to "write an essay" entails much more than translating one word from English to Spanish:

In the United States, the professors usually give essays every week. In the Dominican Republic they don't do that. This reminds me of my first day of class. The professor gave us an essay about discrimination. I was confused because I didn't know what is an essay. I asked to my teacher, and she told me that an essay is the same as what Spanish people call "ensayo." However, I still didn't know how to write an essay because in the Dominican Republic teachers don't use essays.

"I copied and pasted the information I found"

The idea that "teachers don't use essays" in the Dominican Republic, of course, needs to be qualified. While many students have shared stories about how much more they are expected to write in the U.S., several of them mentioned that occasionally, they did have writing assignments in the Dominican Republic, but they were of a totally different nature: writing was used primarily as an assessment tool to check students' ability to repeat information they were expected to study, rather than as a way to use information critically to construct an argument. The following narrative illustrates this point:

In the Dominican Republic we didn't do essays, but we did something similar with a different organization. When teachers gave us a topic, in the introduction we had to explain what we were going to do and what the writing was about. To write the body, we had to find all the information we needed and then make a summary. We could use google search, copy, and paste. In the conclusion, we described everything we did.

It is hardly surprising that the same student, like many others, was completely baffled when she was accused of plagiarism at Bronx Community College after she did what she had been taught to do to produce Academic Discourse in high school.

My first essay was a disaster. I didn't know what an essay is, so I copied and pasted the information I found exactly like it was on the internet. When the teacher saw what I did, she gave me a zero. At that moment, I tried to explain to her that I didn't know how to do an essay. Then she gave the opportunity to do it again. She explained to me how to do it, and told me that to copy information is called plagiarism, and that it is penalized.

Fortunately, the teacher in question understood where the student was coming from and gave her the opportunity to redo the assignment after going over Discursive conventions that clashed with what the student had learned while developing academic literacy in her mother tongue. Other students explained that rhetorical elements that are considered fundamental for a college essay in the U.S. were simply not covered in the Spanish classes they took in high school in the Dominican Republic. Several mentioned that they did not have to use a “thesis statement,” and that expressing a personal opinion about a topic at the beginning of an essay was actually frowned upon. A student explained that:

If I was to give an essay like the ones my professors want at the BCC to one of my teachers in the Dominican Republic, they would be very surprised about my work, give me a bad grade and tell me that they don’t care about what I think.

Another student made a similar point by stating that “we didn’t have to show our critical thinking when we did research. We just had to put information like we found it.” And again, his narrative, like many others, returns to a Discursive clash around the issue of plagiarism. “Sometimes we took little pieces from the sources, and it was not a big problem, like if we did that at BCC.”

Students’ literacy narratives confirmed that the teaching of Academic Discourse in the Spanish classes students took in high school approached literacy as a set of “neutral, objective skills that are learned through a progression of ordered exercises and then transferable to any situation” (Kalman and Street 1). Several students mentioned this approach in their explanation of why they felt so lost the first time they were asked to write an essay in the United States: “They didn’t teach us to write an essay because teachers are only focused on grammar, on explaining how to write a correct sentence, or the parts of a sentence. They taught a lot of punctuation and when we need to put an accent on a word.”

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Ethnographic Partnerships Are a Gateway to Translanguaging

Keeping in mind what students had shared in their literacy narratives as part of the ethnographic partnership was extremely helpful in refining the translanguing pedagogical strategies we had conceived at the beginning of the semester based on the evidence that Dominican students’ struggle

with college-level English writing was related not only to second language acquisition issues, but also to divergent literacy practices (Bartlett and Garcia; Parmegiani and Utakis; Rubinstein-Avila). In other words, the rhetorical expectations students were expected to meet while engaging with Academic Discourse in Dominican secondary schools often clash with what U.S. college professors expect. Students' literacy narratives confirmed this, making the Spanish instructor and I more confident that we were on the right track in using our collaboration to give students the opportunity to "develop academic literacy practices in Spanish that are similar to academic literacy practices in U.S. schools" (Bartlett and Garcia 22). Initially, we had some concerns about privileging American English ways of writing (Spack; Zamel), but as the ethnographic partnership progressed, we found that students do not need "to be held hostage by language and culture," but they can be encouraged to mediate divergent literacy practices "and conflicting rhetorical structures to their advantage" (Canagarajah "Critical" 68). We also found that literacy narratives played a crucial role in helping students identify and resolve those "conflicting rhetorical structures" they encounter along their life trajectories. Students' personal reflections on how they were expected to write in the Dominican Republic, and how they are expected to write at Bronx Community College not only made them more alert to conflicting "rhetorical structures," but it also helped them develop a more positive self-perception as learners and writers. The stories they shared made it easier for them to see that the difficulties they were facing with English academic writing were not due to a personal cognitive deficit, but to the need to add to their Discursive repertoire new rhetorical skills that the Spanish instructor and I were presenting as being well within their reach.

Students Need to Practice Close Reading

Literacy narratives made it clear that because in Dominican schools reading and writing revolves largely around repeating information uncritically, in the learning community—both in the Spanish and the ESL class—they had to be provided with plenty of opportunities to engage in close reading exercises, to pay attention to how language constructs meaning, and to how the reading of a text lends itself to a wide range of interpretations. Students were always encouraged to come up with their own interpretation by making connections with their personal experience and by supporting their points with textual evidence, which was not something they had been asked to do in their high school Spanish class. Fundamental rhetorical elements of

the “typical U.S. college essay,” such as the use of a thesis statement in the introductory paragraph to articulate a position, using research to support that position, and attributing sources, were not taken for granted but demystified—in both the Spanish and the ESL course—through a continuous storytelling process which examined divergent literacy practices in the context of students’ lives. This storytelling process was part and parcel of an Academic Discourse that transcended language boundaries. It expanded “students’ sense of personal agency” as they discovered not only that “their own stories are narratable, but also that through their stories they can engage in a broader critical dialogue with each other and with well-known texts” (Soliday 512) within a dominant Discourse.

The Mother Tongue Is a Powerful Learning Tool in the ESL Classroom

While the literacy narratives were produced mainly in the ESL and FYS courses, which were both taught in English by an instructor with a limited command of Spanish, students’ mother tongue played a central role in the creation of a translingual Academic Discourse in these two classes. As recommended by Elbow (1999), I found it pedagogically productive to invite the mother tongue into the composition process. Rather than reprimanding students for “speaking Spanish” or even “thinking in Spanish,” as some colleagues have been known to do, students were encouraged to speak English as much as possible, but they were also encouraged to resort to their mother tongue if that was the only way they could get their ideas across. In the words of a teacher quoted by Bartlett and Garcia, “If you don’t know a word in English, write it in Spanish. You can always get the English word later” (Bartlett and Garcia 143). Giving students the opportunity to use Spanish to fill in lexical gaps was crucial for allowing a greater level of complexity in students’ engagement with Academic Discourse while creating opportunities to build vocabulary in their second language.

The Language Teacher Becomes a Language Learner

Translanguaging in the learning community was enhanced considerably by the bidirectionality of the learning process that resulted from my participation—with my limited Spanish proficiency—in the Academic Discourse students created in their mother tongue in the Spanish course. In order to be able to participate, I had to turn to my students as experts in order to fill *my* lexical gaps. In addition, my lack of familiarity with cultural references

and rhetorical conventions made me experience a sense of Discursive loss that was quite healthy for anyone who, as a second language instructor, is in a position of Discursive power with respect to his/her students. This sense of loss allowed me to empathize with my students in ways that I could not have imagined and to develop a much greater appreciation for their intellectual and linguistic sophistication. The moments of silence I experienced in my ESL class when I asked what, to me, were very simple questions expressed in very simple English were met with a lot more compassion on my part, after I experienced the embarrassment of being silenced by the fear of having to say something in Spanish in front of the rest of class.

My sense of loss in the Spanish class provided me with opportunities to build bridges across Discourses and languages with my students by using our mutual expertise, as I checked with them about my comprehension (or lack thereof) of what had happened in the Spanish class. These translanguagual check-ins were often the starting point of conversations about mechanical aspects Academic Discourse that students are expected to produce in Standard American English. For example, my asking about the meaning of words I didn't understand in their mother tongue created opportunities for students to increase their vocabulary in their second language by learning the English translation of those words. This process also helped us identify cognates and false cognates and go over idiomatic expressions. In addition, the check-ins provided occasions for approaching grammar contrastively. For example, after I inquired about the conjugation of a certain verb in a certain tense, I was able to examine with my students morphological and syntactic features of the English language using their mother tongue as a frame of reference. This examination allowed me to point out common pitfalls for Spanish speakers, but also provided easy mnemonics anchored in their mother tongue for helping them find ways to remember to use auxiliary verbs and inflections that often get lost as students translanguage.

Lastly, discussing not only my sense of loss with my students, but also the sense of empowerment I felt as my budding ability to engage with Academic Discourse in Spanish got stronger, allowed me to put my own unfolding literacy narrative on the table. Exposing both my vulnerability and my capability as a language learner was crucial for building trust and creating a safe space where students were comfortable enough to bring their own struggle with language and literacy into our Academic Discourse.

IMPACT ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Not surprisingly, the translingual pedagogical alliance discussed above had a positive impact on student's success indicators. In Fall 2013, the average GPA of the ten students enrolled in the learning community was almost two points higher than the average GPA of all the ESL students who had started BCC in Fall 2013 (Parmegiani "Inviting"). By the end of the term, all the students enrolled in the learning community had passed the exit exam for their ESL level and the Spanish course. Comparative GPAs are not yet available for Spring 2014, but all learning community students passed the subsequent ESL level, and three of them even passed the CUNY Assessment Writing Test (CATW), which allowed them to exit remediation one semester earlier. The Spring Fall retention rate for learning community students was 100%, while it was only 65% for all the first year students who had entered BCC in Fall 2013.

Given the small number of students in the learning community, and given that so many variables come into play in determining students' academic performance, these quantitative findings cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the differentials in average GPAs and retention rates are very encouraging. For this reason, this learning community program is continuing and its impact is being monitored through a longitudinal quantitative study of success indicators and a series of focus group interviews. While a statistically sound argument for implementing this large model on a large scale cannot yet be made, these findings suggest that creating learning community clusters where ESL writing courses are linked to composition courses in students' mother tongues could potentially increase success indicators significantly in colleges characterized by a strong presence of ESL students who share the same first language.

CONCLUSION

This article has told the story of my attempt to fulfill my responsibility as a basic writing instructor to make sure my "students' cultural linguistic identities figure prominently in the writing classroom community" (Mendez Newman) in order to increase their chances of academic success. Given the ethnolinguistic profiles of many Bronx Community College students and current U.S. demographic trends, part of my discussion has focused on Spanish speaking ESL students, especially recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic, but the need to "create a place for students' self" within Academic Discourse is certainly not restricted to this student population.

As an ESL instructor and language and literacy scholar, I felt compelled to take my students' first language as the starting point for creating this space and saturating Academic Discourse with new meanings. The link between Spanish and English in the learning community provided this space and these meanings.

The pedagogical need to "aspire to understand students' worldviews, behavior and ethics" (Mendez Newman) made it clear to me that learning had to be bidirectional, and that my efforts to engage in Academic Discourse using my students' mother tongue would go very far in giving me access to their Discursive universe through the ethnographic partnership I sought to establish. Literacy narratives and my participation in the Spanish course as a language learner, prompted by my genuine interest in my students' translingual trajectories, allowed me to design pedagogical strategies which capitalized on students' linguistic resources. This capitalization had a positive impact on student's success indicators. Given the small scale of the study, a statistically sound argument for implementing this model on a large scale cannot yet be made; nevertheless, these findings suggest that creating learning community clusters where ESL writing courses are linked to composition courses in students' mother tongues could potentially increase success indicators significantly in colleges characterized by a strong presence of ESL students who share the same first language.

Fortunately, it is not that difficult to pilot such clusters, especially in colleges that have learning community programs in place. Most majors have a foreign language requirement, and often departments of modern languages offer courses in ESL students' mother tongue. Creating a translingual pedagogical alliance similar to the one described in this article has minimal cost for the college (three hours of reassigned-time per instructor, in the case of Bronx Community College), but it can make a big difference in terms of student retention and graduation rates. If colleges do not have a learning community program in place, it is still possible to create this type of link by applying for a grant that would pay for the reassigned time the instructors need in order to constantly design and refine translingual pedagogical strategies tailored to their students' needs.

Bidirectional learning, ethnographic partnerships, and literacy narratives can also be implemented in teaching contexts where students' languages vary, or where the mother tongue in question is not taught at the college, or even where administration will not commit to starting this kind of program. When I teach stand-alone classes attended by linguistically diverse students, I still approach the learning process from the assumption

that in order to be an effective writing instructor, I need to learn as much as possible from my students about their language and literacy practices. Far from being an impediment for literacy narratives, linguistic diversity within a classroom makes storytelling about language and literacy all the more compelling, as students who grew up in different continents, speaking different languages, practicing different religions, find commonalities in their struggle to mediate conflicting rhetorical structures while wresting a place for themselves in Academic Discourse.

And while it might not be possible to spend much formal instructional time translanguaging in a linguistically diverse class as in a learning community where students share the same mother tongue, writing instructors can still capitalize on students' translingual repertoires. It would be ideal if the instructor has some knowledge of their students' mother tongue in order to guide the translanguaging process and clarify grammatical, lexical and rhetorical issues by using students' first language as a frame of reference. As a multilingual ESL speaker myself, I am fortunate enough to be able to do this—different degrees—even in a class where Spanish is not the only mother tongue spoken by the students. Monolingual English speaking instructors may also use their students' first language as a resource. Familiarizing themselves with their students' mother tongues does not necessarily mean achieving high levels of proficiency. Being able to say a few words in the languages that are so important for students' identities goes very far in creating that “place for students' 'self” that is so important for the successful acquisition of Academic Discourse. Even a basic understanding of the fundamental grammatical structures of those languages can be extremely helpful in making sense of students' error patterns and in finding ways to address them.

Whether or not writing instructors working with ESL populations are willing to engage with translanguaging themselves, it is very important that they do not feel threatened by the “naturally occurring” linguistic practices of multilingual basic writers (Canagarajah 410), but that instead, they find ways use them as a resource. For example, they could encourage students to use bilingual dictionaries, or to consult with their same language-speaking peers to reflect on how they would address relevant linguistic and rhetorical issues in their mother tongue, and by doing so, they could create occasions for telling stories about language and literacy.

Note

1. In keeping with Gee's distinction between "discourse with a small d" and "Discourse "with a capital D" (127-28), I will upper case the word "Discourse" throughout the paper. I discuss this distinction in this article's section entitled, "Academic Discourse, Translanguaging, and Dominican Students."

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Storytelling as Academic Discourse: Bridging the Cultural-Linguistic Divide in the Era of the Common Core

Ching Ching Lin

ABSTRACT: Bakhtin's dialogism provides a sociocultural approach that views language as a social practice informed by the complex interaction between discourse and meaning. Drawing on this theoretical framework, I argue that a dialogized version of storytelling can be helpful in creating a reflective form of academic discourse that bridges the gap between the demands of the Standards-based classroom and the needs of English Language Learners. While storytelling has widely been used as an effective ESL strategy, the current paradigm of education theorizing often characterizes narrative narrowly as personal and decontextualized, thereby dismissing storytelling as an inferior form of academic knowledge. Building on Bakhtin's theory of meaning as dialogic interplay, I propose a notion of storytelling as a generic template for academic discourse that has the potential to integrate a multiplicity of genres and hence allows learners to negotiate between personal and public voices.

KEYWORDS: Common Core Standards; English Language Learners; storytelling; academic discourse; dialogism; heteroglossia

National efforts to better prepare students for college and career such as the K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS 2010) accentuate the role of academic discourse skills for students' success across all disciplines. The Common Core Standards, however, articulate a narrow construct of academic discourse that prioritizes argument as "the most important skills of incoming college students" (Appendix A 25) and often dismisses storytelling as an inferior form of academic discourse. I argue that the current paradigm of academic discourse in P-12 education risks reinforcing the cultural-linguistic divide in public schools, which, in turn, perpetuates social stratification and class distinctions. Recently, as a response to increasing cul-

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tural and linguistic diversities in schools and communities, educators have turned to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic approach to language and meaning as a pedagogical vehicle that offers a subversive expression for the absolutist and authoritarian notion of academic discourse and genre while enabling emerging voices and perspectives. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, I theorize a form of storytelling as a generic template for academic discourse that is flexible enough to represent "various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social 'languages' [that] come to interact with one another [sic]" (282). A *dialogized* notion of storytelling provides a reflective form of academic discourse and has the potential to bridge the gap between the learning needs of ELL students and the demands of the Common Core Standards. While this article is set in the context of K-12 education, it has important implications for higher education and basic and ELL writers.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMON CORE CLASSROOM

As the most recent effort to address the ever-heightened sense of crisis in the U.S. education system, the National Governors' Association in 2010 launched a state-initiated educational reform in which a framework of learning standards was put in place to set the expectations and guidelines for student performance. In order to increase the global competencies of our children, the Common Core Standards call for increasing academic rigor in students' development of knowledge and skills to align with "college and career expectation" (CCSS "About the Standards").

As a framework for discussing the ways that students should perform in the areas of reading, speaking, listening, and writing in all disciplines in order to be college and career ready, the CCSS have effectively redirected school curricular and instructional focus towards more "academic" skills. Among the six "shifts" associated with the Common Core Standards is an increased attention to informational reading and writing (EngageNY). In order to foster students' global competencies in today's knowledge and information based economy, the Standards call for calibrating the school curriculum to reflect a mix of 50 percent literary and 50 percent informational text, including reading in ELA, science, social studies, and the arts (Coleman and Pimentel 5) in elementary grades and shifting toward 70 percent in higher grades (CCSS ELA 5).

In accord with the growing emphasis on information texts in higher education and professional settings, the English Language Arts Standards identify three text types and purposes that students are required to master: argument, informational/explanatory text, and narrative (CCSS ELA). While the Common Core Initiative emphasizes that all three types of texts complement each other, it clearly prioritizes argument. In a section of the Standards (Appendix A) entitled “the Special Place of Argument in the Standards,” it states:

While all three text types are important, the Standards put particular emphasis on students’ ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career readiness. (Appendix A 24)

The emphasis on argument is progressively increased in higher grades. As evidenced in Appendix C, the Standards include only student samples singularly labeled as argument or informational/explanatory in higher grades (from grade 9 on), even though the selected student samples often incorporate narrative and expository writings within an argumentative structure and hence cannot fit neatly into the standard format of a genre matrix. It is evident that the CCSS define argument in the narrower sense found in logic rather than in a broad sense that includes personal narrative. David Coleman and Susan Pimentel, lead writers of the Common Core, write:

The standards emphasize arguments (such as those in the U.S. foundational documents) and other literary nonfiction that is built on informational text structures rather than literary nonfiction that is structured as stories (such as memoirs or biographies). (5)

The prioritization of argument at the expense of narrative is further exacerbated by an increased pressure imposed upon schools to demonstrate accountability. As the CCSS has continued to roll out, we have seen an understanding of narrative—in particular, personal narrative—as problematic in many states’ policy guidelines. New York City, for example, clearly focuses on argument-based literacy skills in its implementation of the Common Core:

Writing needs to emphasize use of evidence to inform or make an argument rather than the personal narrative and other forms of decontextualized prompts. While the narrative still has an important role, students develop skills through written arguments that

respond to the ideas, events, facts, and arguments presented in the texts they read. (The DOE-selected Common Core Standards and Instructional Shifts for Literacy)

In this interpretation of the Standards, narrative—instead of being considered integral and adding depth and richness to an argumentative writing—is defined as a separate category distinct from argument, and dismissed as merely “personal” and “decontextualized.”

The problem with this prioritizing what English and education professor Gerald Graff refers to as “argument literacy” (CCSS Appendix A) is its tendency to view genres as compartmentalized, which prevents us from forging a fuller conceptualization of academic discourse skills. In a blog created and maintained by Grant Wiggins, who is one of the co-authors of “Understanding by Design” and the president of Authentic Education, many expressed the concern that while supporting claims with evidence and reading rich non-fiction texts are critical for students to develop cogent thinking and reasoning, a single-minded demand to attend to information, evidence, and logic is likely crowd out instructional time for more authentic learning experiences in reading and writing, making it less likely for students to develop academic discourse skills more thoroughly.

In addition, a lopsided construal of academic skills may do a great disservice to students who are still developing their skills as emerging readers and writers. In their inquiry into a Common Core-aligned grade 9 writing class, Kelly Chandler-Olcott and John Zeleznik found that students’ success “in marrying elements of narrative and other genres” (99) contributed to their identity as burgeoning writers. Their study shows that the implementation of the CCSS need not require seeing genre narrowly or “banishing narrative to a backseat” (99) in the classroom. On the contrary, teachers viewing genre as “more diverse and more hybrid” (99) than the discrete Standards in the Common Core can help create a classroom discourse that encourages genre-bending and creativity, and hence allows students to explore, wonder, and opine.

Most importantly, the Standards’ narrow framings of academic discourse skill might exacerbate an already strong test-driven educational culture that fosters the tendency to teach, practice, and test skills in isolation. Under the current paradigm of teaching academic discourse skills, teachers often concentrate on ways in which students can be helped to adapt their practices to those of academia, taking the codes and conventions of academia as given, as Mary Lea and Brian Street argue. (157). Learning academic con-

tent and skills is often reduced to the acquisition of fundamental language proficiency—knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and conventions of use that are the essence of *knowing* a language (as evidenced in a plethora of websites featuring the teaching of academic discourse skills such as Teaching Channel, ALD network, Solution Tree). Lea and Street characterize the dominant approach to academic discourse skills development as the study skills approach:

The study skills approach has assumed that literacy is a set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts. The focus is on attempts to ‘fix’ problems with student learning, which are treated as a kind of pathology. The theory of language on which it is based emphasises surface features, grammar and spelling. (158)

As a test-driven culture continues to narrow the school curriculum, the Standards foster an approach to literacy that conceptualizes students’ reading and writing as skill-based and the job of teachers as modeling, coaching, and drilling students’ basic skills. Learning an academic skill is reduced to “developing familiarity with the ways of being, thinking, writing, and seeing the world of those experts in the disciplines” (Hermida 2).

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE AS A FORM OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

The ability to engage productively in academic discourse can be translated into access to the discursive practices of school curricula. Since ELL students are expected to master academic discourse skills in content area classrooms while simultaneously learning basic English, they are presented special challenges because the skills required to understand classroom instructions are the same skills required to participate in academic conversations in content area studies. A narrow understanding of academic skills as manifested in Common Core fosters a literacy approach that takes for granted the mutual relationship between language and power that has profound implications for educational outcomes and equity in the U.S. education system.

How the dominant language is used as an instrument of power is an important theme in Pierre Bourdieu's work. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu argues that language is a form of cultural capital that perpetuates social class privileges and class distinctions by shaping educational outcomes. Having the capacity to define what is academic success allows the dominant elite to monopolize the interpretation of academic standards. According to Bourdieu, the mastery of academic discourse skills is hence closely associated

with academic achievement and material reward. Bourdieu states:

Since mastery of the legitimate language may be acquired through familiarization that is, by more or less prolonged exposure to the legitimate language, or through the deliberate inculcation of explicit rules, the major classes of modes of expression correspond to classes of modes of acquisition, that is, to different forms of the combination between the two principal factors of production of the legitimate competence, namely, the family and the educational system. (61-62)

Since the mastery of academic discourse is highly valued in schools and other institutional settings, it becomes an embodied form of capital that allows access to power and privileges through structural inequality in the education system. By privileging a language reflecting the values favored by the majority of the larger intellectual community, schools risk perpetuating a social structure that maintains power over ELL students who hold the least of linguistic competency in English.

A narrow notion of academic discourse, instead of facilitating access to classroom learning, may alienate ELL students whose lack of previous exposure places them at a disadvantage. Research suggests that certain elements of academic discourse are often implicit and students are expected to gain a grasp of academic literacy without explicit instructions in academic conventions. For example, citing students' self study at Bronx Community College, Andrea Parmegiani and Sharon Utakis argue that one of the main problems facing ELL students with the development of academic discourse skills is their unfamiliarity "with college expectations, what is required to be successful in college, and how to navigate academic affairs, policies and procedures of the college" (23). They suggest that what is considered as academic competency is often culturally-specific: "the academic literacy practices our students are socialized into in their home countries might differ significantly from some of the ones they might be expected to master" at an U.S college institution. Their study calls for teachers to take account of the cultural and contextual components of writing and reading practices by adopting a template that empowers students to explore, critique, and integrate divergent language and literacy practices (25).

As Lea and Street point out, there is a need to see the literacy demands of the curriculum as "involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines" (159). Unfortunately, more often than not,

academic discourse in mainstream educational settings is heavily couched in a language that reflects cultural specificity. For example, Andrea Parmegiani argues that higher education often privileges western literacy practices at the expense of minority students who may have different notions of academic discourse rooted in their own cultures (9). To provide students access to academic discourse “whose mastery is correlated with socio-economic empowerment” (9), he suggests including students’ personal narratives by inviting them to “bring their life experiences into academic discourse” (8). A holistic literacy approach that takes into account students’ cognitive, social, and emotional needs as well as the complex linguistic repertoire that characterize their lives will invite students’ participation in academic discourse and empower them by expanding their “sense of personal agency” (14). A narrowly defined set of standards, prior knowledge and know-how, on the other hand, will only widen the already widening cultural and linguistic divides in our school system.

STORYTELLING AS A SCAFFOLDING STRATEGY

Storytelling has long been considered as an effective scaffolding strategy in serving the special needs of ELLs. Since the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) was founded in 1974, storytelling has been widely utilized as a literacy strategy, ranging from preschool through university level classrooms. More recently, storytelling has been promoted as an effective way to teach the English language to English Language Learners and to help prepare for their transitioning to the mainstream classroom. Three studies that provide rich descriptions in this topic are those by Susan Craig, Karla Hull, Ann G. Haggart, Elaine Crowder; Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky; and E. Martin Pedersen. By tapping into ELLs’ prior knowledge, storytelling provides students a way to approach the text that they otherwise may find intimidating by bringing their perspectives to bear upon the understanding of the text. Whether it is about making text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections, storytelling conceives students’ prior knowledge as an important resource in their construction of new knowledge. The pedagogical benefits of storytelling can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) Stories are usually thematically organized and have a universal appeal to students. Storytelling incorporates elements that appeal to students’ experience, interests, and cultures. In addition, it validates students’ experience and voice, making them feel valued and that they have something to

contribute to the learning that takes place in classrooms. Pedersen advocates storytelling as a pedagogical method, especially when working with ELL students in small groups. Stories help students communicate literary and cultural heritages while helping them better develop a sense of rhetorical structure, which assists in the study of literature, non-fiction texts, and their own writing.

2) In accessible ways, storytelling utilizes a wide range of literacy skills that can help ELLs' transition to the mainstream content area classroom. According to Sara Miller and Lisa Pennycuff, storytelling is "an effective pedagogical strategy that utilizes 'social elements of language' "(37). Elements of stories typically include: a storyteller or narrator, a setting or social context in which the story is set, a set of occurrences that unfolds in a specific sequence, an audience with certain qualities which the narrative must address, and a message or moral of the story that the narrative is trying to convey. The components provided by narratives offer many advantages for teaching and learning. For example, to hold the audience's attention, the narrator must engage the audience through questioning, discussing, comparing, and ultimately inviting the audience to assume the role of a storyteller. It is a playful dance between the narrator and the audience (37).

3) Storytelling has the potential to promote a vision of inclusion and diversity as a resource. It is instantly multi-genre, multi-literate, and multi-modal. In the comfort of a familiar narrative structure, students are encouraged to exercise their freedom and imagination. In storytellings or retellings, details are selected and then given coherence, meaning, and direction. In a literature review, Heidi Bordine Fitzgibbon and Kim Hughes Wilhelm report that using stories encourages students to create their own interpretations, especially when working in small groups. They claim that using storytelling lowers students' affective filters so that learning can more easily take place (23-24). Crag, Hull, Haggart, and Crowder maintain that students with a wide range of oral and written abilities are more likely to participate in storytelling that can be used to bridge "apparent cultural divides" (46).

Despite the proven track record that storytelling has established in the field of ESL, storytelling continues to be slighted in K-12 education (Enciso 22-23). Although the Standards do not explicitly exclude personal narrative, there have been efforts within the current standards-based reform to increase the emphasis on informational text and argument at the expense of other forms of discourse/knowledge, including narrative. Yet, as it has played out in the context of school reforms and policy implementation, the overestimation of the value of logic and information in the current Standards results in

a backlash against personal narrative. David Coleman, the principal CCSS architect, has argued:

[A]s you grow up in this world you realize people really don't give a sheet about what you feel or what you think. What they instead care about is can you make an argument with evidence, is there something verifiable behind what you're saying or what you think or feel that you can demonstrate to me. (Introduction to the Common Core State Standards for ELA and Literacy Part 4)¹

The storytelling mode remains rare in the natural sciences and still radical in the social sciences where an objectivist model drawn from the natural sciences continues to have a strong hold on the disciplines (Czarniawska 1). Though there have been instances of what can be characterized as “the narrative turn” (Riessman 1) in research traditions influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, and new criticism since 1970s, academic discourse in typical science reports and research papers continues to be preoccupied with structures and techniques that mask narrative standpoints and voices—as opposed to embrace and celebrate them (Czarniawska 2).

The artificial distinction between academic and non-academic discourse that is so prevalent in educational practices in both K-12 and higher education greatly limits the depth of learning and prevents voices, multiplicity, dynamism, and creation from coming into existence. What is important is not the fixity of meaning, but a meaning-making process that enables emerging voices and insights into the complexity of human experiences. But storytelling and academic discourse need not be mutually exclusive. Academic discourse does not necessarily need to be in the form of argumentative prose or in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures as explicitly or implicitly assumed in academic and professional settings. As Walter Fisher insists in “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” all genres of discourse can be understood as “conceptions that inform various ways of recounting or accounting for human choice or action” (6). In order to allow English Language Learners to express their ideas, we need a rich form of academic discourse that incorporates both narrative and other forms of discourse into a more encompassing understanding of human endeavors while providing instructional scaffolding for their learning.

TOWARD A MORE INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

While argument and logic are a valid paradigm of academic discourse, scholars from the socio-cultural tradition such as Bakhtin, Fisher, Freire and others help us understand that a narrowly defined evidence-based criteria may not be appropriate in understanding the complexity of human phenomena to which the use of language and communication is essential. For Freire, profound knowledge and authentic learning can only be realized through our relationships and connections with the world from which we draw sources of inspiration to our life: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (244). From this perspective, true learning can only be fashioned through conversation, questioning, and the sharing of one’s thoughts with others, through mutual humanity.

Instead of viewing learning merely as an individual cognitive achievement, sociocultural approaches (e.g. as seen in “New Literacy Studies”) conceptualize literacy development as a social practice situated in a broader context of social circumstances, and hence the goal of learning is to reconstruct knowledge and achieve dialogue in fuller breadth and depth. As many educators from the socio-cultural tradition would agree, academic practices connect to and are shaped by values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. In this broad picture of learning and literacy skills development, social relationships and connectedness are particularly valued, as “literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relationships between people, within groups and communities” (Barton and Hamilton 8). Storytelling successfully captures the social dimension of academic skills development by inspiring purposeful talking and writing, by familiarizing and introducing students to literary devices and conventions, by promoting a vision of diversity and community in the classroom, and, above all, by giving a motivating reason for students to read and write.

Dialogism, *Heteroglossia*, and Storytelling

Drawing upon Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, I suggest that in addition to serving as a scaffolding strategy that values ELLs’ prior knowledge and voice, a *dialogized* notion of storytelling can be taken as a “master metaphor”—as Walter Fisher calls it (6)—that subsumes all other genres and hence symbolizes human communication as “an interplay of reason,

value, and action” (59).

Bakhtin's dialogic approach to meaning and language is profoundly informed by his vision of a cosmopolitan, interactive, and heteroglossic society. As result, it is a theoretical construct that lends itself particularly well to understanding the mobility and flux that characterize the lives of contemporary ESL students. A Russian literary critic and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin lived through the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin whose ruthless regime suppressed the literary consciousness and creativity of a diverse Russia. Bakhtin, belonging to a broadly defined sociocultural tradition, dedicated himself to incorporating a vision of inclusion and diversity within his work to challenge the monolingual, monoglossic discourse of Stalin's authoritarian regime. Bakhtin's theory conceptualizes language as born and “shaped in dialogic interaction” (“Dialogic” 279), and ideological, taking place in the social, political, and cultural contexts in which it is embedded.

By focusing on the dialogic nature of language, Bakhtin gives new meaning to our understanding of discourse. Discourse, understood as the use of words to express thoughts and ideas, is shaped by our interaction with others—whether real or imaginary—in response to what has been uttered before and in anticipation of what is to be uttered afterward. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin writes:

Language lives only in the dialogical interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object, (these are) relationships in and of themselves devoid of any dialogical element. They must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become positions of various subjects expressed in discourse, in order that dialogic relations might arise among them. (183-84)

For Bakhtin, individuals make meaning not within an isolated linguistic setting but against a “cacophonous” background of other simultaneous utterances (“Problems” 68-69). In this view, discourse is regarded as “a living source of insight and renewal” (White 4) and its meaning extends beyond the written or spoken word alone to include “a consideration of tone, sound, and body language” as it is perceived in living reality (4).

This Bakhtinian notion of discourse entails that all of our discourse in every genre (whether arguments, scientific reports, stories, poetry or other genres) are infused with *heteroglossia*—which Bakhtin defines as “another's

speech in another's language"—through and through. Diversity exists within each utterance, whether we are conscious of this fact or not. When we speak or write, we simultaneously enact the voices of others, inevitably taking into account what they might have responded to what we have uttered, in an attempt to anticipate future responses by incorporating them into our speech. Hence each speech or writing must be regarded as primarily "a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere" ("Problems" 91) and is inherently dialogic. To ignore this dialogic nature of language in living conversation would lead to "perfunctoriness and excessive abstractness," which in turn "distorts the historicity of the research, and weakens the link between language and life" ("Problems" 63).

By introducing dialogic utterance as an essential component of language, Bakhtin outlines a concept of cultural discourse in which "languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways" ("Dialogic" 291) and provides a counter concept to the monological conception of academic discourse that tends to exclude narrative and other speech and literary genres. Highlighting the ever-shifting and *heteroglossic* nature of everyday discourse, Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky's novels an art of storytelling incorporating multiple layers of literary genres and hence a paradigmatic expression of *heteroglossia*.

Bakhtin's interest in Dostoevsky's work is grounded in his desire to search for a literary genre that, rather than reinforcing the authoritarian control of a national language on consciousness and expressions, can be used to liberate a society from the tyranny of a national, unified language. For Bakhtin, the *heteroglossic* and hence democratic potential of the novel consists in its ability to be "organically receptive to new forms of mute perception." Through the process of inserting other literary language into the format of storytelling, the novel dialogizes other genres, revitalizing and imbuing them with "an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality" ("Dialogic" 3,7). This spirit of process and inconclusiveness is what makes storytelling a viable literary device to preserve the openness of a multicultural society characterized by *heteroglossia*.

While Dostoevsky's own work provides a perfect example of *heteroglossic* potential of storytelling as it encompasses diversities within all genres of human communication, a more close-to-home example can be found in the evolving conception of English in contemporary American society. Contemporary American English varieties reflect the ever-shifting cultural landscape of the United States. The global spread of English, together with

the increased migration, travel, and telecommunication within and across borders, has spawned linguistic diversities even within American English, such as Ebonics, Spanglish (Spanish English), Chinglish (Chinese English), Hinglish (Hindi English), Singlish (Singaporean English), and Konglish (Korean English). The growing debate about the hegemony of English in the United States and beyond its borders exposes the futility of any attempt to control and censor expression and communication (Higgins 616).

Thus the *heteroglossia* reflected in contemporary linguistic landscapes challenges the idea of monolithic literary genre and how we conceptualize language. In contrast to the notion of genre as a stable type of utterances, Bakhtin conceptualizes genre as the site of the intersection between language, and social and ideological forces (“Problems” 89). Different genres give expression to contradictions between content and form, between personal and public voices, between different social and ideological forces and so on. A super-imposed dichotomy between the primacy of personal experience and the authority of the public examination of that experience would force emergent readers/writers—particularly English Language Learners—who have not yet developed their sensitivity to the nuances of English words and literary genres to face a false dilemma between responding to their experience and responding to their writing. What we need is a fused dialogic concept of genres that will allow English Language Learners and other struggling students to move beyond the false dichotomy between reflection and production, between content and form and help them view reading and writing as a complex and ongoing interplay among personal and public voices.

Retheorizing Storytelling: Beyond the Dichotomy

A Bakhtinian *dialogized* notion of storytelling offers a pathway to escape the false dichotomy of storytelling and academic discourse as manifested in dominant paradigms such as the Common Core Standards. In this view, storytelling and academic discourse, rather than dichotomous, are viewed as taking place in a continuum. All languages include both a speaker/writer and an audience(s)/reader(s), and echo a multiplicity of voices within individual voices. The distinction of storytelling and academic discourse is hence only nominal, as both are made up of different utterances within us. For Bakhtin, it is in/between different literary and speech genres that utterances acquire meaning and a particular typical expression. All genres are forms of language in which this ongoing dialogue takes place.

From this Bakhtinian perspective, academic literacy practice is fundamentally personal narrative in which the speaker/writer adopts a universalist stance that severs standpoints from interpretation and permits both speaker/writers and audience to forget that they are in conversation with a multiplicity of utterances. Very often, this lost perspective can only be recovered with the help of a marginalized voice and regained through an appreciation for the multiplicity within our own voice. Feminist Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber contends that only through stories relating their authors' "deep feelings of exclusion from the dominant avenues of knowledge building, seeing their own experiences, concerns, and worth diminished and invalidated by the dominant powers of their society" (3) can we recognize the importance of lived experiences to the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge. Postcolonial and feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha articulates this insight and struggle:

Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside or outside. One has to push one's work as far as one can go: to the borderlines, where one never stops, walking on the edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit. (218)

In order to engage in a new meaning making process that does justice to the fullness of our lived experiences, we need to challenge forms of discourse that exclude marginalized perspectives, and take on a multitude of different standpoints and negotiate these identities simultaneously (Hesse-Biber 3).

As Bakhtin and many others (such as Fisher) have insisted, any use in language is an ongoing dialogue with socio-historical forces that define us as human (albeit at times unconsciously). Meaning-making takes place within this dialogue. It is in the overlapping space between discourse as a public event and meaning making as private reflection that the possibility of a speaker/writer's voice that is so valued in academic settings can emerge. Reflecting on the shifting and heteroglossic nature of language throws into relief the feigned transparency/objectivity of the dominant notion of academic discourse. By privileging new points of view and voices, storytelling can be used to explore the interplay between individual and autobiographic experiences on the one hand, and larger, socio-cultural discourses on the other. How do we translate this Bakhtinian vision of storytelling into a pedagogical design of academic discourse?

In the following section, I relate my experience of incorporating storytelling in reading and writing activities in a Common Core-oriented classroom, as an attempt to switch from a monological teaching style in which reading and writing are still practiced as a knowledge transmission tool, to a dialogic approach in which students' active approach to meaning construction is prioritized through journal writing. I conclude with reflection and recommendations for future research.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS: NEGOTIATING AMONG PERSONAL AND PUBLIC VOICES

Prior to making the transition to teaching at the college level in TESOL, I taught social studies in a New York City public high school for thirteen years. Located in a gentrified area of New York City, the school was a Title I school serving low-income students, with 74% of the total student population receiving free lunch. According to the 2011-2012 Progress Report of the school, 43 % of students graduated within four years and 52 % of students graduated within six years. The low graduation rate subjected the school to repeated threats of closure. In 2012, I taught Regents Prep classes to students who failed the New York State Social Studies Regents Exams once or repeatedly. At that time, the Common Core was just set in motion and a new teacher evaluation aligned with the Common Core was put in place.

Working with many ELL students compelled me to incorporate ESL strategies into my classroom practice to help them overcome their trepidation about using academic language in speaking and writing. I decided to use storytelling as a tool to provide ELLs with points of entry into academic communities by engaging them in meaning-making through a process that allows for the dynamic interplay between reflection and production. I also decided that Bakhtin's theory of *heteroglossia*/dialogism would help us move beyond the fixed meaning of the text toward a fuller understanding of the complex interaction between discourse and meaning while allowing students to cultivate their voices. However, Bakhtin's narrative paradigm—a narrative strategy that signals the interplay among the expressions of self, other, and the collective voices and identities through stories—would be a deviation from my previous practice, which basically followed the traditional mode of “teacher models, students practice.” Rather than relying on templates and rubrics as I normally did in guiding students through their reading and writing process in a standards-based classroom, the narrative approach was an open, unfamiliar territory into which I treaded with uncertainty.

The challenge of using multivoiced narratives in the standards-based classroom is to uphold learning standards while providing instructional scaffolding for ELLs and other struggling students. As an exit assessment, students were expected to write a Regents style essay about an event chosen from history, discussing about how historical circumstances giving rise to the event and how the event impacted on different groups of people in global history. I grappled with the following question: How do I fit the open process of a multivoiced narrative into the straightjacket of a standards-based teaching and learning task? In searching for a feasible plan, I decided to go back to students' Regents Examination essays and explored ways to enhance and enrich their writing. I found most of their writings were teeming with sentences such as "One negative effect was the workers in the factories were treated poorly and had poor living conditions. Because of the conditions at the factories, many died"—sentences that were flat, monologic, and void of the complex and dissonant voices echoing the social heterogeneity that characterizes their lives. To tap into the heteroglossic potential that I saw latent in my students' writings, I decided to help students identify and explore textual voices in reading and writing.

Inspired by Mary E. Styslinger and Alison Whisenant's "Crossing Cultures with Multi-Voiced Journals," in which the authors documented their experience of journaling with students, I structured my classroom activities and assignments with a view toward demonstrating the heteroglossic nature of all discourses. My primary focus was to explore jointly the multiplicity of voices within the text as well as within ourselves, to experience what Bakhtin refers to as "an intensive interaction and struggle between one's own and another's words" ("Dialogic" 354-55). Within such space of interaction, students would hypothesize possible meanings, evaluate their propositions, and draw conclusions while reading and writing. Most importantly, through this process, students would construct what we encountered through reading and writing as a larger, more complex account of humanity. Hence I used storytelling as an inquiry tool to recover the context of coexisting multiple voices/perspectives within texts and in so doing I hoped to promote student discourses that Nancy Welch describes as "internally persuasive and publicly meaningful" (500).

As part of my practice of using storytelling to enhance students' academic skills, I read with students a multiplicity of documents from the early era of Industrialization. These texts provided juxtaposed perspectives and often contradicting accounts of early industrial societies. I challenged students to expand the choral potential of texts, seeing each text as "doubled-

voiced, expressing simultaneously two different intentions” that are dialogically interrelated: the direct intention of the author, and his or her refracted intention in response to a socially charged reality. We began by learning to reject the view of “the utterance as a direct, single voiced vehicle for expressions” (“Dialogic” 324, 354-355). Instead, students were encouraged to see as if each utterance is a dialogic counterpart of another, as a negotiation of different voices, including their own. As an example, I chose “Letter of Crewe Factory Girl” by Ada Nield Chew—to study how *heteroglossia* is mediated and echoed through a marginalized voice. She writes:

And therefore, on that account I feel reluctance to reveal them, greatly as I value this opportunity which you, sir, have so kindly given me of emphasizing—or it must already be known—the fact that we are suffering from a great evil which stands in urgent need of redressing.

As a class we explored the *heteroglossia* of a discourse by noticing how texts enter into dialogic relations with each other. I brought to students’ attention that her narrative was dressed in the form of a public document—as a testimony against the management. We compared her narrative with another in which a worker told his story in an affidavit to be used as evidence in court. We realized that genres are not fixed or discrete categories but relate to social practices embedded in a broader context of social relations. In the Victorian era, personal narratives mostly existed as part of public discourse. This awareness helped us better understand the apologetic tone in Chew’s voice. Living in a society known for its rigid social structure and mobility, she could only dress her grievances in the cloak of public causes.

I urged students to explore the ways the author negotiated different voices and social expectations in her writing. I asked students, “Who are the intended readers of the text?” Bakhtin’s notion of narrative as a dialogical and heteroglossic genre ensures that reading a text always involves multiple possible ways of interpreting the text. As Bakhtin suggests, as readers, we have the responsibility to multiply “the artistic wealth of humanity” through “creative understanding” (“Speech Genres” 137). In trying to make sense of the text, we were inevitably led to question how we identified ourselves vis-à-vis our historical counterparts. We came to understand the Bakhtinian moment: “(i)n all areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words, which are transmitted with highly varying degrees of accuracy and impartiality” (“Dialogic” 337). Once we

experienced the complexity of discourse as ongoing, interactive, multi-voiced social dialogue, I instructed students to journal in her voice using their imaginations.

As usual, we stopped periodically to predict what would happen next, connect to what we have known, explore the meaning of her feeling and infer the purposes behind her words. Students were encouraged to consider whether they would have acted differently in the situation described in the text, plotting possible courses of action for our heroine. A series of problems and choices were created, and students then were prompted to explore each choice and consider how their choices might have provided different results. Students were also encouraged to act out a piece of text and retell the story in Reader's Theater. Students shared and discussed their thinking with each other. Sharing one's work in public space *dialogized* the writer/speaker's utterances. We discussed the necessary dynamic interplay between what the speaker/writer may not realize, but the reader/audience can infer or know.

Together we struggled to move away from our monological habit of seeking a single-voiced, pat, ready-made meaning in the text and toward a more complex, *dialogized* interaction with the text, to negotiate our own "internally persuasive" discourse through "listening to, selecting and orchestrating" words that are half our own and half another's (Welch 495).

The movement was a tortuous one. In the beginning, students expressed reluctance and resistance, for this activity contradicted their classroom expectations. From time to time, students verbalized their frustration with the meaning of multivoicedness, "Is this sentence multi-voiced?" Reactions such as this one promoted me to think that I might have unwittingly imposed my own monologic, authoritarian discourse on students in the name of empowering them. I assured them that the struggle to discover multivoicedness within one's voice through engaging another's words is a perpetual, existential quest shared by all (certainly including myself) and hence the fate of our humanity.

We spent almost two weeks on this lesson, more than what the curriculum recommended. Compared to their previous writing, I found more nuanced, textual voices in their later drafts. At the end of the second week, some of them were able to write about how early industrialization, in its progressive promise of prosperity and expansion, belied a form of entrapment for individuals: While earning wages gave individuals (especially women) the hope to attain financial independence and helped them develop a self-image that eventually contributed to the rapid individualization of the society, the meager factory wages proved to be a dead-end alley. Some students

also talked about different forms of entrapment they found in their lives. I believe that many students learned to value *dialogized*, multivoiced thinking as they struggled to retell the story in their own way and make it their own.

This narrative approach is different from the traditional academic approach I used to adopt in many ways. As a scaffolding strategy to engage English language learners in their own internally persuasive discourse, storytelling helped my students meet the demands of the Common Core and State Standards by reflecting and collaborating through dialogic co-construction of knowledge. In spite of students' initial reluctance to engage time and effort in other students' texts, students all agreed that multivoiced feedback and co-construction of knowledge was the most valuable lesson they learned from this two-week project.

CONCLUSION

Dialogic storytelling has the potential to provide a rich and authentic context for learning, including a context that enables English Language Learners to draw upon their own experiences, thus assisting them in better understanding the complex interaction between discourse and meaning required by the Common Core Standards. In support of the Common Core, storytelling can be used to facilitate ELL students' access to the ways of talking, reading, understanding, and writing in a specific area of knowledge. This access can be achieved through integrating teaching strategies that encourage ELLs to actively engage in the process of meaning construction by retelling stories and negotiate disciplinary meanings. The dialogue between students and their real and imaginary others constitutes a particularly effective means to construct knowledge and negotiate between personal and public voices. Through participating jointly in retelling stories, the narrative approach to academic discourse allows ELL students to express their understanding of texts through classroom activities.

In addition to being an instructional tool supporting the Common Core, storytelling can be utilized to promote critical reflection on knowledge and text. The potential agreement and conflict endorsed by divergent voices could lead students to reflect on and transform a text's meanings and knowledge. Hence not only is storytelling compatible with academic discourse, not only can it bridge between the demands of the Common Core and the special needs of ELLs, but it is a reflective form of academic discourse that can be utilized to enhance and support academic discourse skills development by helping students think more richly and critically.

Note

1. In offering the transcript for public download, the State of New York censored the word 'shit' and changed it into 'sheet.'

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Staging an Essay: Play and Playwriting for Redirecting Habits of Mind

David Ellis and Megan Murtha

ABSTRACT: Many first-year students struggle with the transition from high school writing to college writing as higher-order demands are made and new discipline-specific genres are added. Previous writing training can provide a “mental set effect,” old habits of mind, which inhibits growth. Additionally, students receive writing training in courses other than the composition class that may further interfere with development and the acquisition of the critical thinking needed for college writing. In this article, we argue that playwriting exercises, informed by Vygotsky’s theory of play, offer a mode to foster critical thinking common to writing practice across the academy and actuate Burke’s “parlor” of academic discourse. Writing-About-Writing (WAW) after playwriting exercises strengthens writer identity and facilitates the transfer of knowledge to other genres.

KEYWORDS: basic writers; playwriting; play; academic discourse; Vygotsky; Zone of Proximal Development; transfer.

We talk about ideas. And I know that I play with the ideas in order to understand them and fit them together.

-Gregory Bateson in “Metaphor: About Games and Being Serious”

We are failing at our jobs. Or so goes the story about English teachers and First Year Composition (FYC) instructors, fueled by anecdotal “media lament[s] that ‘Johnny or Jenny can’t write’” or by poor showings on standardized tests (Brockman and Taylor, “Threshold” 42-43). As Doug Downs observes in “What Is First-Year Composition?” a prevailing sense has taken hold in the public that the charter for FYC to “teach the basic writing skills [such as grammar and punctuation] that employers seek” is not being met “because so many students just can’t write” (50). For Elizabeth Brockman

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and Marcy Taylor, the complaint that their students can't write came from within their institution but outside the English department. In addition to noting students' inability to write grammatically, professors from other departments remarked that students also failed to write with the level of logical, complex, and evaluative thought expected in academic discourse (Brockman and Taylor, "Threshold" 42, "What Do Professors Really Say?" 76); these are the same features that tend to be dampened by a culture of high stakes writing testing (Frazier 108).

Yet, as our first-year composition students take their seats at the start of the term, we can imagine them as having some confidence in being successful, even if they are simultaneously nervous, as they have at least done well enough to graduate high school and enter college. These students bring with them all the habits, skills, and knowledge gained from varying cultural and formal educations into the college writing classroom. Many hold fast to the lessons of high school, which may have been geared toward strategies for passing high stakes exams, leaving many unprepared to satisfy the higher order demands of FYC as well as the demands made by our colleagues—like Brockman and Taylor's—outside the English Department, or the expectations of the public charter that Downs identifies.

Recent findings from cognitive neuroscience suggest that once people develop singular and effective modes of tackling repeated tasks, such as the five-paragraph essay form frequently taught in American high schools, an efficient "mental set effect" arises (Crawford and Willhoff 74). The resulting mental efficiency inhibits insight that a novel approach might offer, as the neuroscientists Richard Chi and Allan Snyder report: "Once we have learned to solve problems by one method, we often have difficulties in generating solutions involving a different kind of insight" (qtd. in Crawford and Willhoff 74). Accordingly, previous writing experience and training, even for the most successful high school writers, may act as a mental set effect, preventing students from successfully meeting all the additional higher-order demands of college thinking and writing, and consigning many students to the status of "basic writer." Additionally, David Russell and Arturo Yañez suggest that students familiar with limited genres of writing will feel alienated by new writing demands, particularly the more specialized and novel the demands are (334). A limited genre, such as the five-paragraph essay geared for an American high school student, or the impromptu standardized timed-writing assessment, can induce a mental set effect, which then leads to alienation as new forms and tasks are called for in college. We come to a kind of *Catch-22*: the singular mental set effect established in high school, or even in test-prep

workshops, limits insight while the introduction of new modes in college composition or other classes, contributes to alienation.

In these difficult moments, the pathways of transfer of prior knowledge into college writing competency, including FYC or basic writing, can be precarious. Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Yancey identify three main outcomes as students attempt to make use of their prior writing knowledge and practice: the nearly identical repetition of old writing habits; the reworking of former skills to fit new tasks; or the self-creation of new knowledge or practice after a “critical incident” or setback. Students’ skills or trained habits can become a crutch, utilized by some as tools which enable them to gain steadiness as they grow and learn as writers, or, more likely, as Chi and Snyder’s work suggests, they become debilitating implements, clutched at as the only means of support. What practices, then, can we implement that can mitigate—without a set-back—mere repetition of old habits, and encourage not just a re-working of former skills, but help generate new knowledge that reflects the complex, evaluative logic that professors across disciplines are clamoring for? In short, how do we disrupt mental set-effects in order to engage students in lively correspondences across genres?

These are developmental concerns as much as they are transfer concerns. Accordingly, they align with the familiar Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) schema, which serves as the basis for the teacher’s role as a guide who assists the student during learning activities until the student gains independent steadiness (*Mind in Society* 91; Dixon Krauss 18). The student, basic writer or otherwise, starts in what could be called the Comfort Zone, the space where she feels comfortable tackling familiar tasks as part of her mental set effect. For the basic writer, this Comfort Zone may consist of a series of stable rules about writing do’s and don’ts—for the five-paragraph form or standardized writing exams. Even if students struggle to implement them, these rules feel familiar. Alternately, new and challenging tasks are within the Anxiety Zone, a space where the student feels unprepared and temporarily unable to accomplish tasks without guidance, such as the seemingly vast, looming land of the higher-order requirements of college writing. At last, in between these two zones is the Proximal Zone, so key to basic writing theory, where with the aid of the instructor offering tools and assistance, the student can cross over into self-sufficiency.

For the many FYC and Basic Writing instructors influenced by ZPD principles, including us, it is tempting to see our classes as a type of boot camp where we train students for the writing battles they will encounter as they move into the intellectual rigors of college life. Unlike boot camp,

FYC—whether particularly designed for basic writers or a general population class with basic writers in it—usually doesn’t occur before what it is preparing its charges for—college life. Most students experience their composition course as just one class among several where writing instruction occurs. All new writing students, but especially basic writers, are thereby vulnerable to the sense of alienation that arises from the multitude of new writing genres and challenges that Russell and Yañez have identified.

Moreover, it is likely only a portion of the writing instruction in other courses will clearly echo the instruction students receive in FYC or BW simply because discipline-specific courses have their own primary concerns and vocabularies. The writing teacher is one voice among many, competing with not only the writing habits that students bring with them, but also a wealth of new instruction from other classes that may be in seeming conflict with what they receive in their writing classrooms. The student may bounce back and forth between a “writing to learn” approach encouraging inquiry in one class and in the next be “learning to write” within the confines of a particular discipline, where mastery over course content is expected to be displayed with all the rule-bound trappings of a discipline-specific paper. For the student who is unable to rapidly synthesize a limited pre-college writing education with the bewildering spectrum of new approaches, the varieties of writing in college can exacerbate the natural disorientation that comes with being a new student. As the looming Anxiety Zone widens in these fractures among the disciplines, the Comfort Zone of an acquired mental set effect offers an especially enticing retreat. The effect may be to see these students’ writing, both within and outside of writing courses, as lacking, as seen in the charges leveled against Brockman, Taylor, and their colleagues that students “can’t write” (42).

In what follows, we attend to the mental set effects of many of those entering FYC, with special attention paid to basic writers, and the unsatisfactory writing that results when students retreat to old habits. We turn to the classic developmental psychology work of Lev Vygotsky and play theory in search of methods that can disrupt these mental set effects, through which students open new avenues for “self-creation of new knowledge” without having to first face a “critical incident” (Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). We then present a series of writing exercises that fall within Vygotsky’s theories, developed to promote the habits of mind necessary for college writing as defined by the 2011 “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” by the CWP, NCTE, and NWP, as well as to prepare students for participation in the traditional modes of academic discourse (1). These exercises vary

in their design, some more tailored toward creative and critical thinking, others laying groundwork for discourse in the mode of the Burkean parlor. Still others are designed to foment writer identity and participation in the traditions of David Bartholomae and Roz Ivanic (Bird 62-63).

We don't want these exercises to operate only within a vacuum of isolated assignments, but rather to function as tools that develop fundamental features of writing that travel across projects. Accordingly, we then explore how coupling them with metacognitive writing assignments, which call for a reflective self-analysis of writing process (Downs and Wardle 561-62), can help bridge the gaps between the simpler "low road" transfer found in moving from a dialogue-driven writing exercise, to an academic-discourse-as-conversation model and a more complex "high road" transfer found in moving from FYC modes of inquiry to discipline-specific writing genres (Perkins and Salomon, qtd. in Donahue 149).

Back to the Comfort Zone

In a recent issue of *JAEPL*, Ryan Crawford and Andreas Willhoff draw upon the latest neuroscience research based on fMRI scans of brains and other techniques during problem-solving activities to gain a clearer biological understanding of the processes of routinized thought and inhibited creativity (74). Researchers have found the brain returns to the old "mental templates of well-routinized representations and strategies" to form solutions as an efficient method of cutting through the noise of new information (Chi and Snyder, qtd. in Crawford and Willhoff 75). By artificially stimulating the brain—activating the right hemisphere while inhibiting activity in the left—researchers have shown that the mental set effect can be avoided (75). Crawford and Willhoff argue that similar positive effects can be achieved in the FYC classroom through the "stillness" and "incubation" (79) offered by meditation practices. What the studies suggest is that we seem to be hard-wired to resist novel thinking approaches when inundated with new and conflicting information and that the breaking down of old habits requires novel approaches that don't activate routine. Perhaps even the most dedicated first-year students, the ones most eager to become more advanced writers, may be working against natural cognitive patterns that keep them repeating old thinking and writing forms that need to be disrupted before they are able to become better writers.

In particular, Crawford and Willhof characterize the mental set effect that results from the writing training of most students who have come up

through American public schools: students have “overlearned” certain writing practices “taken as gospel during secondary education,” such as “the five-paragraph theme, grammatical rules, sentence and paragraph exercises”; and of these, the first-year composition instructor “must disabuse students” to engage them more successfully (74). Many students, perhaps basic writers especially, seem to start out locked into these rules and practices even if they haven’t yet mastered them, perhaps fearful that without these tricks of the trade, standardized writing tests will be impossible to pass.

Such overlearning of limited forms holds for students other than Americans fresh out of the public school system. At our institutions, a large, urban private university and a small, urban private college in the Catholic tradition, respectively, we also have growing populations of international and recently immigrated students who may have little to no exposure to American writing conventions yet whose cultural and educational backgrounds have already shaped their mental set effects. Many international students come from collectivist cultures like China and other East Asian countries² and bring with them a set of social-cultural values and writing conventions that may conflict with those of college composition in the U.S., including a mode of indirectness that counters our own strident individualism (Scollon 113).

In his article, “The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition,” Fan Shen chronicles the clashes which occurred between his Chinese cultural and formal educations and the requirements of American college writing as he navigated varying disciplines (459). He describes the ideological and logical conflicts that can occur when writing in English within an American college, noting his own conflicts with the social and cultural ideologies he acquired growing up in China (459). Ron and Suzanne Scollon identify such conflicts as a consequence of the two views of self in Western and East Asian cultures (113). American academic conventions can be seen as speaking “bluntly” or “immodestly” in many East Asian countries and they were difficult for Shen to adapt once in the U.S. Directives from his writing instructors to “just write what *you* think” left him befuddled (emphasis is Shen’s). Shen writes, “I found that I had to reprogram my mind, to redefine some of the basic concepts and values that I had about myself, about society, and about the universe, values that had been imprinted and reinforced in my mind by my cultural background, and that had been part of me all my life” (460).

If Shen’s experience and Scollon’s assertions are at all representative, the task for student and teacher is substantial. The “reprogramming” that Shen speaks of becomes the directive for the students like him that Scollon

identifies. Without the redefinition of self in relation to the world at large, they may fall into the category of students that David Bartholomae identifies in “Inventing the University,” those basic writers that the university has “failed to involve” in “scholarly projects. . . that would allow them to act as though they were colleagues in an academic enterprise” (11). While a student like Shen is culturally or ideologically shut out of participation, American-reared basic writers are likewise kept from participation by “overlearning” rules for a single form that does not invite them in as academic colleagues, and they may simply retreat to the Comfort Zone of what worked in the past, that is, by mimicking forms without a real consciousness of what is desired (Crawford and Willhoff 74; Bartholomae 11). Both ends of the spectrum—the hard-driving argumentation encouraged by standardized tests on one side and the subtle claims couched in the wisdom of experts on the other—may keep students from developing the critical reasoning and active participation in the academic enterprise when relied on too heavily in FYC, BW, or across the disciplines. When students operating under such mental set effects are asked to analyze and interpret source texts, the retreat into old habits keeps texts at a distance, encased in authority, rather than being seen as living documents with which the student can engage intellectually.

In exploring the intersections of social identity theory and basic writing pedagogy, Barbara Bird suggests that without a conversation between students, texts, and ideas, basic writers will be ill-equipped to join the discourse. As she says, “[a]pproaches to curriculum and pedagogy that only emphasize cognitive knowledge not only limit students’ understanding as whole beings, but they also reduce the impact of learning since students may not internalize the community understandings” (63). In many cases, the writing that results from such limited engagement remains merely practical, a prescribed arrangement of concepts lacking synthesis or inquiry. Bird warns, “If basic writing students do not understand academic writing purposes, their efforts will be focused on mimicking textual features instead of developing an authentic engagement with content” (65).

How, then, do we as writing teachers design work that will help the student—no matter the educational and cultural background—shed thinking and writing habits held in mental set effects that hold them back from developing more? How do we build upon and honor the needed formal and cultural educations they arrive with, while also helping them become ever more self-sufficient, autonomous, “truly human” questioning Freirian thinkers? Additionally, how do we help students discover writing and thinking principles that can more readily transfer to other college writing

tasks? These questions apply to all writers, yet become even more salient for students who are non-native speakers of English, or who come from historically marginalized communities.

Vygotsky, Play, and Playwriting

To address these questions, we turned to the still relevant human development classic *Mind in Society* to see what Vygotsky's theories could tell us about the teaching of writing. We had seen that writing assignments with a playwriting component generated more critical engagement from students than other assignments. The writing itself improved along with the engagement, yet we didn't have a clear understanding of why. Vygotsky's work reveals fundamental features of thinking that can serve as a foundation for writing praxis. In addition to utilizing the ZPD framework from *Mind in Society*, we also borrow other related propositions, namely his ideas involving symbolic action in play and inner-speech. The critical proposal of Vygotsky that revealed to us why these exercises worked was this: "the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge" (24). We see in this claim that the dialectical joining of practical, mostly physical, activity and the abstract, conceptual realm of what Vygotsky calls inner speech serves as the basis for human consciousness (25-27). Play is fundamental to cognitive development as it offers an arena for learners to combine speech and action intentionally: "play is imagination in action" (97). What we draw in particular from Vygotsky is that the physical and performative iterations of thought are disruptive to mental set effects, enabling the subject to break through stuck spots, old habits, and the Anxiety Zone of thinking.

Specifically for composition and rhetoric studies, play of this kind can fall under the rubric of semiotic remediation practices as put forward by Paul Prior, Julie Hengst, Kevin Roozen, and Jody Shipka (33). They propose that the multimodality of this sort of play—in activities like a family pretend game, a scripted dance performance arising out of work from a FYC classroom, or a comedy skit—go beyond play; rather, they are situated and remediated dialogic practices that demonstrate a complex weaving of "historical trajectories or (re)productions, reception, distribution, and representations" that rise to a level of meaning-making analogous to academic discourse (734). The authors draw from Erving Goffman's notion of keying,

or “non-serious” activity, but not “unimportant” activity, that operates outside of a primary frame, such as an essay (738). Developed in line with the ideas of Gregory Bateson (738), Goffman’s practices of “keying” as semiotic remediation become not only “instances of communication (externalized exchanges), but also engines of distributed cognition and moments in the ongoing, historical, and dialogic production of people, societies, and environments” (762). In this sense, these types of activities, while playful, echo many of the properties of academic discourse. They more closely align with natural processes of socio-cultural genesis of individuals and societies as well as the habits of mind called for by the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” more so than the simplified writing of high-stakes testing as Frazier identifies.

If what Vygotsky proposes holds true—that “in play a child deals with things as having meaning” (Vygotsky 98)³—then writing exercises founded in these principles could provide a method for developing consciousness much as Prior and his co-authors have formulated. We are considering consciousness in an academic frame as an umbrella term that covers the crucial habits of mind of curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, flexibility, and metacognition (CWPA, NCTE, and NWP), and we imagined what the parallel of *play* might be in a college composition classroom of young adults. We wondered if this sort of conscious and intellectually developmental *playing* could be captured within a play, specifically, a stage play written out in a script utilizing ideas, concepts, characters, or authors drawn from source texts so that they could then be actively re-conceptualized by the student writer. We considered the imagined physicality that playwriting calls for to be analogous to the types of play scenarios that Vygotsky employed when investigating cognitive development in young learners.

The immediate rationale for playwriting is two-fold: firstly, the student is hard-pressed not to return to habits of a mental set effect (neither the five-paragraph nor any other traditionally academic form is an option) and, secondly, the student cannot complete the task without actively using her imagination to enact a “radically altered” relationship to reality and, hopefully, igniting “significant intellectual development” (Vygotsky 25). If source texts are used, these must be re-imagined in order to fit within the form, or as Bateson says, “play[ed]” with in order to “understand them and fit them together” (4). The necessary re-contextualization invites a deeper reading and discourages mere repetition, even as the playwriting form, in using source texts, invites students into what Douglas Hesse (noting com-

position and creative writing intersections) might call a “Burkean parlor constituted differently” (41).

The Tasks and the Students

The exercises that follow promote our aim to disrupt returns to the Comfort Zone and overlearned forms, while encouraging student participation in the “academic enterprise” (Bartholomae 11). We use these exercises with generally equal success at our two home institutions in general population courses as well as ones designed for ESL students, or for students who have been placed in a developmental class because of an intake assessment, many of whom are also ESL. The exercises have a few variations with different objectives depending on desired outcomes or places they mark within the writing process. But generally, we have three categories: 1) generative writing for its own sake, 2) pre-writing before a scaffolded formal essay, or 3) revision writing as intervention for students who have produced unsatisfactory drafts of a formal essay. These exercises can also explicitly ask for students to include themselves as characters within the scene to foster “the affective and holistic personhood of the learner” and so promote writer identity of the kind that Bird advocates (63), though not every iteration makes that demand. The excerpts that follow come from the same class group, an ESL FYC section for speakers who all had six or fewer years of English language instruction and who could likely be categorized as basic writers (no formal writing assessment was administered). The course title “What is Thinking?” highlights the metacognitive and epistemological themes central to the class, which were specifically chosen to underline the role of critical thinking in writing. All the readings for the class—ranging from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, selections from Oliver Sacks, *Rhinoceros*, and the Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo—touch upon some aspect of thinking and its relationship to identity. In keeping with departmental guidelines, students are required to write three formal essays during the term after completing a series of exercises and multiple drafts. Each essay requires multiple sources.

For all of the exercises, students were asked to imagine a circumscribed space in which they could conceptualize new ideas in contact. Depending on the particular assignment, the characters conceived by each student could be embodiments of concepts, writers of source texts, characters borrowed from source texts or any number of iterations. Whatever the iteration, the students were invited to imagine a physical setting populated with embodied characters that they were then charged to give voice to.

Concepts Meeting on a Bridge: The Writing that Resulted

As preparation for a short formal definition essay, students were asked to define “thinking.” The exercise did not require outside texts, though the ultimate essay did. To help with the definition work, students were asked to contrast “thinking” with other terms typically associated with it, such as “reflecting,” “analyzing,” “imagining,” and “daydreaming.” Students chose three terms, one of which had to be “thinking,” and were asked to personify and imagine the various concept terms as self-aware agents. (What would they wear? How would they react to or observe their surroundings? How are they different from each other? On what would they agree with each other? On what might they disagree?) Then they were to place the three characters in a location of their own choosing, which they were to draw before articulating in writing. After completing the drawing of the setting, they wrote a three-to-five page scene in which their chosen characters interact.

The following excerpt from Dingyi⁴, an intermediate ESL writer from China, illustrates his developing understanding of terms as he assumes each character’s perspective, an exploratory approach Dingyi continued when writing the formal definition essay. The bolded text in this and all following student excerpts signals writing that is echoed in the student’s subsequent assignments as well.

Three people on the Brooklyn Bridge, and they are facing the river, and talking about the bridge.

Imagining: How long I haven’t been here, my first time here was with my family, when I was about 5 or 6 years old.

Reflecting: Oh, I remember my first time here was because a class activity, we were here for draw of this bridge.

Thinking: Actually, I don’t remember the exactly time when I was first time here, probably when I was sitting in the train, and pass through here.

Imagining: It was really happy to be here, all my family members had a delightful day, with smile on the face

all the time.

Reflecting: Yes, me too, it was my first school activity outside. We were all so excited about being here.

Thinking: **What was my mood when I was first time saw this bridge. Probably normal, nothing as the calmly river. Maybe excited, or happy to see this scene.**

Imagining: I can still get the picture of the day with my family members on here in my head. We were just standing here, and took a wonderful family picture.

Reflecting: Not bad. I love this bridge, **when I see this bridge, it seems could bring me back to many years ago.**

Imagining: **Yes, close my eyes, I can see the bridge, river, smiley, sunshine, train, bench and different kind of people go through here in my brain.**

Thinking: **How many people? How many different kind of people? How happy they are?**

*Sun goes down, and three of them prepare to get home. **Thinking always thinking, always talk to his mind, Imagining create the pictures in his head like a film, and Reflecting is replying what Imagining talk about, and make a connection between his history and Reflecting history.***

Here, Dingyi writes from the perspectives of the content he analyzes. The practical activity, as Vygotsky would call it, is limited. That is, there isn't a direct manipulation of the physical scene, yet the imagined physicality does call forth a type of inner dialogue within the student. The conjuring of the bridge and river provokes a lived experience by the student and the

recollected physical landscape lends itself to insight, as seen by the character “Thinking” who sees that thinking is much more active than a “calmly river.” We can see how Dingyi gently pits the concepts against each other, in order to see how they fit, creating a subtle argument along the way that is not burdened with having to be “proven.” In this way the student imitates Bateson’s notions of play, fitting ideas together, because the abstract concepts have taken “concrete” form in the manner Vygotsky calls a “stepping stone for developing abstract thinking” (81).

In “Metalogue: About Games and Being Serious,” Bateson presents an imagined meta-conversation between a young daughter and a father about playful debates they have, demonstrating how the “game” works:

I think of it as you and I playing together against the building blocks—the ideas. Sometimes competing a bit—but competing as to who can get the next idea into place. And sometimes we attack each other’s bit of building, or I will try to defend my built-up ideas from your criticism. But always in the end we are working together to build the ideas up so that they will stand. (4)

We see that the process is playful, but the aim is serious: to form ideas that stand. There is less room for the student to feel wrong while personifying allegorical characters standing on a bridge, as he is not hemmed in by dictionary definitions or by worries that he isn’t following the rigid rules of a particular form. He can discover. With this platform, Dingyi observes from within each character the distinct actions in the scene he creates and records those actions without any impinging formal language of traditional forms; he avoids the mental set effect. Inherent in his scene are a number of observations that distinguish multiple senses of the three terms in relation to need and context, such as the use of memory, reliance on visualization, and focus on internal questioning. Importantly, he also sees how the terms function together (as shown in the final stage direction). The characters *Imagining*, *Reflecting*, and *Thinking* implicitly contribute to an overarching experienter in distinct ways, creating and fusing a complete mental experience recorded in the writing. During the single event of standing in a familiar location, perception, connection to the past, and reaction to the present combine into “holistic” and “embodied ways of being” for the student writer in the way Bird advocates. The playwriting invites Dingyi to conceive of the terms as actors, as living, breathing identities, rather than flat definitions. He views the “thing” itself, the signified, as opposed to the

container of the “thing.” This mode invites an inductive and inquiry-based approach: the inner speech transitions into a dialogue, the characters speak to each other, prompting questions and responses as the student deepens his distinction of the abstract concepts in a concrete setting.

Dingyi composed a draft for the formal definition essay, using the same terms as he did in his play. For the essay, the students were required to independently find and then draw upon outside sources as well, so that they would also learn research practices necessary for academic discourse. Dingyi maintains the personification method of these terms in the essay (a practice he later explained in a reflection as a way to wrap his head around the abstract challenge of the assignment). The following is the introduction to his paper. As we have noted, many of the (bolded) concepts and language established in his play are echoed in this subsequent text:

My brain is an amazing container, it contains an infinite world made of knowledge. **There is a family live inside this world, they are “thinking,” “imagining,” and “reflecting,” and they having different jobs to help me to absorb more knowledge.** According to the theory of left-brain and right-brain by Kendra Cherry, “Our left-brain is good at thinking, logic, reasoning, language and numbers, and our right-brain is good at imagining, creating pictures, and colors” (Cherry). In other words, **“thinking” lives in the left brain, he is a curious man, so his jobs are asking questions and talking about ideas and solutions. “Imagining” lives in the right brain, and he likes pictures and he is really good at art, and his job is to create images. “Reflecting” is the modest one, he lives between them, and he likes memory a lot, and uses memory help me to absorb knowledge.** All of them are inside my brain, and helping me to get the knowledge and complete the world I have.

By imagining and embodying these terms, Dingyi conceptualizes them now with a more cohesive understanding than if he were considering them as isolated, external occurrences. The rich foundation of the student’s prewriting exercise eased his weaving in a source text that supports his observations but does not take the place of them. We can imagine a student without the scene-writing experience who is called upon to define the terms falling into a less critically robust five-paragraph form where each of the terms are dryly defined, paragraph by paragraph. It is likely the terms would remain abstrac-

tions. In a ZPD schema, the playwriting supports the student outside the Comfort Zone, lending steadiness in the Anxiety Zone, and allowing him to complete the assignment independently of the scaffolded assistance that the play first provided.

At the end of the term, students were given a classification assignment, directing them to classify three characters from different works encountered over the semester according to each character's strength as a thinker (Who is the freest thinker? Who is a semi-restricted thinker? Who is the most controlled thinker?). For this, students first needed to identify what components of thinking they would focus their analysis on (e.g., clarity of thought, level of restrictions on thought by outside influences or emotions, or freedom or limitations of actions as evidence of thinking, and so on). Through this articulation of what thinking is and requires, students could then apply their definitions by placing characters of their choice along the spectrum of thinking they established.

As prewriting to the classification essay, students wrote three-to-five page plays, using at least two characters from different texts. The students placed the characters of their choice in a setting from yet another text we visited in the course readings. Through this prewriting assignment, students were encouraged to approach what they had been reading from a psychological angle, where they step inside each of their characters and write from that perspective. This created a more essence-driven understanding of the characters under discussion in their formal papers in a manner consistent again with Bateson, rather than just talking about them.

The following is an excerpt of a scene written by Klara, an immigrant student from Albania writing at an advanced level in English. She placed Randle Patrick McMurphy from Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and Jean from Eugène Ionesco's play, *Rhinoceros*, in a psychiatric ward in World War II Germany (time and country were chosen based on the novel *Youth Without God* by Ödön von Horváth).

This scene takes place in Germany in a psychiatric ward during World War II. In this ward, McMurphy is sharing a room with Jean, who was sent to the institution after suffering from PTSD after turning back from a rhinoceros into a human.

McMurphy: What are you in here for, dear pal?

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Jean: One of my so-called friends, Berenger, signed me up to be here. He thinks I've driven myself mad.

McMurphy: Well, we're all a little mad. What makes you so special?

Jean: How many people can say they've turned into a rhinoceros and come back to their original state of mind?

McMurphy: Wait just a damn second, are you bullshittin' me?

Jean: They say you only lie to the ones you fear. Why would I fear you?

McMurphy: Are you sayin' you lied to me?

Jean: No, my incompetent friend, I am saying that I was once a rhinoceros and now I am me again.

McMurphy: Well, what was the difference?

Jean: There is no difference. **I chose to become a rhinoceros and got bored with it, so I decided to come back.**

McMurphy: I'm no doctor or nothin', but I'm pretty sure you can't choose to make that kind of transformation for yourself.

Jean (louder): You can, when your willpower is as strong as mine is.

McMurphy: What the hell does this got to do with willpower?

Jean: **I chose to turn into a rhinoceros to symbolize my strong willpower and my smart state of mind.**

McMurphy: *(Placing his hand to his chin and softly rubbing it)*

Wait, you said you turned into a rhinoceros to show how strong your mind was.

Jean: Precisely.

McMurphy: So, **how can you be you again when the rhinoceros you were was also you?**

Jean: **Your words make no sense to me.**

McMurphy: **Well, your logic makes absolutely no sense to me.**

Jean: **That is why I am the strong thinker here and you are, well, you are you.**

McMurphy: **You, my friend, are in denial.**

In this scene, Klara creates tension between the two characters as informed by their varying awareness of reality. McMurphy is alert to Jean's distortion of the transformation that he has undergone, and his ability to confront Jean about his denial portrays McMurphy as the more mindful thinker, less bridled by confirmation biases. Here Jean's lack of self-awareness about his motive for transformation, which he casts as personal choice—not as buckling under the pressure to conform—shines through. This depiction reveals Jean to be the overly controlled thinker that he is, though he would never admit it.

Following, in her formal classification essay, Klara compares Jean and McMurphy's levels of thinking to further analyze the sociopolitical implications of restrictions on freethinking. Many of the qualities that she observes

about McMurphy in the excerpt below, for example, echo the mannerisms she gives him in the scene above:

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, McMurphy is the freest thinker because **he is confident in himself**. When McMurphy first arrives at the psychiatric ward, **he is outspoken and boisterous**. Unable to be tamed by Nurse Ratched or her evil minions, McMurphy walks around the ward without worrying about any consequences that may come to him. **He does not accept commands or information without first questioning and trying to find the reasoning behind them**. An example of this is when he is told by one of the aids that the patients have to wait until six thirty to brush their teeth, McMurphy is amazed at the illogic of the rule. Although the rest of the patients follow these irrelevant rules because they feel obliged to, McMurphy questions the reasoning behind them, and makes a point to the aid by brushing his teeth with soap powder instead (Kesey 84).

Similarly, in her discussion about Jean, Klara exposes the illogical nature of Jean's character with a rich analysis of his insistence that willpower shapes every aspect of his life, despite his inability to control his turning into a rhinoceros before Berenger's eyes:

In Act Two, Scene two, when Jean is turning into a rhinoceros, he has no control over it. **For a man who claims to have will-power, we notice in this scene that he is unable to control the transformation that has taken hold of him**. When Berenger visits Jean and notices his change in appearance, **Jean is in complete denial that he is morphing**. Instead, he tries to take the attention off of himself by telling Berenger that he is the one that is turning into a rhino. By trying to prove he is in control of his own body, and that the grunting noises he is making due to turning into a rhinoceros is on purpose, Jean says "I can puff if I want to, can't I? I've every right...I'm in my own house" (Ionesco 65). In addition, **once he notices that he is changing and there is nothing he can do, he begins saying that he is fine with turning into a rhinoceros: "What's wrong with being a rhinoceros? I'm all for change"** (Ionesco 68). Due to the lack of control over the situation, Jean is trying to put on a show for Berenger to prove that he is the one who chose to transform, and

it is not happening without his consent. **Instead of admitting the truth that he is powerless to the change, Jean finds excuses for himself because he refuses to admit he has no willpower over the situation.**

Through the scene, Klara creates a concrete arena (the imagined psychiatric ward, borrowed from *Cuckoo's Nest*) where the players may interact, and by manipulating their exchanges, their deep personal qualities emerge.

Klara plays, fits, and builds in the manner of Bateson (4). The progression of assignments creates scaffolding that fosters an inductive approach and emphasizes close reading. An imagined character dossier develops within the student, drawn from evidence in the source text, as characters are re-imagined and represented on the page. By assuming their roles, Klara conceives their behaviors and decision-making processes, while adding context for these by way of other sources. She avoids the problem of getting “inside a discourse [she] can only partially imagine” as she both invents and defines the discourse as part and parcel of the assignment (Bartholomae “Inventing” 19); the discourse is imagined from the inside. While there is, undoubtedly, a much larger discourse surrounding what Klara creates, her writing becomes a starting-point which confers authentic authority, a newly defined Comfort Zone free of any previous mental set effects. From here, she can expand as she transfers skills developed in the scene into the essay. In many ways, Klara's play is more imaginatively engaging than the resulting essay, while the essay is more traditionally “thoughtful.” The play form offered a broader platform for the student's mind to roam, even as the more formal essay required her to “scale back.” But if the objective is to encourage critical engagement and participation, the playwriting activity fulfills its purpose, while the essay provides the practice that is necessary for the kind of writing more likely called upon in other courses.

Locked-In Drafts: Intervening with Playwriting

In a different essay assignment that did not include playwriting, students were asked to use two expository sources as their primary evidence. Marta, an international student from Spain writing in an intermediate level in English, was asked to interpret the significance of repetition in Marina Abramović's performance art piece, *Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful* by drawing from Matthew Goulish's microlecture pertaining to repetition, “A Misunderstanding.” The following is the opening paragraph of her first draft:

As Goulish affirms there is no repetition to be made as **we are living within a continuously environment so we cannot avoid time and space modifications**. We need also make a reference to our inside world when talking about repetition. **Our inside being is also changing without us noticing**. In one second we can start feeling hungry, angry, happy, nervous, euphoric, sad[...]we can start or stop feeling ANY emotion. This is exactly the reason why the author thinks accurate repetition is not possible. **The only way we could repeat something is if we could own time and space** (feelings are implied within the time concept as if we were able to freeze time we would be able to freeze emotions). The best idea of thinking about the possibility of controlling such things as time and space is pretty pretentious. No one has been capable to control them before, why would we think we are going to be able to achieve that? Eventually, could time and space be an object of ownership?

Marta demonstrates inklings of comprehension within this paragraph, but she is not keeping herself entirely focused on responding to Goulish's argument. While her ruminations about time and space being "objects of ownership" are valid, they drift away from Goulish's meaning. Marta unintentionally misrepresents Goulish's meaning: she suggests time and space are the objects of ownership, whereas Goulish posits that a repeated action becomes familiar, and when we recognize the repetition, that familiarity causes us to feel that we own the moment. The cherry-picking of evidence endemic to the hard-driving arguments of the five-paragraph essay also emerges here, permitting Marta to avoid meaningful analysis. Instead, she drops in a mention of Goulish as unearned, stand-alone support before proceeding to her own ruminations, which are only loosely connected to the original text. As in this case, students like Marta, who have limited English vocabularies or who lack a full understanding of source material, may latch onto new terms and concepts as buzzwords, repeating these terms in inaccurate contexts.

Marta's misrepresentation of Goulish led her instructor to ask her to complete a playwriting exercise instead of the standard second draft in order to deepen her interpretation of both Abramović and Goulish's perspectives as preparation for the final essay. The exercise would also reframe Marta's role to one of an active, focused participant within the conversation. Excerpted below is her scene where she, Goulish, and Abramović discuss the nature of repetition, which she planned to analyze within her formal paper. She places

the scene in her home kitchen, an invention that helped her contextualize the ideas.

Marta: Okay. The most important thing about baking is to make sure you use exactly the same quantity of ingredients every time you make it. **You have to be very accurate and repeat the same recipe without any modifications.** If you can do that the final result will always be the same.

Goulish: Are you sure it's possible to repeat exactly the same recipe and get exactly the same results over and over again without any alterations?

Marta (very upset): Yes Goulish, I do.

Goulish: **According to that every single grain has to weigh the same every time, and the eggs have to be at the same biological state, and the butter melted in the exact same proportion, all the same in comparison to the first time your grandma make the pie, and even then it would not be possible.** Am I wrong?

Abramović: I might agree with you. I think that repetition does not exist as a concrete and accurate concept. **The environment in which we live changes constantly. Time goes by. Emotions, the states of nature, locations...everything is changing within seconds and we barely notice it. Because of that, repeating the same song, sentence, recipe, gesture, is not possible. We cannot make sure we are using the same number of sugar grains when mixing a cake's dough for the second time. We can't expect the grains to weigh exactly**

the same either. We cannot melt the butter in the same proportion and expect it to be at the same temperature level when adding it to the mixture.

Here, Marta constructs her scene from an apt analogy she conceived in her first draft: the inability to bake the same pie twice. By placing the concept of repetition in a concrete realm, baking a pie, she inserts herself within the discussion alongside Goulish and Abramović, where she not only directly responds to the conversation she enacts, but also assumes their perspectives. To use Goffman's terms, the student gains a "footing" within the conversation as an active speaking participant (qtd. in Goodwin and Goodwin 226). As such, a student like Marta is no longer a mere "hearer" of the words of others, but is constructing, along with the other "fully embodied actors," in a vein similar to Bateson's notion of playfully debating a topic with the intent of building ideas that stand (Goodwin and Goodwin 226; Bateson 4). At the same time, she models Vygotsky's "play [as] imagination in action" (97).

In her play, Marta takes the initial rich observations and ideas from the first draft, though disconnected from the source text, and grapples with them directly through dialogue writing. In her first draft, the line "we are living within a continuously environment so we cannot avoid time and space modifications ... Our inside being is also changing without us noticing," is clarified in her play: "The environment in which we live changes constantly. Time goes by. Emotions, the states of nature, locations ... everything is changing within seconds and we barely notice it. Because of that, repeating the same song, sentence, recipe, gesture, is not possible."

After writing the play, Marta returned to her draft ready to revise with a more grounded sense of how to utilize her sources. In her revision, she identifies the main arguments of Goulish, and pushes his ideas by considering why repetition is impossible:

For Matthew Goulish, repetition involves the experience of exactly the same thing, which for him, is not possible. As we all know, **we live within an environment, which is continuously changing.** People die and babies are born every single second no matter what. Time passes and we all get a bit older every minute. **The time is changing, our location is changing, we, as human beings, are physically and emotionally changing.** Even the rock standing on the mountain is changing because as

the wind blows, it is exposed to different atmospheric gasses that wear it down. **According to this fact of life, repetition is not possible unless we could stop this dynamic change** both inside and outside ourselves.

Without the loss of her initial ideas or voice, her observations are now more direct, executed with a clearer progression and shape. She distinguishes between her views and Goulish's. Rather than trying to make Goulish say something he does not, she delineates between his observations about repetition and her own that were grown in conversational response.

The Playwriting Voice: Enter the Parlor

In the now canonical *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke suggests that to enter discourse is to "[i]magine that you enter a parlor" where the conversationalists "answer" to each other (110). Tellingly, Burke conceives of discourse as an imagined physical space, where embodied writers or ideas can be placed in relation to one another. Whether in antithesis or synthesis, the important element is that a larger understanding can be achieved through a back and forth dialogue, and that any new entrant to the conversation—including the student writer—is expected to be just as present in this space as those who came before her.

If we apply Burke's analogy to the "literary forms" that are the backbone of many discipline-focused writing projects or even FYC classes, we see that writing becomes the space in which conversation takes place, the veritable parlor, where sources or ideas become speakers alongside the student. Playwriting operates under these same rules of imagined spaces, lending itself as a natural medium for students to explore ideas before attempting to tackle them in traditional modes of discourse.

In "Teaching Basic Writing: An Alternative to Basic Skills," Bartholomae articulates his criticism of all skills-first thinking, that students must first "work on" sentences or paragraphs in order to gain steadiness before they can be "let loose" to write fuller essays (87). While Bartholomae attached this philosophy specifically to Basic Writing more than three decades ago, and the landscape has undoubtedly changed, for those outside FYC the charge still resonates. Brockman's survey of her colleagues shows that in many courses outside the FYC there is still an emphasis on mechanics and skill that the student is expected to master before entering the parlor. In order to counteract the skills-first pedagogy, Bartholomae promotes student-driven inquiry, where they "attempt new perspectives, re-formulate, re-see, and,

in general, develop a command of a subject” (86). Bartholomae’s pedagogy could be an apt description of Burke’s parlor, a space for the student to pursue inquiry on the page by playing with ideas to understand them and fit them together in the mode of Bateson, Vygotsky, and other play-friendly theorists.

Playwriting alone doesn’t necessarily transfer into successful participation in academic discourse. It is useful to include “meta-writing” exercises, of the literacy narrative type advocated by Downs and Wardle, during the progression of assignments too (561-62). We often ask students to reflect in writing or through a class conversation what they learned by completing the playwriting exercise and/or how they could take what they have learned and utilize it in a formal essay (or vice-versa). For more advanced students, we might ask students to imagine a literature review for a research report in another class as a type of play. Meta-writing of this kind privileges, as Bird states, the *whys* of discourse practices over the *hows* of it, allowing students to “construct their academic affiliation...‘positioned’ as insiders” (Bird, Ivanic qtd. in Bird 65). From this position of understanding, Bird continues, students have “power to choose how they want to negotiate their academic selves in connection with their non-academic lives” (65-66). It is through this negotiation of the academic self that creates a “holistic and *authentic* writer identity rather than a superficial, mimicked writer performance” (emphasis Bird’s 66). This meta-writing underlines not just the discoveries made by the student, but the process of discovery. As we see in Marta’s work, the switching of modes engages her in a particularly rich metacognitive space, which then fuels her understanding of the source texts and how to write about them. Consequently, the meta-writing encourages an awareness of high-road transfer of fundamental writing and thinking skills to other writing projects (Donahue 149).

Playwriting supplies Vygotsky’s concrete “stepping-stone” into discourse, satisfying both those who value tradition-bound forms and those who place primacy on inquiry. Playwriting coupled with meta-writing both prepares the pathway for transfer and becomes it. For students who have come out of a Chinese educational system or a similar one, as with Fan Shen, playwriting offers space for the student, as character and author, to create a writing self more suited to the task of English composition. As Shen declares, “in order to write good English, I knew that I had to be myself...[and] had to create an English self” (461). By creating an “English self,” Shen adapts to rules that often curb entry into academic discourse, and in doing so conforms to the expectations of the gatekeepers to the conversation who decide who may participate and how, that is, by valuing “surface features of writing and

dialect features of edited American English” over substance (White, qtd. in Frazier 109). Keith Gilyard has a kindred term for the gatekeepers, *eradicationists* (90), a name he applies to those in the academy who wish to eradicate particular English dialects in college writing, ranging from African American English to invented Englishes of ESL learners (84-85).

While Gilyard is a staunch *pluralist*, one who feels that all English dialects should be treated with equanimity within the academy, and that SAE should not be privileged—he does present us with a third option: *bidialectualism* (90). A bidialectualist, in Gilyard’s eyes, is one who sees all English dialects as equal, who also pragmatically asserts that “in order to succeed in the mainstream” elements of SAE should be adopted for most academic tasks (90). We agree; however, a low stakes playwriting exercise can—perhaps should—be written in the student’s own words, without fear of reprisal so that they are able, as Bartholomae advocates, to “imagine themselves as writers writing” (85). Stressing SAE mechanics at the scene-writing stage may alienate enough to propel some students back into the comfort of a mental set effect wherein concern over form trumps inquiry or content. Only after the playwriting exercises (likely not until the very last drafts of the essays that follow) are they asked to seriously accommodate all the rules of genre and discipline-specific conventions in order to satisfy the gatekeepers. In this way, the fundamental elements of inquiry-based writing are privileged over the distracting “noise” of SAE “correctness” that drives some back into a mental set effect. While playwriting allows students to “imagine themselves as writers,” a follow-up meta-writing exercise permits them to look back at that writing self to discover truths about their individual writing practices and processes, inviting an awareness that can carry over into other writing projects.

Conclusions: Play and Understanding

As Bateson suggests, in the composition classroom and the academy at large, “we talk about ideas.” Yet, merely talking about ideas doesn’t seem to be enough for Bateson (or for us). The end goals are to first “understand them” and then “fit them together”; the ideas are inert unless we make something of them. For Bateson and us, “play” is not the object, but the tool for understanding and, then, for making something of that understanding. So far, we have been talking about playwriting and expository writing as if they are at least partly interchangeable when clearly they are not. While they are distinct from each other, if too much is made of these distinctions, unifying

principles can be lost, squeezing the “intellectual room” of the scholar, as Douglass Hesse intimates in “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies.” Creative writing in the composition classroom does not need to be solely about “creating attention structures from the stuff of words” (Hesse 41) through the use of beautiful language as some see its role. While beautiful language can be the product of creative writing that can then engage the reader, the purpose of creative writing goes well beyond such concerns. We argue that the habits of mind identified in the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” are exercised, if not cemented, through the critical thinking enabled by creative writing. The central objectives are practice in the invention of logical structure that narrativity requires and, for dialogic playwriting in particular, exposure to the constituent conversational elements of academic discourse. Playwriting as pre-writing offers both an analogue to and concrete experience of academic discourse, a socio-cultural genesis that Prior and others point to, which lays a foundation to build from as students transfer to other genres. Just as importantly, if not more so for breaking through debilitating mental set effects formed in high school, playwriting is often seen as play by students. Play is not only appealing to the struggling student, fostering participation, but also offers a way to break from limited overlearned writing and thinking modes. Additionally, play of this kind calls upon natural features of intellectual development that Vygotsky identifies, features that may have been tamped down by well-meaning “rules of writing” enforcers.

Playwriting is not, of course, a panacea, but another effective tool among many that can help students as they transition from high school to college writing. Crawford and Willhoff’s writing on the use of stillness and meditation as a mode to quiet the “noise” of new information that often provokes a return to a mental set effect of old habits offers promise too. We see no reason why our two approaches, and others, couldn’t be used in conjunction to help students decrease the size of the Anxiety Zone in their work as they take up new genres and attempt to transfer skills from one mode to another. In our students’ work, we see that Comfort Zones are expanded to include many of the fundamentals of academic discourse and the habits of mind and skills “essential for success” (“Framework for Success”). Better writing is the product of rising consciousness within students, which, in turn, encourages them to be more “fully human,” as Friere believes, and promotes future participation in the academic enterprise or perhaps beyond. Ultimately, playwriting offers a structure for students to understand intel-

lectual problems in context—deeply and holistically—while also authorizing them to take a seat in the parlor and speak up.

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Notes

1. "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing" identifies eight habits of mind, viewed as "essential" (1): curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition. Notably, the "Framework" privileges these habits over outcomes such as rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions. An order of operations is implied: the development of these habits of mind first gives rise to acquiring writing skills and not the other way around.
2. Students from China and other East Asian countries now make up nearly 40% of all international students (Institute of International Higher Education)
3. Franca Garzotto explored and empirically confirmed the Vygotsky question in 2007 in the domain of complex developmental learning and computer games in "Was Vygotsky Right? Evaluating Learning Effects of Social Interaction in Children Internet Games."
4. All students were asked how they would like to be named in this article and chose to use their actual names.

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Designing a Digital Story Assignment for Basic Writers Using the TPACK Framework

Shoba Bandi-Rao and Mary Sepp

ABSTRACT: The process of digital storytelling allows basic writers to take a personal narrative and translate it into a multimodal and multidimensional experience, motivating a diverse group of writers with different learning styles to engage more creatively and meaningfully in the writing process. Digital storytelling has the capacity to contextualize learning and provide opportunities for self-directed learning. Although digital storytelling—as a tool to practice basic writing skills—is relatively new, the outcomes are encouraging for writing instructors to incorporate a digital storytelling activity as part of the curriculum. In this article, we share how we applied Mishra and Koeler’s Technology Pedagogy Concept Knowledge (TPCK) theoretical and conceptual framework to facilitate the process of integrating technology to content and pedagogy as we designed and implemented a digital storytelling assignment in our writing classes with 20-25 students. Digital storytelling is the art of expressing a compelling story through the use of digital tools such as images, recorded narrative, text, music, and video.

Key Words: basic writing; digital storytelling; multimodality; self-efficacy; Technology Pedagogy Concept Knowledge (TPCK)

In the digitally charged world we live in, there is a need to move beyond “foundational literacies” (Skinner and Hagood 13) that emphasize printed text, reading comprehension, writing, grammar, vocabulary, or as Norton Grubb suggests, “linguistic capacities that are basic” (6). We can no longer assume that students learn post-secondary writing exclusively “through reading and writing” (Hobson 107). Further, a mono-modal approach to writing does not reflect our students’ discursive needs. John White and Patrick Lowenthal point out that when it comes to discursive style, “teachers in the K-12 setting and especially in the college setting simply assume that students entering the university have mastered (and are ready and willing to use)

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academic discourse when, in fact, these relatively specific conventions have never been fully examined or deconstructed in the K-16 classroom" (297). Struggling writers require an approach that addresses a variety of learning styles and academic discourses, or as Grubb proposes, a more constructivist or balanced instruction that includes "improvement of many dimensions of cognitive abilities" (6) and expressivist needs.

Current mobile technologies such as smartphones and tablets have already allowed students to explore multimodal literacies. For instance, students use the camera on their phones to take "photo notes" or capture pictures of slide presentations or notes written on the blackboard; use the Internet on their smartphones to research a topic or look up the meaning of a word; and watch "how to" video clips to learn everything from mastering a dance move to solving a mathematical equation. As students become more comfortable navigating through digital information, pedagogical approaches in the classroom must also connect "students to content in ways that they are accustomed to consuming information" (Dreon, Kerper, and Landis 5), with multimedia writing activities. Digital Storytelling—the art of combining traditional literacies (listening, reading, speaking, writing) and new literacies (digital images, video, music, computer graphics) all working together in interesting ways to craft a short story—is one such activity that provides students who struggle with writing alternative ways to engage in the writing process.

Digital storytelling appeals to a diverse group of students because it focuses on students presenting compelling personal narratives (Condy, Chigona, Gachago and Ivala 278), and it accommodates students with different learning styles with its multimodal approach (Robin 709). Digital storytelling enhances student confidence with mobile technology (Reyes and Clark 56) by promoting self-directed learning, providing students an opportunity to use their creativity to determine how they want to present their stories (Li 2159; Yang 210), and facilitating the transition into the academic discourse styles. As a result, digital storytelling has demonstrated the ability to motivate basic writers (Gregory and Steelman 291; Kajde 65; Sadik 490; Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, and Eynon 164), adding a sense of achievement as students have an end product, namely the digital story, that they can share with their peers in class (Plankis and Hwang 2348).

Although digital storytelling may sound attractive to writing instructors as a way to engage students in the writing process, the thought of actually implementing the project in a class with 20-30 students can seem daunting, prompting a wide range of technological and pedagogical ques-

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tions. What technologies should students use? How proficient do they need to be in using these technologies? How will they respond to the tasks? These are understandable concerns, and we had similar fears when we started our digital storytelling project. Such concerns are not uncommon. In their study, Ruth Sylvester and Wendy-Lou Greenidge discuss teachers' fears of "loss of classroom management, technical glitches, time pressure, and lack of administrative endorsement in a time of accountability" (294); they stress the importance of having a good theoretical and conceptual framework while designing the assignment to transform the digital storytelling challenge into a more manageable and a "doable" classroom activity. The use of digital technologies in education is relatively recent, so there are few theoretical and conceptual frameworks available, and they are still in the testing phase.

In addition to considering the theoretical foundation for the work, it is also critical to have the support from an institution that promotes a technology-enhanced learning environment. We had the backing of the E-Learning Center at our school, which organized a weeklong workshop conducted by experts from the Center for Digital Storytelling. During this time, we trained on ways to implement digital storytelling in our classrooms. Since then, we have incorporated the digital storytelling project in our syllabus and have been making adjustments to it to suit the needs of our students. This article reflects on these ongoing efforts to develop the project for our students by exploring available frameworks for implementing digital storytelling assignments effectively into the Basic Writing classroom. In a previous study, we implemented Bernard Robin and Sara McNeil's instructional design framework, ADDIE (analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate), to design and evaluate a digital storytelling assignment in our writing class with ESL learners (Sepp and Bandi-Rao). In the current study, we explore the Technology Pedagogy Content Knowledge (TPCK) theoretical and conceptual framework to design the digital storytelling assignment for our Intensive Writing course.

The objective of the TPACK framework is to integrate technology with pedagogy and course content in an organic manner so that neither the teacher nor the students feel the strain of technology interfering with the teaching or the learning processes. Later in this article, we will share how we integrated multimedia technology relatively easily into the course curriculum using the TPACK framework in our basic writing class with the purpose of addressing the learning needs of a diverse group of students.

Digital Storytelling for Basic Writers

Storytelling goes beyond the universal human need to communicate with others and to preserve cultural bonds with family and community (Bruner 13-14). It plays a significant role in the development of our intellect. Jerome Bruner, and Victoria Gates, Erik Jacobson, Sophie Degener and Victoria Purcell-Gates add that the process of storytelling facilitates (1) our cognitive development from concrete concepts to abstract concepts, and (2) our ability to infer from the characters, the plot, the theme, the conflict, and the setting. Thus, the relevance of storytelling—oral, visual, written, and/or digital—cannot be underestimated in the basic writing classroom, where students experience difficulty in making connections within a text. Even though digital stories begin with the traditional process of selecting and researching a topic and writing a short interesting and compelling personal narrative, they are then “combined with various types of multimedia, including computer-based graphics, recorded audio, computer-generated text, video clips, and music so that it can be played on a computer, uploaded on a web site, or burned on a DVD” (Robin 222). As Cynthia Reyes and Bill Clark note in their study, mobile technologies that students use on a daily basis can help put skilled and unskilled writers at the same starting point, creating a more equal classroom (53). Even the familiarity with some of the basic features of smart phones—use of the camera, voice recorder—allows basic writers to interact more confidently with proficient writers and learn from them.

Though the literature on digital storytelling is not extensive, studies done so far affirm that when planned carefully and adopted appropriately, digital storytelling is valuable in the basic writing classroom. Research studies suggest that students who labor with the traditional form of writing are able to express themselves through the multimodal process of digital stories in ways they previously could not. For instance, Susan Britsch discovered that “the interaction of the visual with the verbal necessarily engages a more selective and informed use of both as each supports the development of the other” (718). In another study, Yu-Feng Yang reports two major findings on adult English language learners who created hybrid text using multimodal resources. First, the students’ intent drove the use of the multimodal resources, which in turn helped students imagine and reimagine their digital stories as they crafted them (233-34). And second, this student-centered approach motivated and empowered participants to take charge of their own learning (235)—an outcome from which basic writers can benefit tremendously.

Students' self-efficacy, or students' belief in their ability to complete a task, is crucial for developing confidence and learning effectively. Ed Jones found in his study that basic writers generally tend to have low self-efficacy (210), and any move towards helping independent learning is a move in the right direction. Further evidence for self-directed learning comes from James Groom's successful digital storytelling online course DS 106 offered at the University of Mary Washington. DS 106 provides "a layered approach that supports an 'open' pedagogy with the aim of encouraging creativity and innovation through community building, collaboration and increased global communication skills" (Lockridge, Levine, and Funes 3), where teachers allow students to make decisions about the course, thereby motivating students' engagement in the process. As students exercise their creative muscle with multimodal resources, they gain room to explore aspects of writing beyond their "comfort zone" and bolster their self-efficacy.

In another study with at-risk college freshman in a basic writing class, Tracey Weis, Rina Benmayor, Cecilia O'Leary, and Bret Eynon found that digital storytelling helped motivate students at their respective institutions. Eynon, who teaches at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, had his students research immigrant experiences and then create their own digital stories by examining the immigrant experience of another student at the college. Eynon found that even though his students had little time for a challenging project (most had to balance home, school, and a job), students became more motivated as they connected with the immigrant experiences of others and placed their own experiences in "a larger social and historical context" (Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, and Eynon 164). Findings from these research studies are encouraging for classroom instructors.

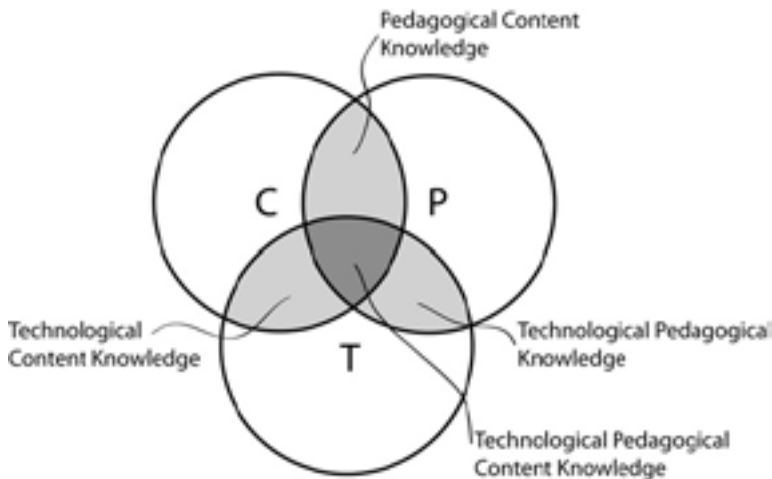
Integrating technology seamlessly with the course content can initially seem challenging for instructors. It is important to ensure that neither the instructor nor the student feel discouraged by the technology or find technology interfering with the actual purpose of the lesson. Linda Stine questions this concern in her work, "If I ask students to present their ideas in pictures and bullet points on a PowerPoint slide, will I be taking away another needed practice opportunity for expressing themselves in grammatical sentences and fluent paragraphs?" (40). An instructor should not have to have these dilemmas. A sound and well-developed framework should allow teachers to integrate technology into the writing curriculum so that basic writers master the skills of developing paragraphs and become actively engaged in the process of academic discourse. In the following section, we describe the TPACK

theoretical and conceptual framework we used to bring together content, pedagogy and technology as we designed our digital storytelling project.

Theoretical Framework

The TPACK framework guided us in planning the digital storytelling assignment. The framework basically builds upon Lee Shulman’s Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) conceptual framework, proposed in 1986 and widely used in teacher education, to present “ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others” (9). According to Shulman, the knowledge of the subject matter, namely the content (what) and the pedagogy for delivering the context (how), are not mutually exclusive. The ideal zone for teaching and learning is the blending of the two. Using Shulman’s PCK framework, Punya Mishra and Matthew Koehler have developed the TPACK framework to help teachers design authentic lessons in which the technologies employed meld with the course content and pedagogy to effect “connections, interactions, affordances, and constraints between and among content, pedagogy, and technology” (1025). TPACK is diagrammatically represented below with the use of three circles (content, pedagogy, and technology) that overlap with each other. The area where the three circles intersect is the ideal area where critical teaching and learning takes place.

Figure 1



The three circles—Content, Pedagogy, and Technology—overlap to create four more kinds of interrelated knowledge (Mishra and Koehler 1025).

Looking at Figure 1, we identify four major areas of knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, technological knowledge, and at the intersection of the three is the technological, pedagogical, content knowledge. We will now examine each area as it relates to digital storytelling:

- *Content Knowledge* is the “knowledge about the actual subject matter that is to be learned or taught” (Mishra and Koehler 1026). It’s vital that the teacher has the mastery of the subject, including the “concepts, theories and procedures within the given field” (Mishra and Koehler 1026). For the writing instructor, these would include a thorough knowledge of writing personal narratives, developing ideas and paragraphs, drafting, editing, proofreading, and storyboarding. Samples of digital storytelling content can be accessed from resources such as the Center for Digital Storytelling website (www.storycenter.org), Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (<http://dalnresources.org.ohio-state.edu/contents.html>), and Computers and Composition Digital Press (<http://ccdigitalpress.org/stories/chapters/introduction/>).
- *Pedagogical Knowledge* is the “deep knowledge about the processes and practices or methods of teaching and learning and how it encompasses, among other things, overall educational purposes, values, and aims” (Mishra and Koehler 1026). Teachers should know how to organize and deliver course materials and to prepare students to participate in group activities such as sharing, discussing and writing drafts, setting up storyboards, collaborating with others, and giving and receiving constructive feedback.
- *Technological Knowledge* is the “knowledge of the standard technologies such as books, chalk and blackboard, and more advanced technologies, such as the Internet and digital video” (Mishra and Koehler 1027). Technology for a digital storytelling project can vary from simple (smart phones, PowerPoint, Photo Story 3, iMovie) to sophisticated Windows Movie Maker, Adobe Premier). Teachers should consider which technologies are needed for creating a digital story, which technologies are available easily to students, how the technologies are used, and what the limitations are. For instance, Photo Story 3, a software program for creating visual stories, is available on Windows operating system, but not on Apple computers. Other factors such as computer lab facilities and services available at the college

should be considered while planning the project.

- *Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge* is the most exciting component, the one that makes the “whole” greater than the “sum of its parts,” or as Mishra and Koehler put it, “an emergent form of knowledge that goes beyond all three components (content, pedagogy, and technology)” (1028). As teachers examine content, pedagogy, and technology separately and in connection with each other, they find the key to successfully implement the digital storytelling project in their classrooms. It is at the intersection of the three areas where technology enables, enriches, accelerates, and enhances the delivery and development of knowledge in ways that help students with their critical thinking and learning skills. This is when students are focused completely on enriching their digital stories, using technology to mainly move their narratives further.

The TPACK framework assisted us in fitting pedagogy to technology in digital storytelling to help a diverse group of basic writers enhance their writing skills through small group discussions around photographs and storyboarding and through writing and rewriting several drafts. The framework facilitated the process of identifying technologies important for the digital storytelling project: a smartphone for taking pictures and recording narratives and software programs such as Windows Movie Maker, iMovie, and PowerPoint for creating the digital stories. Further, during the process of recording their personal narratives and listening to them, students were able to think critically and reflect upon their writing process, which led them to make meaningful edits to their narratives.

Crafting Digital Stories Using the TPACK Framework

In the Spring 2014 semester, one of the authors implemented the digital storytelling assignment discussed here in her *Intensive Writing* course using the TPACK framework. This non-credit course mainly prepares students for college-level writing and the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (aka CATW). The project had to be carefully planned and carefully integrated into the course syllabus. Since students at this level must pass the writing test in order to advance, the digital storytelling project was one small part of the course requirements. Traditional writing assignments such as essays and drafts were still the major part of the coursework. The digital storytelling project was

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The instructor began the project by asking students to think about a place in New York City (building, park, street, neighborhood, public work of art) that was special to them. Students were asked to take pictures of the place with their mobile phones. The Empire State building, Battery Park, a neighborhood in Spanish Harlem, and a work of graffiti in the Bronx were some of the places students selected. Then students shared their pictures with their peers in small groups and talked about why the place was special to them. Next students were asked to write paragraphs about their special place as an in-class writing exercise. Although students have used pictures from their phones for other writing tasks before, the TPACK framework made us aware of how to take advantage of usable and convenient technology to enhance small group discussions and help students draw out details from the images and include them in their writings. The convenience of smartphone technology for capturing, storing, and sharing pictures cannot be disputed, based on their size, weight, accessibility, and availability.

In the next step of the digital storytelling process, namely storyboarding, students planned how their story would unfold frame by frame, much like a comic strip. Students sectioned their story into smaller meaningful parts and put them on index cards or used comic-strip-creating software programs such as Bitstrips. They sequenced the parts so that the narrative flowed coherently and logically with one dramatic moment in the narrative to not only engage the reader, but also propel the story forward. For those students who struggle to string their ideas together coherently, the storyboard provides a visual and kinesthetic way to sequence various parts of their narrative. This was an excellent activity for students to exercise their decision-making and think critically about their writing, as there were no right or wrong answers. Students were encouraged to work on the script and the storyboard simultaneously so that they could review and revise their scripts as necessary. Students familiar with technology took advantage of several mobile apps available for creating storyboards such as StoryBoard Maker, CardBoard Index Cards, and StoryBoard Quick Direct.

The use of storytelling with visuals in a college-level writing classroom is often perceived as being “subservient to language,” and images regarded “as unstructured replicas of reality” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 23). The fear is that students could spend far too much time looking at photos that are poor duplicates of reality, which, in turn, could interfere with the quality of their writing. This is true if visuals are overused or used in an unstructured

manner without relevance to the verbal language. But such fears should not undermine the richness that images bring to a basic writing classroom (George 23), particularly one with diverse students having different learning styles. Studies have shown that images help students who have grown up in an audio-visual saturated culture, as well as those who are more visually sensitive than verbally fluent, to write better. For example, Diana George finds in her study that visual images have had an important place in the writing class in helping students to pay attention to details and explore new ideas (23). We too found this attention to detail in the narratives students wrote, particularly when it came to describing physical spaces and appearances.

Overall, students wrote some excellent personal stories about their favorite places in New York City. Even though we are tempted to present excerpts from some of the best narratives, we decided to showcase samples of two particular students (whom we will refer to as Student A and Student B), primarily to reiterate how the digital storytelling experience can “move” even the most reluctant writers to write a little more on their own, which, in turn, can help the students develop more self-assurance.

First, we present short excerpts from Student A’s narrative to demonstrate how images played a significant role in helping the student draw out details in her writing. Student A came to the United States from Jamaica when she was thirteen years old. She said that she “hated” writing all through high school. In class, she was uninterested in writing. Her essays were short because she didn’t elaborate sufficiently or develop her ideas, and she struggled with development even at the sentence level. Even though Student A had created an impressive storyboard about the Whispering Gallery at Grand Central Station, her special place in New York City, she wrote her first draft with great difficulty.

Student A (excerpt from the first draft)¹

It is a dome that connects the food court to the corridors. If a person stands at one corner and speaks, at another corner you can hear it. When you speak, the sound is carried through the ceiling.

The tutor at the College Writing Center provided some feedback on the first draft and encouraged Student A to view the images and storyboard while writing. Having a smartphone on hand made it easy for the tutor to view

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these images and help the student. It is at such small but significant moments when technology dovetails so nicely with teaching, allowing the tutor to ask critical questions about the images in real time and making the student feel more connected with her project. In the subsequent drafts, the student began qualifying some of the nouns/verbs in her narrative; *long* hallways, *opposite* corner, hear the words *clearly*. Soon, the student took the initiative and sought the tutor's help for appropriate vocabulary to describe the Whispering Gallery; *dining concourse*, *arch-shaped hall*, *corner arches*.

Student A (excerpt from the third draft)

The Whispering Gallery is an arch-shaped hall that connects the large dining concourse to the long hallways. If a person stands at one corner of the gallery and whispers, another standing at the opposite corner can hear the words clearly as if the speaker were next to him. When a person speaks at one of the corners, the voice is carried along the corner arches to the ceiling and to the other corners of the gallery.

This third draft is a significant improvement over her first draft. What we think happened is that, once a few sentences started to read better (in the academic discourse), Student A must have felt a sense of accomplishment, which, in turn, motivated her to seek the help and assurance of the tutor to work on her writing.

Initially, in the first draft, unskilled writers find it difficult to narrow the focus of their story and develop their voice. They also tend to resort to *telling* the story as opposed to *showing* the story. It is at this crucial stage that students need some careful guidance from their instructors and tutors as they navigate their way through multiple drafts. By examining good sample scripts (written and/or audio), instructors can draw students' attention to various aspects of effective writing in terms of coherence, organization of ideas, sentence structures, etc. The Center for Digital Storytelling website provides a number of sample digital stories that can be used as models. Although there is no constraint on the length for a personal narrative, a digital story is generally between 250 and 300 words. As a rule of thumb, a 250-word script makes a two- to two and half-minute digital story. Economy of words is the key to digital storytelling.

When students completed their third drafts (for some students, it was

their fourth or fifth drafts), they recorded their narratives using the voice recorder app on their smartphones. This was a practice recording, not the final one. Most recordings were done in the presence of a tutor or the instructor to ensure that the students got the prosody (stress, intonation, and pronunciation) right. Unskilled readers, who are unable to chunk words meaningfully, place stress on the precise syllable of a word, or get the right intonation, need to practice reading. For such readers, we recommend that instructors and tutors show students how the words within a sentence are chunked and where they need to pause by making notations on the hardcopy of their script. For instance, a red dot was used at the end of each sentence to indicate a longer pause. We used short green vertical bars where commas were placed to indicate a shorter pause. We underlined with a pencil groups of words that needed to be read together. These notations helped all students read better. Once again, the voice recorder app on their smartphones made the recording process easy and convenient. After recording, students were then asked to listen to their own narratives at home and revisit their scripts to see if they wanted to make any more changes to it prior to the final recording.

Doing a practice recording is an additional stage we implemented in the current digital storytelling project based on the experience we have gained in the previous semester's project. The first time we had our students create digital stories, we had them record only once, after the students had completed their final scripts. However, what we discovered was that several students wanted to make changes to their scripts as they listened to their own, recorded narratives. This came as a surprise to us as we had not anticipated the value of listening to one's own narrative in the editing process. As an unanticipated consequence, we decided to do the practice recording in the future digital storytelling projects we implemented because we considered it an important step in the editing process. Neuroscience professor, Paula Tallal, uses the term "glasses for the ears" with reference to helping students with dyslexia read better. The phrase "glasses for the ears" refers to computer-generated speech that is used to train the children to discern certain consonant sounds such as /b/ and /p/ that they previously could not (Blakeslee). We think that "glasses for the ears" is an equally apt phrase to use for our basic writers who revise their writings after they have listened to their own, recorded narratives. This action appears to unlock another level in the editing process by helping basic writers see their writing in a new light or a new perspective, perhaps as an outsider.

To demonstrate this editing process, we present excerpts from Student B's narrative, another struggling writer who was painfully aware of her per-

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ceived shortcomings as a writer and extremely self-conscious while speaking and writing in class. She never volunteered to read aloud or participate in large group discussions. Student B, who came to the US from Bangladesh after completing high school there, wrote about the view of New York City from the Empire State Building.

Student B (excerpt from the third draft)

When I saw the city from the 86th floor of the Empire State building, I felt that the world is very big. Everybody is fighting their own life. I am busy with my life. My mind is thinking about all those things. I realized our life is small.

After the student listened to her recorded narrative, she made the following edits on her own:

Student B (excerpt from the fourth draft)

When I looked below, I began to feel connected to the city in a number of ways. Standing on the 86th floor, I felt like I was flying. I began to see that the world is very big, but our lives are very short. In New York, everyone has freedom. I can become whatever I like to be.

Student B made some important changes after listening to her narrative. The discussions and negotiations that went on between the student and the instructor during the conferencing sessions of the various drafts suddenly began to make sense to the student on a deeper level. For example, in the fourth draft, she includes a point of reflective reference: “*I began to feel connected to the city in a number of ways.*” The student’s sense of freedom comes alive in “*Standing on the 86th floor, I felt like I was flying.*” This juxtaposition of the phrases, *the world is big and our lives are short*, demonstrates stylistic sophistication. Notably, the student did not think of this phrasing while working on the previous drafts, which were mainly based on either the student reading the script aloud to herself or to the instructor, or hearing the instructor read her script aloud to her. We identify this exercise of listening

to one's recorded narrative as one of the critical learning areas where technology, content, and pedagogy intersect within the TPCK framework. This revising process probably gave Student B a certain sense of confidence in her language skills as later in the semester she slowly began to participate a little more in class discussions. She even volunteered to read aloud a paragraph from a text in class. Listening to the writer's own, recorded narrative appears to have a significant impact on the revision process. Several students expressed that they read their scripts more carefully while listening to their narratives recorded in their own voice. We don't know how to explain this aspect of "reflective editing," but we believe that it is worth exploring and researching this process further in a future study.

Once the students had revised and completed the scripts and the final recording, students gathered the following digital materials: recorded narrative; selected photographs, images, and/or video clips that coordinated with the sequence of the narrative; and background music that complemented the mood of the narrative. Students were reminded to save their digital files in an organized manner by labeling the files clearly and saving their audio, images, music, and text files in a separate folder on their flash drive. Using programs such as Windows Movie Maker (Windows), iMovie (Mac), and WeVideo (free cloud-based program), students created their digital stories. We gave our students the option of selecting a platform with which they were comfortable, a decision that sprung from our discussions about connecting technology to pedagogy and content within the TPCK framework. Although most students preferred Windows Movie Maker or iMovie, a handful of students used PowerPoint. For students who needed extensive help with technology, we coordinated with our computer lab assistants. We also paired more tech-savvy students with less tech-savvy students and had them work together. While 50% of the students completed their projects at home, others used the computer lab facilities on campus. We recommend that once students complete their digital stories, teachers copy the projects onto a flash drive prior to the day of the screening to check for any formatting discrepancies, so that these issues can be resolved before screening in the classroom.

Evaluating Success

The highlight of the digital storytelling process was the screening toward the end of the semester, when students watched each other's digital stories in class and felt a sense of accomplishment. We screened about three to

four digital stories at the end of each class over a two-week period. Staggering the screenings has an added bonus of allowing extra time for students who may need that additional weekend to polish their projects. We adapted Ellen Maddlin's rubric for evaluating digital storytelling projects in the writing class (see appendix A). Prior to the actual screenings, we practiced using the rubric to evaluate three sample digital stories so students understood what each criterion meant. Students felt comfortable with this non-traditional and non-intimidating system of evaluation. After the screening of each digital story in the class, students first provided verbal comments, mostly about what they liked. Then the class took a few minutes to complete the evaluation using the rubric. Students wrote comments about what they liked in the digital story and provided a few suggestions. The instructor also completed the rubric and provided helpful feedback.

In a classroom with diverse students, we cannot assume that students give and receive constructive criticism in similar ways. Cultures differ in terms of directness and indirectness while providing feedback on a peer's work. Thus peer-evaluation for the digital storytelling project took on a life of its own as we discussed and made students aware of the cross-cultural pragmatics and ways to provide criticism in positive and constructive ways in an American classroom. In this process, students learned to be more specific while providing feedback, using phrases such as "If I were you, I would change the picture of the sunset to a sunrise as that will go better with your feeling of love for this man you met at Brighton Beach" and "I feel that a little more information about why you felt lonely that day as you walked through the park would help the audience understand the snowy image of the tree you show." Such an exercise not only helped students feel more comfortable while they provided feedback on their peers' digital stories; also, the need to be specific pushed students to learn about the finer aspects of academic discourse.

Recommendations

In terms of a timeframe, we staggered the digital storytelling project over an eight-week period, so the students didn't have to feel overwhelmed or rushed, especially since many of our students hold jobs and the digital story was one of several writing assignments students completed during the semester. For teachers implementing the project for the first time, or even the second or third time, we recommend collaborating with other teachers and following the guidelines of TPACK framework as closely as possible while

planning and designing the assignment. This collaboration not only helps teachers plan, but it also eases the tension of carrying the entire burden alone. We also recommend that teachers create their own digital stories, which can serve as models to share with students. Having this first-hand experience is important to hone the sequence of the various stages of the digital storytelling process and anticipate other difficulties while integrating technology with pedagogy and content. Another suggestion for smoothing the process and reducing the burden on the classroom teachers is to tap into university resources. When working with more than twelve students in a class, it is advisable for teachers to coordinate and collaborate with writing tutors at the college writing center and lab assistants in the computer labs. Tutors/lab assistants should be provided with necessary information about the digital storytelling project so everyone is on the same page with the objectives and goals of the assignment while working with students.

Conclusion

Overall our basic writers benefitted from crafting digital stories. Students expressed their satisfaction in the comment section of the course evaluations at the end of the semester. Most students specifically mentioned their positive experience with the digital storytelling project. A large part of this positive experience emerged from the nature of the personal narrative that helped a diverse group of students communicate their thoughts, feelings, cultural experiences, and stories through writing and images. The opportunity allowed students to tap into their creativity and bring it into their writings. They also had to make decisions among many choices at various stages of the project, which gave them a sense of empowerment. The multimedia resources catered to the needs of students with different learning styles, and discursive needs through the use of images, storyboards, and recorded narratives. These tasks helped students describe with details, organize and develop ideas and review their writings mindfully. Because students had a final product at the end to review, share, and save, they experienced a sense of accomplishment (Plankis and Hwang 2348). Lastly, by viewing each other's digital stories, basic writers in a diverse classroom learned from their peers' constructive criticism, which facilitated their social development (Bandi-Rao cited in Beaudoin).

We found the TPCK theoretical framework helpful in interweaving content, pedagogy and technology as we planned and designed the digital storytelling assignment for the writing course. At no point did we feel that

Designing a Digital Story Assignment for Basic Writers Using the TPACK Framework

the objectives of the assignment were compromised because of technology. The availability, familiarity, and ease of using the digital technologies were crucial in complementing content and pedagogy within the TPACK framework. In fact, we felt that technology contributed to enhancing the writing process that students were involved in. Smartphones and tablets provided students the convenience of taking pictures, recording their narratives, and listening to them at their own convenience, anytime and anywhere. This kind of flexibility is essential for students who are working or have families. It allows them to use small chunks of time available to them—commuting to school on the subway, between classes, waiting in a line. But one particular step that we would like to highlight in this article is the sophisticated editing process that emerged from students listening to their own recorded narratives. Several students used this aural opportunity to make small but significant revisions to their narratives with little or no directive from the instructor or the tutor. Students felt motivated to improve their scripts, a self-directed learning process vital for basic writers to succeed in academia. We consider such steps of the digital storytelling process as the ideal learning area where the three circles in the TPACK framework—namely the technology, content, and pedagogy—intersect. Overall, we found that the TPACK framework served our needs well as we planned and designed the digital storytelling project for our basic writers.

Many of our basic writers struggle with traditional literacies. Digital storytelling has the capacity to help basic writers use digital literacy as a way to transition into traditional literacies and academic discourse more easily and in a way they comprehend and feel comfortable. Even going beyond basic writers, simply based on the frequency and ease with which students use PDAs for learning inside and outside of the classroom, and the general decline in reading and writing skills as noted by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges in 2006, it would not be hard to believe that freshman composition is poised for a change, with the real possibility of photo/video essays and digital stories becoming a regular part of most college composition course curricula as a means to engage students in their writing.

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Note

1. We have obtained permission from the students to share extracts from the writing. To keep their identities anonymous, we use Subjects A and B.

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Appendix A

Digital Storytelling Rubric for ESL:

Adapted from Maddin's Digital Storytelling Rubric (10).

Category	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Poor (1)	Score
Focus	There is a clear focus throughout	The focus is clear during most of the video.	The purpose of the story is clear, but the focus is lost a few times.	It is difficult to figure out the purpose of the video.	
Development of the story	The story is told with exactly the right amount of detail throughout.	The story seems to be missing some important details, OR it includes some unnecessary details.	The story needs more editing. It is noticeably too long or too short in more than one section.	The story needs extensive editing.	
Narration – intonation, pace, and clarity	The pace, intonation, and clarity of the narration fit the story.	Narration is generally engaging, but the pace may be a bit too fast or too slow for the story.	The intonation doesn't suit the story.	The narration is difficult or impossible to understand or hear.	
	The images create an atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story.	Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story.	An attempt was made to use images to match the story, but it needed more work.	The images were not appropriate for the story.	
Grammar	Grammar and usage were correct and contributed to clarity, style and development.	Grammar and usage were generally correct, and errors did not detract from the story.	Grammar and usage were generally correct, but errors detracted from the story.	Repeated errors in grammar and usage made the story very difficult to follow.	

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