



## Journal of Basic Writing

Fact and Theory and Value Judgment: What *They* Say/*We* Say of Basic Writing's Unhedged Good

**Don J. Kraemer**

Negotiating a Transcultural Ethos from the Ground Up in a Basic Writing Program

**Michael T. MacDonald and William DeGenaro**

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Cultivating Places and People at the Center: Cross-Pollinating Literacies on a Rural Campus

**Wendy Pfrenger**

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## CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 20-30 pages, double spaced, on topics related to basic and ESL writing, broadly interpreted. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines. Manuscripts are refereed anonymously. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and e-mail addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of about 150 words, and a list of four to five key words. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for including excerpts from student writing, especially as it entails IRB review (which should be noted in an endnote).

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: Hope.Parisi@kbcc.cuny.edu, and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in eight to ten 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 such fields as psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. The journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of new literacies, translingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics and online and social-media impacts as per intersectional writing identity formations.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, and critiques the institutions and contexts that place students in basic writing and standardize academic language, as much as it may illumine the subtexts of individuals' writing practices. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population and settings 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 written in non-technical language; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy. A familiarity with the journal is the best way to determine whether JBW is your next venue for scholarship.

## EDITORS' COLUMN

Territories, frontiers, “the pedagogical West”—In metaphors to describe the new work of Open Admissions, our field generated a professional impulse for *re*-conceptualizing Basic Writing nearly simultaneous to the moment of its conceptualizing. Mina Shaughnessy’s way of characterizing the “place” quality of Basic Writing—where we as professionals saw ourselves as going, and whom we were meeting there—aimed at, and for a time well accomplished, motivating self and others toward understanding teaching as both a *searching* and an *encounter*. But as we soon saw, those “spaces” were sorely troubled in that we brought along the imprimaturs of the academy and expected that we would always lead in these encounters. In the same way Basic Writing represented a clear departure from business as usual for writing instruction at CUNY and other open admissions sites, Shaughnessy’s bequest of “place” and “travel” for Basic Writing pointed to a *there* that was clearly elsewhere, and acknowledged, if not affirmed, the trepidation that many felt about venturing there.

Refiguring the “place” quality of Basic Writing, as we might characterize the work of this journal for many years, has largely meant shifting *there* to *right here* and the goal-oriented *sometime soon* to *right now*. Our first article, by Don J. Kraemer, “Fact and Theory and Value Judgment: What *They Say/ We Say* of Basic Writing’s Unhedged Good,” recalls the encounter among voices and communities as foundational in the work of Basic Writing. Kraemer maps a continuum of critical versions of such encountering, first through Graff and Birkenstein’s *They Say/ I Say*; second through Zak Lancaster’s critical reading of *They Say/ I Say*; and third through Kraemer’s own argument for expanding that space in which students meet academics and their expectations for writing, whether in terms of academic moves (Graff and Birkenstein) or more indirectly, through the language of hedging and concession (Lancaster). Drawing on ideas of “spatial dynamism,” Kraemer advocates for teaching beyond “the rules of the game” toward a type of “contact with . . . interlocutors” expressing choices “relative to those expectations” for “cultivating common ground, not prostrating oneself on ground owned by others.” Following Suresh Canagarah’s translingual classroom as contact zone, the refigured space of Kraemer’s BW classroom “does not ignore ‘dominant norms and ideologies of correctness’; rather norms are negotiated” to start from the “interests and values” of those whom he names “student-writer citizens.” These students, as we find them, “*should* [be] imagine[d] . . . [to] regard others, as they regard themselves, as free and

equal . . . free to pursue their own conceptions of the good; [and] committed to the principle that others are also free to pursue their conceptions of the good” (author’s emphasis). The *right here* and *now* of the BW classroom is thereby ethical space for “better see[ing] the point of hedging” and for constituting writing as deliberative practice.

In our second article, “Negotiating a Transcultural Ethos from the Ground Up in a Basic Writing Program,” Michael T. MacDonald and William DeGenaro likewise resituate the *where* of Basic Writing by recognizing, and so more enabling, the shifted terrains of language diversity in local contexts of Basic Writing. Accounting for the growing population of Arab-American students at their institution’s home in Dearborn, Michigan, alongside an increased outreach to international students, MacDonald and DeGenaro relate their vision of Basic Writing space as “the site where linguistic diversity is most *audible*, where,” citing Lu and Horner, “difference is the norm” (author’s emphasis). Attuned to the linguistic pluralism present in classrooms, they find at hand the already formed and forming impetus to reshape curriculum and professional unity around a “transcultural ethos”—which they define as “a programmatic stance that affirmatively and actively works to engage with the distinctive markers of global-local language shifts and encourages the negotiation of these shifts among local stakeholders.” For MacDonald, DeGenaro, and their colleagues, the “ground up” portion of their title means collaborative inquiry into the rich, performative potential of language choice, strategies, codes, and reflection of monolingual and multilingual students, as well as broader frameworks for instructors’ reading and assessing these performances. Their model of programmatic change, informed by these awarenesses, suggests a vertical, not linear, trajectory for moving forward, in which a wide swath of stakeholders posit and engage “evolving, dynamic learning goals for BW” in a “dialogic process.” “From the ground up,” in other words, roots stakeholders in the *here* and *now* of present capabilities, needs, and envisioning around translanguaging, empowering all invested learners, whether student, instructor, or program administrator, to lead together.

Next, in our third article, “Developing Translingual Disposition through a Writing Theory Cartoon Assignment,” Xiqiao Wang continues the place-based ethos of translanguaging as it informs BW classrooms, offering a writing theory cartoon assignment as a “pedagogical enactment of translanguaging” which purposes “a space for teachers and student writers to describe, analyze, and strategize ways of negotiating language differences.” Taking aim at the apparent gap in the theory and pedagogy of translanguaging-



ism, especially as these potentialize a critical consciousness for students about their own and others' translingual practices, Wang's pedagogy mirrors the bridge-building advocacy of MacDonald and DeGenaro's program reform--as it too responds to "transformed . . . cultural and linguistic realities on and off campus" of a midwestern university. As Wang envisions it, allowing students to cartoon-theorize the language negotiations required across platforms of language diversity--ones in fact current "in all communicative acts"--is a key to fostering basic writers' self-perceptions as "agent who [regularly] draw on their multilingual repertoire to navigate" complex rhetorical acts. The assignment, more widely figuring Basic Writing as an arena of activity, encompasses teachers and students in another reforming of the classroom as authority-space. To use Kraemer's term, a "spatial dynamism" excites a crosshatching of invitations: for teachers, it is the invitation, or "exigency," "to reconsider the role of their own language repertoire and pedagogy," and for students, it is the encouragement to lead through striking artistic renderings of translingual self-awareness.

Finally, in our fourth article, "Cultivating Places and People at the Center: Cross-Pollinating Literacies on a Rural Campus," Wendy Pfrenger reinvests the place-based quality of Basic Writing theory and pedagogy by rooting rural literacies to academic competence, broadly (re)contextualized. Her interviews of peer writing consultants working under her directorship at a regional, highly "place-identified" writing center of Kent State University reveal a range of stances toward education that, while marking these peer tutors as "non-traditional," uniquely qualify them to serve as mediators in a third space for individuals and communities seeking welcome and inclusion. Since many of these writing consultants grew up and still reside in the same community, their literacies bear the imprints of shared interests and understandings of rural life and culture. Defining place-based literacy in a rural context, Pfrenger proves the literate and pedagogical talent of her writing consultants especially apt for negotiating "the dissonance between students' success in extracurricular contexts and their perceived inadequacies in academic contexts." The place-based ethnographic approach of Pfrenger's study makes every case against the originary notion of Basic Writing pedagogy as a kind of traveling elsewhere: both her writing consultants and their students, facing socioeconomic landscapes of "divi[sions] within by barriers of opportunity" and across "the surrounding region by deepening poverty," support one another's challenges to discover and grow their literacies in the present moment. Pfrenger elaborates the homegrown yield--community-based literacies, rural-cultural leverage for teaching and learning, and the

productive use of dissonance—as a new “pragmatics of place.”

The authors of this volume try to reclaim the space of Basic Writing classrooms for students and teachers in fuller, more complicated recognitions of contexts, talents, and purposes. They remind us that, rhetorically, “to teach” gains in meaning when we use it transitively, by linking it not to *what* but to *whom*: Whom do we teach and from what vantage point? Where do we mark the vital center points of our intersections with students, and what kinds of spaces support these center points? What are the collaborative activities of inquiry that happen there? These are certainly very large and useful questions for evolving the place- and travel-based ethos of Basic Writing.

--**Hope Parisi** and **Cheryl C. Smith**

# Fact and Theory and Value Judgment: What *They Say/We Say* of Basic Writing's Unhedged Good

Don J. Kraemer

**ABSTRACT:** *This article uses Zak Lancaster's 2016 discovery that academics do not actually write the way They Say/I Say says they do to reflect on relations between, on the one hand, facts about academic writing and, on the other, the pedagogical values that underlie and guide those facts—or, put another way, to reflect on how values we may espouse relate to the facts of actual practice. What implications for how we teach Basic Writing follow from the facts of how academics write? I argue that what “follows” is deliberative, not deductive: although value-laden practice may emerge from and relate to certain facts, such practice is not necessarily entailed by those facts. Some discussion of is/ought relations helps explain this argument, i.e., that how things go is not always how they should. This argument also points, then, toward the good that Basic Writing should promote.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Basic Writing; civic engagement; critical reading; deliberative practice; fact; the good; They Say/I Say; value*

Do academics really write the way *They Say/I Say* says they do? The answer to that question surely matters; how it might matter to Basic Writing is the focus of this article. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing (TSIS)*, a popular textbook by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, develops the metaphor of academic writing as “a conversation.” *TSIS* claims that when “writing [i.e., what *I Say*] responds to something that has been said or might be said [i.e., what *They Say*], it thereby performs the meaningful task of supporting, correcting, or complicating that other view” (xiii). Basic conversational responsiveness and then some—this promisingly dialogic take on academic literacy is an outcome that the writing program I direct aims for. Based on recent program-wide assessment, however, our aim appears off-target, especially with respect to teaching reading as a critical part of such conversation. This failure is disappointing but, as I’ll discuss below, perhaps not all that surprising. More of a surprise is the possibility that

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*TSIS* itself does not deliver what it promises. Many of us—I, for one—teach as though the templates *TSIS* features are actually used. Yet evidence that these templates are *not* generally used has recently been presented—most notably by Zak Lancaster’s 2016 article “Do Academics Really Write This Way? A Corpus Investigation of Moves and Templates in ‘*They Say/I Say*.’”

Lancaster investigates whether the templates recommended by *TSIS* are actually used. His discovery is that those templates are generally *not* used. The templates that are in fact used, the moves that are in fact made, are *less direct* than the templates and moves recommended by *TSIS*. Lancaster’s article, then, presents an opportunity to reflect on how values we may espouse (such as those in *TSIS*) relate to the facts of actual practice. Reflecting on what his practical discovery means, Lancaster joins his project to others that seek “to recenter language in writing research and instruction” (459). This call “to recenter language” may mean that the language practices that constitute academic writing are what related research should pursue and what writing courses should impart. If so, then I would say not that such a commitment should be made central to BW research and instruction only—but rather that this commitment is, or can be, on a continuum with BW’s deliberative priorities, *civic* as well as academic. I will return to this continuum in closing, at which point it should be clear why—in BW classes—priority goes to deliberative discourse, by which is meant actual, reasoned discussion about future-oriented policy questions. This is the *unhedged good* to which my title refers.

To argue for this good is not to diminish studies like Lancaster’s—studies that make available knowledge that is verifiable—as Keith Rhodes and Monica McFawn Robinson put it (13, 18). Verifiable knowledge (such as whether academics actually write the way *TSIS* says they do) is more than a little useful. Credible evidence of links between developmental reforms, e.g., Accelerated Learning or Stretch programs, and a decrease in student attrition has the power to persuade administrators, perhaps also colleagues in other disciplines—those with reason to be skeptical of sacrificing more curricular space and money to “remedial” programs. Not to embrace research that is replicable, aggregable, and data supported—“RAD research,” as Richard Haswell calls it—is to surrender “its ability to deflect outside criticism with solid and ever-strengthening data” (Haswell 201, 219). Who would disagree—would disavow the usefulness of knowledge it is unreasonable to reject?<sup>1</sup>

Would more than a few of us, insofar as readers of *JBW* constitute an “us,” contest the claim that such knowledge is intimately connected with values—with our normative, value-laden theories of what BW is,

what its pedagogy should do? Here there is more uncertainty, perhaps—an uncertainty emerging from the connection itself, not from the question of whether there’s a connection. When we reflect on our knowledge, the factual basis of our knowledge and the values that drive our theory and pedagogy needn’t be opposed. They can work interdependently (Haswell 203, 219) and, moreover, probably work best that way (theory without knowledge, knowledge without theory? No thanks). But even so, as we work with facts and values as though they were interdependent, on what basis should a new fact—an empirical finding, say, about how experienced or inexperienced academic writers actually signal concessions—count as a reason to adjust our value-laden theory, such as our pedagogy or the principles that justify a Stretch program?

This is a pressing question for me. When our program converted to Stretch in 2014, we did so based on value-laden theory: teacher-researchers *should* imagine classrooms of student-writer citizens who regard others, as they regard themselves, as free and equal. They are free to pursue their own conceptions of the good; committed to the principle that others are also free to pursue their conceptions of the good—a pursuit often enough leading to differences of opinion—they are able and willing to cooperate, critically and creatively, to help make the classroom a place of collaborative inquiry. This collaborative enterprise is symbolic action for civic, professional, and personal ends; those ends inform the deliberative community’s decision regarding which differences of opinion become *stases*—those places where the agreement to disagree begins the inquiry.

In the hopes of better accommodating the students conducting this enterprise, we eliminated remedial, pre-baccalaureate (i.e., non-credit bearing) BW instruction; replaced it with a curriculum in which the same fifteen learning outcomes are met in either a single-quarter course, a two-quarter sequence (Stretch), or a three-quarter sequence (Extended Stretch); and instituted Directed Self Placement (DSP), allowing students to use standardized tests—such as the California State University System’s English Placement Test—and a local survey, as well as the counsel of online teachers and tutors, to place themselves. Whichever option students place themselves into, they engage the same fifteen outcomes, and these outcomes—whether they address drafting strategies or critical reading or the contingencies of rhetorical situations—are understood as instrumental to the deliberative assumptions our program makes about students and the reasons they and others could have to care about, to study, to develop one’s reading and writing.

These deliberative assumptions imply value judgment, an implication I can explain with reference to the important question of educational transfer. Transfer, as presented in Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak's 2014 *Writing Across Contexts*, depends on "the ability to see both similarity and difference across sites, and to see similarities only where they exist and differences where they exist. Those distinctions, we believe, are at the heart of transfer" (102n.6; emphasis added). *Writing Across Contexts* inquires into, and reflects on, teaching practices that enhance "students' ability to see, like experts, patterns of similarity and difference across tasks and thus enhance their theories of writing" (147; emphasis added). Let us assume that "to see, like experts" implies not so much seeing positivistically—seeing what anyone would see, regardless of her theory—as, rather, something like seeing in a theorizing way: i.e., a kind of *reading*. To read in a theorizing way, "like experts," need not mean seeing the same thing experts see. While it may be true that experts can see the same thing, sometimes they do not, and often enough they have to justify what they see as *more or less* important. To read for the facts of the matter, then, may involve an active sort of seeing, an act both involved and involving. Such reading does justice to one of the dynamic aspects of "fact," as presented by Alasdair MacIntyre: "In the sixteenth century and earlier 'fact' in English was usually a rendering of the Latin 'factum,' a deed, an action, and sometimes in Scholastic Latin an event or an occasion" (357).<sup>2</sup> To get our audience to see as we do—to see an occasion of fact in routine data, to see that fact as a reason to believe or do something—is to compose the value-laden inquiry we and our audience co-conduct.

That our stretch curriculum might help students imagine reading as *this* kind of value-laden inquiry seems a necessary assumption—an assumption about the good that our curriculum should help realize. It seems to us that, regardless of the facts, this good *must* be assumed. If, for example, facts about how our students enact Critical Reading seem unaligned with this good, then the fault (we believe) lies not with the assumption but elsewhere—perhaps in our practice. But we cannot, I think, resign ourselves to our failure to address this good—or to address key components of that good, such as Critical Reading, the outcome that for our program is proving especially problematic. Although through two rounds of program-wide assessment the results for most of the outcomes have been predominantly positive, how students talk about and enact Critical Reading sticks out as disappointing, disturbingly so. To begin explaining why, let me introduce

our Critical Reading learning outcome, which reads as follows: “Read difficult, research-based texts with critical understanding.” This outcome is then elaborated:

- a. “Explain in clearly written English the rhetoric of others.”
- b. “Reconstruct and revise the connections between claims, reasons, and evidence in your own writing, your peers’, and published authors’.”

This elaboration, “a” and “b,” is a version of the Is/Ought question to be more fully addressed below—the question, that is, of the relation between the textual material that has been brought forth as what *is* relevant (“a”) and, in accord with this material, the inferences that *ought* to follow (“b”). To make the case that the Critical Reading outcome and other outcomes have been met, students use their cover-letter commentary to guide the reader through the evidence they’ve assembled in their portfolios (essays and projects from their stretch courses and other courses). Their cover letters address an audience beyond the instructor of record: “the program,” the university community, taxpayers, prospective employers, and others a student may wish to imagine—others to whom a student might make the case that she has begun realizing in some meaningful way outcomes that promote her own good specifically and, more generally, the welfare of others.

Almost to a person, students choosing the three-course (Extended) Stretch have, at the end of more than thirty weeks of instruction, a view of Critical Reading that strikes us as overly uncritical—a view focused almost exclusively on “a” (explaining others’ words) and much too little, if at all, on “b” (reconstructing and revising the connections among claims, reasons, and evidence). The following statement from an Extended Stretch cover letter is typical—taking critical reading to mean decoding and using the words of others in a way that does not violate institutional correctness: “I was required to critically read these sources in order to not only understand them but to acquire the ability to use them correctly.” Also typical (and also from Extended Stretch):

To help me better understand my reading skills my professor told us to highlight, circle, and define unknown words throughout the essays to get a better understanding of the message the author is presenting. I developed a habit of often memorizing the author’s name of key people referenced in the readings because my professor would often use names as questions on the pop quizzes.

Such strategies are understandable, but they put little premium on any critical activity that the writer, as a free and equal person, might use to advance her own project. Decoding “the message the author is presenting” and demonstrating that one recalls proper nouns from the reading—that is the value that comes through. This is not exercising judgment about what one has memorized. This is not seeing like an expert. This is all “They Say” and no “I Say.”<sup>3</sup> This is not the good that *They Say/I Say* aims for. Neither is it the good aimed at by the writing academics actually do.

### **The Question of What Follows from How Academics Actually Write**

Facts matter to theory, as acknowledged above, and research articles in comp studies that bring new facts to light can certainly be as meaningful and helpful as studies that argue new ways to see and understand. One such study that brings new facts to light is Lancaster’s, a study that inquires into the particular bundles of language—templates or moves—that *TSIS* claims academics use when pressing their claims, offering concessions, entertaining objections, and so on. *TSIS*’s aim is “to demystify academic writing by isolating its basic moves,” not just any moves but “*the* moves that matter” (xvi, xvii; emphasis added). It is a given, I suspect, that most users of *TSIS* assume that the moves that *TSIS* isolates as highly meaningful in academic writing are moves that occur in academic writing, are moves that will be found with some regularity or at least in privileged places (introductions, conclusions, transitions between sections, etc.).

Perhaps in the grip of such an assumption, most responses to *TSIS* have questioned whether these moves should be taught—whether teaching them as moves to be learned and imitated is good, in other words. But by questioning the assumption itself, Lancaster engages a quite different and “empirical question”—the question of how academics “really write,” of whether *TSIS*’s templates “accurately reflect patterns of language use in written academic discourses” (439). To restate: Avoiding the prescriptive policy question of whether textbooks in general “*should* capture the tacitly valued discursive strategies used in academic discourse,” Lancaster takes up the descriptive question of whether this textbook in particular *does* capture those strategies (439). And only after answering this question with empirical findings—which show that academics do not really write the way *TSIS* says they do—does Lancaster engage the qualitative question of what these findings might mean (439).



Using electronic concordance software (AntConc), Lancaster analyzes three different databases, amounting to well more than 100 million words of writing from incoming first-year students, from students in the disciplines, and from scholars writing for refereed journals (see 444–45). The results of this careful and credible corpus analysis have been called “little short of astonishing” (Haswell, “Focus”). No argument from me—who finds just as astonishing the brute fact of Lancaster’s empirical question, a question which had never occurred to me, though I have not only used *TSIS* in BW classes but also written about the experience. About the astonishing results themselves, two points of special relevance to BW: (1) they are anchored in a developmental pedagogical context, a context that compels Lancaster to single out *objections* and *concessions* (because “writing research has shown that acknowledging and negotiating with opposing views is a persistently troublesome area for novice academic writers” [440]); (2) the results underscore the recurrence of bits of language that we academic insiders may take for granted, whose significant interpersonal effects we may fail to explicitly register (see 450, 457, 460). These findings especially resonate locally: for two years now we have found evidence of our Extended Stretch students’ trouble negotiating not just “opposing” views but others’ views, period. We are receptive, then, to the suggestion that certain facts warrant a different kind of attention.

One of those facts that resonates—maybe especially because we insiders are blind to it—is the general realm of the interpersonal, more specifically the norms of politeness said to govern *good* conversation. In academic writing, the interpersonal may be far more important than previously suspected and, in some ways, perhaps more important than the “*ideational*, which has to do broadly with expressions of propositional content” (Lancaster 461n.5; see also 442): “it appears that interpersonal tact may be a *greater* concern in academic writing contexts than ‘precision and impact’” (449; emphasis added). As elaborated by Lancaster, “interpersonal meanings—expressions of attitudes, stances, and reader positioning—have an effect on readers’ judgments of overall writing quality” (440). Although judging “overall writing quality” is not necessarily the same as judging whether one should lean more closely toward the authorial position—judging whether one is persuaded, in other words—judgment of the whole’s quality surely affects how we understand its parts. Singling out parts that have to do with interpersonal meaning, Lancaster asks writing-instruction-related questions—questions such as “whether it is *better* in certain contexts to entertain objections directly or indirectly” (444; emphasis added). Just as

“greater concern” above is evaluative, so is the question of how “better” to entertain objections—and here my own commentary begins.

In a discussion of the fact-value relation, *better* stands out. That evaluative salience animates Lancaster’s more explicit engagements with student writing, such as when he entertains how first-year writers might be helped to do more with concession moves, in particular to do more to validate those who hold different views (458–59). Of his revision of one such move, Lancaster says he “cannot argue that this [revised] voice is inherently ‘better,’ but it offers an alternative to the more agonistic stance” (459). Now while it could be that limitations of space prevent Lancaster from arguing why one voice “is inherently ‘better’” (or maybe inherency is the problem), he is able to voice his preference for a less agonistic stance. Whatever the reason for why the question of better cannot be argued, a value judgment is nevertheless made. The ground may be well-prepared; the leap from it, however, is uncertain.

Making such an uncertain leap is one we must make as well. If we join the factual event of seeing what *TSIS* calls “templates” as “formulas,” linguistically understood (Lancaster 441—more on formulas in next section), should we in BW who use templates therefore do more to work with them formulaically? Does the presence of formulaic language—of the transfer potential of “important cross-disciplinary and cross-generic patterns” (456)—mean that such language should be a focal point in BW? What if a template has more heuristic power than does a formula? Might the heuristic value of, say, *directly* addressing objections then outweigh the formula’s *interpersonal* value—perhaps on the grounds that directly addressing objections may help students become some of the persons of value in “interpersonal value”? Depending on where we find ourselves and with whom, templates might be better than formulas when it comes to “plunging [students] into actual discussions and debates,” getting them to try out “different patterns of response,” and thereby helping them get “a sense of what works to *persuade different audiences* and what doesn’t” (*TSIS* xxv; emphasis added). Let me here offer a fact inseparable from value: I’m more interested in getting students into deliberative games than into gaming the judgment of the quality of their writing.

A helpful illustration of this fact-value entanglement appears in Deborah Mutnick and Steve Lamos’s “Basic Writing Pedagogy,” which distinguishes between the BW metaphor of “spatial approaches” and the metaphor of BW as initiation into “the ‘rules of the academic game.’” In tension with “*the* academic game,” generative of “games of persuasion,”

and akin to “contact zones” (discussed below), spatial approaches posit that the game’s “rules, the game itself, and the terms of such practice all depend centrally on where and how each is imagined, and posit as well that members of any given discourse community may *contest* those rules” (32; emphasis added). The words “depend centrally” are telling: what is central is not fixed. It moves with, or can be moved by, contingencies of place, modes of imagining, even perhaps the concerns any individual member of any individual community may voice. Those gathered into deliberative community might well try to advance their interests, be responsive to more voices, discern more good, enlarge responsibility. And as Mutnick and Lamos say, in such a community the norms of communication—the communicative facts and the values they seem to imply—can be contested.

To restate this spatial dynamism: When learning or contesting or changing norms, somebody in some medium in some place and time advocates something to someone, and with someone, for some reason. In this exchange, in which what is advocated is a public object of deliberation and hence subject to change, interlocutors may expect that certain norms be observed—such as the norms of politeness that feature in the next section. To make contact with such interlocutors, writers (should) design their choices relative to those expectations. Relating to those expectations is part of advocacy—of cultivating common ground, not prostrating oneself on ground owned by others. I take this assumption as ground readers of *JBW* work in common: priority goes to helping students co-create deliberative community. That priority in place, relating to others’ expectations is surely as constitutive as other literacy acts. The question now is what to make of the different forms that relating to others’ expectations might assume—whether, that is, this or that form communicates impoliteness, respect, or something else. To engage this question, let us proceed to the matter of Lancaster’s value-laden approach to the fact of *TSIS*.

### **Whose Good?**

As facts matter to theory, facts about academic discourse matter to BW pedagogy. But which facts matter, so much so that values follow them? As discussed above, Lancaster nominates *indirect interpersonal formulas*, which not only occur in academic discourse but also embody values important to academic discourse. By acknowledging uncertainty, readers’ attitudes, and alternative interpretations, as well as by soliciting cooperation in a joint inquiry, formulas help constitute authorial stance, such as indirect

interpersonal stance. Indirection is embodied in formulas like “It may appear” and “It could be argued that”—in contrast with formulas in which interlocutors are more directly named, such as “Some readers may question” or “Linguists are likely to claim.” As it happens, and of special interest to me, is that interlocutors are relatively directly named by writers I routinely assign in BW classes. In Michael Sandel’s *Justice*, for example, some version of the “*Libertarian reply*” or “The libertarian has a ready response” appears seven times in four pages (66–69). Yet if most academic writers more frequently feature indirect than direct interpersonal formulas, then maybe preparation of BW students for the discursive practice that awaits them should privilege formulas of indirection.

To think about this, let us consider *concessions*. In contrast to *TSIS*, which advocates a more direct approach—concessions are for *overcoming* objections, for example (Graff and Birkenstein 88)—Lancaster finds in actual practice an approach that builds “solidarity with interlocutors by affirming and validating their views” (Lancaster 452). As Lancaster notes, “This view of argumentation as a process of building sympathetic understanding between writer and reader is one with which many beginning writers are less familiar than the view of argumentation as armed combat” (452). This account seems right. In my experience, at least, BW students associate argumentation more with adversarial combat than with collaborative inquiry. Combat, furthermore, seems reinforced by *TSIS*’s metaphor for concessions: to *overcome* objections. To many students and as well to many of us, *to overcome* may signify a kind of vanquishing, a getting the better of. This is a motive that academic discourse might mitigate rather than reproduce.

There is, in other words, firm footing for Lancaster’s rationale. Yet I’d like to destabilize it, just a little, the better to focus on what BW is more properly good for, for whom it is good. What if, in a BW classroom, we have reason to give more priority to heuristic value than to interpersonal norms? After reading Lancaster’s article, I am far less sure about my first *reaction* to this question (Of course we have reason to! Don’t we want students to be more concerned about their claim on the audience than self-conscious about how they sound?). Though that initial reaction is insufficiently hedged, it remains deeply rooted, so let me follow those roots, beginning with Birkenstein and Graff’s response to critics: “Far from turning students into mindless automatons, formulas . . . can help them generate thoughts that might not otherwise occur to them. And such formulas aren’t set in stone. Students can and should be encouraged to modify them to suit particular arguments and audiences” (Birkenstein and Graff).<sup>4</sup> Inventing arguments, tailoring

argumentation for the situation and for the people with whom one is in argument—I'm in. I'm in because if the good of my teaching role were not to help students head more resourcefully and mindfully in this direction, then my role has been badly rehearsed and not worth performing.

But what if my role *has* been badly rehearsed, badly because I have not understood the script, in particular *formulas* as linguists define them and identify them? Whereas I have (following Birkenstein and Graff) emphasized the heuristic relation between formulas and the thoughts they help invent—the ideas that might claim the reader—Lancaster points out that formulas linguistically conceived do not so much claim the reader as “guide the reader”: formulas less embody propositions than “frame propositions” (Lancaster 441). They help prepare the common ground on which interlocutors can meet by displaying “socially valued stances or discursive identities” (442). This common ground can be extended by certain hedging formulas that “cross disciplinary boundaries,” such as *to some extent* and *in some cases* (442). The promise of transfer across discourse communities, a promise implicit in our curriculum’s learning outcomes, is no small recommendation for formulas.

What we recommend and when, however, varies with audience. How this platitude importantly relates to BW I can explain via a metaphor important to both *TSIS* and Lancaster: academic discourse as *conversation*. Consider what “[g]ood conversationalists, or discussants,” do:

[They] carefully listen to, mirror, and validate others’ views, even those with which they disagree. They give room for others to ask questions and express concerns, and they try not to put words in others’ mouths. They try to be fair, respectful, and open-minded, asking questions, offering reasons for their judgments, and pausing to consider counter views and evidence. At its best, academic writing reflects these qualities. . . . (Lancaster 458)

If templates clear space for a claim, formulas help claim the reader—with fairness, respect, open-mindedness. While these qualities can be hallmarks of good conversationalists, do they exhaust the ways conversation and its makers can be good? There is much evidence, thanks to scholars like Shirley Brice Heath and Deborah Tannen, of cultural variability in conversational competence and pleasure (such as overlapping speaking turns, such as bravura star turns). This variability concerns as well ethical norms (such as directness), even what goes into “pausing to consider counter views.”

In another text I've used, the philosopher Darrel Moellendorf's *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change*, directness does not preclude politeness and may, in fact, be one of politeness's norms. Consider: "In the course of a useful discussion of catastrophe, Richard Posner contends that" followed by "There are two problems with this approach" (Moellendorf 87). Conceding the usefulness of Posner's discussion, Moellendorf then quite directly identifies two problems with it, amplifying them in a way that is conventional for philosophy. An instability may lie, then, in the description of *good* conversation, which is as arguably selective as it is clearly evaluative: good for whom, for what purposes, in which contexts.

With BW contexts in mind, let's consider the general preference for indirection revealed by Lancaster's study. This preference for a *good* conversation implies a conversation that may not qualify as *as* good, a conversation that is more direct than indirect. Imagine varieties of directness and compare them with good academic conversation: not only do good academic conversationalists "try not to put words in[to] others' mouths"; good academic conversationalists do not use the words of others, especially not if the others are the readers addressed. Neither put words into others' mouths nor, in accord with norms of indirection, cite the words that *have* come out of their mouths—that is the maxim. This maxim appears to presuppose, certainly to favor, an insider addressing insiders. What it might take for writers new to college to achieve such a feat may raise questions about how much rhetorical finesse it is reasonable to expect. Maybe teaching formulas for indirectness would help cut to (the inequity of) this chase, or maybe a better place to begin would be teaching the norms of argumentation and inquiry as they occur in conversations that are generally deliberative. Yet from either way to begin emerge questions that seem basic to me: Why would we want to? Who benefits? How do BW students, wherever they are, stand to benefit?<sup>5</sup>

Put another way: If the formulas Lancaster has called to our attention represent the way it is in Rome, then following a When in Rome strategy is one step we might take. We might also ask, however, whether Rome is where we want to be or a stop along the way toward more utopian destinations. Lancaster questions the *TSIS* templates "in terms of how well they reflect these implicit politeness conventions" (457). To question how well conventions and norms are reflected—this would seem to reinforce what already exists, that which is prior to the conversation it helps guide. Such conversation can be, as Lancaster says, constituted by "strategies for building mutual understanding and respect between writer and reader and other

participants in the discourse” (457). This conception may be not only, often enough, adequately accurate but also normatively regulative—a stipulated model of conversation that aspires toward an ideal.

But to concede that to reflect such an ideal would be a good is neither to abdicate the pursuit of other goods nor to concede their absence. The norms of politeness we cite do not represent (among other relevant voices) the majority—that is, the unpublished voices of those scholarly contributions wishing to join the conversation but which are formally prevented from doing so. What about those and other voices? There is serious work in comp studies, like Mutnick and Lamos’s spatial approach to BW, that turns such worry into pedagogy. Such transformation can be seen in another spatial approach, the contact-zone translingual classroom as described by Suresh Canagarajah:

Since there are *diverse norms* for languages, genres, and literacies in the contact zone, interlocutors must negotiate them situationally for texts and for talk that make sense to each other. This does not mean that multilinguals are insensitive to dominant norms and ideologies of correctness in society. Instead, they consider these norms as *open to negotiation*, especially in relation to their interests and values. (33–34; emphasis added)

The plurality of norms in any contact zone prompts collaborative sense-making. This sense-making does not ignore “dominant norms and ideologies of correctness”; rather, norms are negotiated—negotiated “*especially* in relation to [multilinguals] interests and values,” that is, in relation to their different conceptions of the good. This negotiation is local, not necessarily conforming “to a rigid notion of genre or the textual conventions of any one community” and possibly, in point of fact, taking “a shape that is appropriate to the rhetorical objectives, audience expectations, and authorial interests in that contact zone” (Canagarajah 34). In BW contact zones, academic norms of politeness are relevant: subject to questions of whether they should be conformed to and, if so, why and how.

What spatial approaches and contact zones have in common is that the facts negotiated therein—if only to be mastered and hence conformed to, often enough to be assimilated or tweaked, perhaps to be resisted—have an intimate relation with value. We seek not only some facts of convention worth our curiosity, then, but also facts that might count as evidence, as reasons. This question has long emerged from how value relates to fact,

Ought to Is, yet this question's long standing may make it harder to see—something like the invisibility of what we have acquired rather than learned (see Lancaster 450, 457, 460). Making this question more visible for the BW community might help improve how we engage the fact-value relation—not least in our use of *TSIS* and of Lancaster's critique of it.

### **Critical Reading: Ought from Is**

One cannot deduce an *ought* from an *is*, Hume famously claims.<sup>6</sup> Rather, one negotiates with others which facts are relevant and how, given those facts, things might go or should go. Hume's claim deserves to open this final section, if only passingly, because rather than refute Lancaster's project—which makes that big move from *is* to *ought*—Hume's claim warrants that move: though we cannot *deduce* oughts from ises, oughts can be derived from them. *Deducing* oughts from ises is illogical. Moral obligation is not entailed by what exists; the way the world is does not compel this or that value. But how we derive oughts from ises is another issue—and one that bears on BW and the practical reasoning most relevant to it. Two typed, double-spaced pages of a BW student's draft may contain twenty or more errors, but whether the fact of those errors counts as evidence for downgrading or rewarding the draft is up for debate: where one reader might infer carelessness, another reader might infer ambition. Or a draft might contain language that one reader regards as annoyingly in-one's face, another reader as a thought-provoking involvement strategy. Or in the case of non-anonymous work, what we may know of a writer in advance of her crafted ethos will probably affect how we contextualize any claim of hers. The same fact, in other words, neither automatically nor necessarily engenders in everyone the same *ought* conclusion—nor necessarily any conclusion at all, if the fact fails to become (weighty enough) evidence or reason. Whether an *ought* follows an *is*, then, is itself a motivated judgment—a judgment we have reason to make and present to others to judge.

Although the modal scope between description and evaluation is different—to evaluate is not to describe—evaluation depends on description, on fundamental facts. If we recommend that X ought to be done, we ought to be right about certain facts regarding X—about people's capabilities and attitudes, also about the material properties and interactions that would help realize capabilities and redeem attitudes. If a writing program values “critical reading,” for example—so much so that it features Critical Reading as a learning outcome—then that value must relate to something students



can actually do and could wish to do. What if it is a fact that students, as readers, seemingly cannot—or seemingly do not wish to—do what we believe they eventually must, if their reading is to count as critical?

Recall that aspect of our Critical Reading outcome that we found little or no evidence of in student portfolios: “Reconstruct and revise the connections between claims, reasons, and evidence in their own writing, their peers’, and published authors’.” Recall also that we struggled to identify evidence of connections among claims, reasons, and evidence reconstructed analytically or revised into alternative readings. Rather, we saw—as shown above and again here, in an excerpt from another Extended Stretch portfolio—representations of Critical Reading as correct comprehension: “When reading the information for my research paper, most of the information was new to me and I needed time to digest the long texts. With this reason, my critical reading skill got a great improvement and now I can pick up the main idea in a long text very quickly.” Representative of what our sample of 260 portfolios had to say about Critical Reading, this excerpt seems to imply that persuading one’s audience that the Critical Reading outcome was met means assuring that audience that assigned material/researched material was read and understood.

This implication is a bit heartbreaking. To demonstrate a kind of comprehension is a good, but it is not the same good as “seeing like an expert.” Seeing like an expert—assessing the strength and quality of connections, imagining justifiable counter-readings—is a core outcome, not only a norm we value highly but also a norm with which we identify, by which we develop our character. We do care whether we can justify, to the relevant audiences, what we choose to do based on the best available evidence. We care about the relation between our values—our *best* practices—and the facts that ground them, the facts they will redeem, the facts they promise to create. We care about helping our students exercise their judgment to read critically and to engage others’ readings, even if their performances are clumsy with concessions and figure objections as obstacles best taken head-on.

If this core value is not evident in one set of facts—the students’ portfolios—what does this absence mean? What is to be made of it? Relinquishing the value altogether seems absurd. If the preceding paragraph is right, we will not want to—we cannot—deduce from the facts that our value is mistaken (that value resonates in our very concern!). Yet something follows from those facts, if only the desire for more facts. What about the fact of the students’ attitudes behind, and their reasons for, responding as they

did? Why did they elect not to deploy something they were taught? What are the odds that all 260 students in the sample were exercising their right not to display something that, at the time, they felt insecure about? Could it be that at the end of the third quarter of students' first year in college, there was so little evidence in their coursework (including their stretch work) that writing is used to read critically *in this way* that they politely put this outcome to the side? Or that, given students' prior and ongoing experience with jobs and bosses—bosses who may have been the models for the prospective employers the students' cover letters may have been addressing—students had little reason to believe that this kind of critical reading was in fact valued?

Our BW students are young—fresh out of high school. I bring this up because age is likely a factor. In their work with high school students, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm found that with policy arguments, students are more likely to take risks, less likely to play it safe. When it comes to policy, students perceive teachers as less likely to be “looking for a single correct answer”; accordingly, students experience the policy arguments they write as more real than ““assign-and-assess”” papers—papers that students perceive as writing that the instructor uses to test content knowledge. The instructor's comments on such papers, furthermore, are perceived as functioning mainly to justify the grade (135, 121). In light of our findings, Smith and Wilhelm's work resonates. The discourse of policy debate—discourse amplified by an election year that promised to make history, discourse present in students' everyday lives—seems linked with the very few portfolios which feature a different representation of Critical Reading. For example, writing about an opportunity to analyze one of then-Presidential-candidate Donald Trump's 2016 stump speeches, a student in Extended Stretch assumes this relatively active stance:

As I read the speech I not only highlighted what I thought was important but took notes and *rephrased* important ideas. “With no explanation why, the audience takes his word and now believes that with Trump as president, we can magically become better and stronger than all the other countries he claims are better off.” I am able to think about what trump is trying to say and show the audience how I have critically thought of it and I *explain why he might be wrong*. (emphasis added)

The writer brings forward a connection between Trump's implied claim (here is what we should do to become better and stronger) and the evidence (no

evidence, other than Trump's unpremiered assertion that other countries are better off). The writer selects ideas that are "important," recasts them, and acknowledges a reader who will judge the explanation for why Trump "might be wrong." In the terms of *TSIS*, there is at last an "I Say" responding to a "They Say"—even if it amounts to He Says Yes/I Say Probably Not. More promising than no conversation at all, this conversation also seems engaged, concerned with where it might lead, in contact with people who might be made to care enough to respond.

I end by putting this kind of conversation on a continuum with *TSIS* and Lancaster—on the same continuum, of course, but more importantly at that end of the continuum that *TSIS* and Lancaster point toward: practical reasoning for all, reasoning in which questions such as which facts and whose values can be fair game. BW teaching and scholarship already leans this way but can, I have argued, by more deliberately engaging the relations between fact and value, make a greater difference for those it serves.

For those we serve, those relations should be not only dynamically deliberative but actual. In a passage cited above, *TSIS* claims we "learn the ins and outs of argumentative writing not by studying logical principles in the abstract, but by plunging into *actual* discussions and debates, trying out different patterns of response, and in this way getting a sense of what works to persuade different audiences and what doesn't" (xxv; emphasis added). Earlier, to highlight authorial investment, I'd underscored "persuade different audiences." For acts of persuasion to have these learning effects, however, they probably have to strike students as real: "actual." Not only does plunging into "actual discussions and debates" seem reasonable, then—a good place to begin—it will likely help younger BW students better see the point of Lancaster's sophisticated formulas. Such students might better experience the ethical and heuristic potential of hedges, for example—the way hedges can work both "to project a measured stance toward claims, demonstrating the writer's awareness of complexity and concern for carefully delineated assertions" and "to open up space for alternative views and voices, creating room for readers to bring their perspectives to the discussion" (442). In academic discussion generally but perhaps especially importantly in BW classrooms, readers bring their perspectives of the good. This is the unhedged good with which our practical reasoning begins, and as it encounters others' conceptions of what is good, it will find reason to hedge. That is, our students will better see the point of hedging—its usefulness for *ethos*, for invention with and involvement of readers, for the value-laden contingencies of rhetoric and reading. In BW research and instruction, such language is less

what must follow than something that could be followed—if that language is understood less as formulaic and more as the claims we readers make on one another, amid democratic complexity, to constitute ourselves individually and politically, and as the value-laden core around which other uses of language might be recentered.

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### **Notes**

1. Typical of the agreement I believe we'd find is Chris Anson's agreement with arguments that research-based evidence "may change the views of detractors or the terms of the debate" (17).
2. Compare with what Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen say in *Beat Not the Poor Desk* (a book that has informed my pedagogy): Although, as they tell their students, "What you notice has to be something everyone would recognize when you point it out" (58), not only does the "something" have to be pointed out; it is the result of an intellectual, analytic "reordering" (64).
3. Or, as Lancaster says, "Counter-argumentation is thus pervasive and necessary for building robust arguments, yet many students still struggle with, or altogether avoid, this key element of academic writing" (443).
4. Let me confirm here that I agree with Lancaster that Birkenstein and Graff leave themselves open to the charge that they claim they are teaching the moves that are actually made: e.g., "Many students fail to pick up those moves on their own, however, either because they don't read widely, or they don't read with an imitative eye. That is why representing the moves in explicit formulas is often necessary. Teachers who think they are being progressive and student-centered by rejecting such prescriptive methods are passing up a chance to demystify intellectual practices that many students find profoundly puzzling" (Birkenstein and Graff). To write of students that "they don't read widely, or they don't read with an imitative eye" implies that if students did read widely or with an imitative eye, they would see more of the "intellectual practices" that we see, if not try imitating them as well.
5. Other linguistic approaches to literacy have taken this approach, such as Academic Literacies (ACLITS), which is said to be "best able to take

account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations, and identities” by looking “further at the wider aspects of the learning situation, in terms not only of disciplinary epistemology and methods, but also of student identity, social positioning and resistance, gender, and so on, as well as in terms of wider institutional factors, in short to consider the complexity of meaning making which the other two models fail to provide” (Russell et al. 453, 466).

6. Here is Hume: “For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ’tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it” (3.1.1, 469). Factual descriptive statements do not entail evaluative prescriptive statements. One can derive an ought from an is, but that action is deliberative, not deductive. We do not deduce values from facts but deliberate from facts, and when we deliberate, we are seeking value, that is, facts that can count as evidence and reasons.

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# Negotiating a Transcultural Ethos from the Ground Up in a Basic Writing Program

Michael T. MacDonald and William DeGenaro

*ABSTRACT: This essay describes the process of reassessing our BW program at the University of Michigan-Dearborn in order to cultivate a more deliberate, transparent negotiation among stakeholders toward a “transcultural ethos.” Informed by Bruce Horner’s argument that leading-edge work on language and language difference can take place in BW, we formed a working group that conducted a two-year study designed to serve three purposes: to account for the local contexts of increasing language diversity in our BW classrooms; to revise the BW curriculum in ways that accounted for our evolving local contexts; and to begin fostering a transcultural ethos for our writing program. We found that the most progress toward these goals was made when language use was treated as a subject of critical inquiry, reflection, and analysis in the classroom. We also found that code-meshing approaches could foster student agency while making acts of negotiation more deliberate. The imperative to continue building toward a transcultural ethos has prompted us to pay more attention to the risks of commodifying student writing and to place greater emphasis on teacher self-reflection.*

*KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; code-meshing; curricular change; negotiation; transcultural ethos; translanguaging; writing program reform*

## BASIC WRITING IN DEARBORN

The students in our basic writing (BW) course have for at least a generation mirrored Dearborn, Michigan’s unique linguistic, ethnic, and racial character. Dearborn is home to the highest concentration of Arab-Americans in the United States, with vibrant and visible diaspora communities from Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen living the kinds of “multicultural” and “multilingual” lives that reflect the cosmopolitan narratives of 21st century higher

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education. For the past several decades, BW has served large numbers of multilingual Arab-Americans alongside white, often first-generation university attendees. This context creates an important juxtaposition: the children of Arab immigrants next to the children of auto workers, Arab Muslims next to white, working-class students from “down river” or Macomb County. While these two groups differ in demographic terms, they are united at times by an unfamiliarity with the dynamic terrain of university culture and the shifting conventions of academic literacies.

In the past four years, our campus has invited an additional student population: international students. BW in cosmopolitan Dearborn has become even more marked by multilingualism during the years following the recent global financial crisis, as our University has sought to make up for declines in enrollment by entering quickly into lucrative international partnerships. As Paul Kei Matsuda observes, the recruitment of international students often serves to increase “visible diversity” and tap “out-of-state tuition” dollars (“Let’s Face It” 142; “It’s the Wild West” 131). These rushed arrangements are often motivated by the potential for fast profit and entered into without consideration of necessary staffing and infrastructure. The *rush* to profit from inflated tuition rates and room and board fees and to tout institutional commitment to multiculturalism can obscure the need, for example, to prepare faculty for the needs of L2 writers, not to mention to assure adequate transportation and housing services. We have observed these demographic and institutional shifts as white, mostly “monolingual” faculty members, one of us (Bill) the writing program director, and one of us (Mike) a tenure-stream assistant professor, both with interests in BW studies and a desire to respond in critical ways. We have watched as the University’s administration has targeted Arabic-speaking nations like Oman, as well as China and Brazil, for these new partnerships. And so as Arabic-language signs literally mark some of the streets around campus, having changed the material and linguistic make-up of Dearborn, the campus itself is marked by new student populations and a new degree of language diversity, in part as a result of Michigan’s own economic realities and the University’s pressing need for diversified revenue streams.

Amid this flux, BW has been the site where linguistic diversity is most *audible*, where “difference is the norm” (Lu and Horner, “Introduction: Translingual Work” 208). New international students on our campus place into BW in high numbers based on a timed writing exam that many take after completing a language proficiency program. This program is on a non-academic track (language courses are open to non-matriculating and



pre-academic students) and arose around the same time as the increased recruitment efforts; there was no need only four years ago for such a program. It also generates fast revenue for the institution. These realities have complicated matters for our Writing Program instructors, many of whom are part-time lecturers, and who, at times, have reported experiencing difficulties teaching BW sections comprised of growing numbers of L2 writers alongside “monolingual” writers. So these rushed, transnational relationships prompted us to consider how we might make some reflective changes to our BW curriculum. These shifting realities have also led us to consider how BW might be the most appropriate locus of larger, programmatic change.

We are mindful of Bruce Horner’s compelling jeremiad that not enough scholarly, critical, and collaborative work toward inquiry into language difference and “difficulty as the norm” (“Relocating” 6-7) is located in the BW classroom, a site he argues is full of potential due to its pluralism and its marginalized position within the university. We wondered, given the growing linguistic diversity in our BW course, how we might craft a curriculum that better responded to *all* the students now sharing space in BW on our campus. Could a transcultural ethos—what we are imagining as a spirit of openness to multiple language practices—do transformative work within our program? We also wondered if both the lecturers who often teach our BW course and the students themselves would resist critiques of standard language ideologies (see Shapiro). Thus we were interested in the pedagogies informed by translanguaging articulated in particular by Suresh Canagarajah and Vershawn Ashanti Young, who argue that “code-meshing” offers agency and performative and reflective opportunities for students through a fairly explicit critique of the ideology of monolingualism. We hoped the BW classroom itself could become a rhetorical situation wherein students, given the agency to choose among a wider array of language options and by performing across multiple languages, dialects, codes, and registers, might in turn challenge instructors to reflect on standard language ideologies.

Though the growing linguistic diversity in our BW program is the product of global-local inequalities and profit-motive, we saw these new transcultural relations opening up important possibilities for approaches to language that could challenge the dominance of monolingualism and prompt teacher self-reflection and dialogue with student writing. That ethos would remain rooted in an awareness of the aforementioned global-local transformations, but also foreground the perspectives of BW students who, we believe—echoing Horner—had the potential to instill in our writing program a greater awareness of the dynamic nature of language across 21st

century milieus. This is how we define “transcultural ethos,” as a programmatic stance that affirmatively and actively works to engage with the distinctive markers of global-local language shifts and encourages the negotiation of these shifts among local stakeholders.

Since we wanted that “ethos” to emanate from students and student writing, a fundamental goal for us was to provide opportunities for basic writers themselves to engage with and reflect on those global-local shifts by such means as writing assignments with optional code-meshing components and critical reader-responses to difficult readings on the topic of language diversity. Seeing, too, an opportunity for collaboration to determine the best ways to move forward, the two of us formed a BW Working Group among BW instructors that would grapple with these decisions in a collaborative manner.

We asked if it was possible to foster a transcultural ethos in (and from) the BW classroom for program reform. This article presents findings about students’ increased language awareness that emerged from our pilot curriculum and an analysis of teachers’ responses to that writing as our intention was to pilot a code-meshing curriculum then “report out” to additional groups of stakeholders on campus (beyond our Working Group and beyond the Writing Program even), continuing to root discussions in student work. Our goal for change was to increase the opportunities for negotiation among the stakeholders in our program. That is, we wanted to give more support to students, but also to the teachers who prompted this assessment.

## **A WORKING GROUP TOWARD PROGRAMMATIC CHANGE**

At UM-Dearborn, our BW course lacked a common syllabus and shared learning outcomes, and although other program courses (a two-course comp sequence, several professional writing courses, etc.) emphasized rhetorical awareness and were guided by learning outcomes, BW had remained neglected. Lecturers who taught the course had reported largely via informal communication at gatherings like professional development sessions and placement exam readings that the course was becoming increasingly diverse vis-à-vis L2 writers. Seeing value in programmatic change rooted in models that are collaborative and collective, we invited program lecturers who regularly taught BW and an experienced Writing Center consultant to consider BW on our campus. Recent scholarship in writing program administration highlights the utility of curricular reform and conceptualizing for program change *collaboratively* (Dunn et al; Ostergaard and Allan) and drawing on

principles of *collective* action (Gillfus); in addition to working collectively toward change, we hoped specifically that change could emanate from the ground-up, i.e., from a consideration of the perspectives of those actually involved in the day-to-day work of BW—lecturers, students (via close consideration of their writing), and writing center professionals alike.

Because we were starting from a place of uncertainty regarding the position of BW in our Writing Program, two broad questions guided the group's inquiry: To what extent did the COMP 099 curriculum serve the increasingly diverse BW student populations on campus? And, might the increased diversity of language practices in COMP 099 broaden the range of our teaching practices? As a group, we read samples of student writing to get a sense of what kinds of work students were doing in the course. Initial observations from these meetings included the following:

- There was no single, monolithic “BW student” but various profiles that included mono- and multilingual students from both the U.S. and abroad.
- The curriculum needed to provide additional support to students of all language backgrounds as they negotiated university expectations, conventions, and codes.
- L2 writers often communicated robust, fully developed ideas with “a high level of specificity” but in many cases struggled to meet the specific expectations articulated on assignment sheets.

Because our initial observations emphasized a need to foster reflective awareness across different rhetorical situations and to provide students with additional time to negotiate the expectations of college writing, the group discussed the viability of abolishing the stand-alone BW course in favor of a stretch or studio model. We considered how a co-curricular studio course—with its foregrounding of reflection on the writing process and in lieu of non-credit bearing BW course—might uniquely foreground the learning model that the group was articulating. (Mike had taught in a studio program during his doctoral program and helped facilitate a robust discussion of how a one-credit studio coupled with our first-semester composition class might meet needs across our established and emerging student populations.) Institutional data, however, showed that the non-credit BW course correlated highly with several markers of student success including baccalaureate attainment. So the group decided to 1) preserve the BW course but pilot a curriculum emphasizing language awareness and 2) create

a one-credit, elective studio course that would provide additional support to all student writers including but not limited to those enrolled in our BW course. Even though teachers saw merit in possibly instituting a large-scale curricular change (i.e., essentially abolishing BW), quantitative data told a story that was compelling to us—a story about student achievement. Data did not *contradict* our own teacherly points-of-view *per se*, but rather provided another, important (we felt), local perspective. And we hoped that action items emanating from the group would be true to the spirit of “ground up” program change.

### **A PILOT CURRICULUM TOWARD A ‘TRANSCULTURAL ETHOS’**

We worked to ground our pilot curriculum in both programmatic deliberations in the field as well as recent scholarship. Indeed, we found useful the wealth of theory-building that has emerged in the wake of the “translingual turn,” drawing on scholarship that defines translingualism not as a specific practice but as an ethos. Lu and Horner define a translingual approach as “a disposition of openness and inquiry toward language and language difference” that “recognizes translation and the renegotiation of meaning” (“Translingual Literacy, Language Difference” 585). Translingualism, then, represents a potential strategy for encouraging students and teachers to regard both dominant and non-dominant discourses as resources for discursive *negotiation* in the academy (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; Hanson; M. Lee; Lu and Horner, “Translingual Literacy”; Milson-Whyte; Welford; Young et al.). Emerging studies of translingualism in *JBW* have likewise defined the term *translingual* as an “attitude of openness” (Mlynarczyk 12), positioning students “simultaneously as experts and learners” (Parmegiani 25). For example, Victor Villanueva has observed how code-meshing can foster a valuable recognition of the “the subaltern speaking” (100). Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk’s term “attitude” in particular resonated with us, though we hoped that our “transcultural ethos” would extend beyond “attitude” and encompass not just a stance but a spirit and practice. Similarly, Andrea Parmegiani promotes examinations of “how ways of thinking and using language clash and how these clashes can be implicated in power relations” (32). These are the approaches to language we wanted to cultivate first within the space of our pilot curriculum—and subsequently in our program.

## Elements of our Pilot Code-meshing Curriculum

Our curricular choices aligned with several of the “six pedagogic strategies for supporting code meshing” identified by Sara Michael-Luna and Canagarajah. Three such strategies seemed particularly suited to our local contexts: “multilingual text selection,” “modelling written code meshing,” and drawing “knowledge from inside and outside the text” (60). We also emphasized low-stakes writing and the complexity of texts and then brought all of these elements to bear on a culminating literacy narrative assignment.

- *Multilingual text selection*: Articles like “From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle” by Min-Zhan Lu and “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” by Gloria Anzaldúa helped foreground proficiency in *writing from texts* (summary, critical response, paraphrase, direct quotation, and close-reading)—all consistent with extant program goals.
- *Modelling written code-meshing*: We highlighted writing by Anzaldúa and Young (*Your Average Nigga*) to show how writers might integrate academic discourse with other codes. These texts served as models for composing in multiple codes. They also helped model the kinds of questions students might explore in their own essays. We invited students to practice code-meshing and supported whatever choices students made about what codes to use in their own writing, but also asked them to reflect on their composing process.
- *Drawing on knowledge from inside and outside the text*: We asked students to reflect on the role of language in their own lives, make critical connections with course readings, and examine how their own experiences as readers and writers might support or complicate the ideas about language, power, and genre communicated in the assigned readings.
- *Regular low-stakes writing assignments that worked toward longer, high-stakes (graded) essays*: Assignments would focus specifically on *language awareness* and *code-meshing*; language use would serve as a subject of inquiry for the course, and students would be invited to *discuss* code-meshing as a topic and as a prompt for personal reflection.
- *Assignments that asked students to close-read<sup>1</sup> complex, scholarly texts about language use in transcultural contexts*: We valued the work

of teacher-scholars like Canagarajah and Young and sought to emulate their approaches to language in our pilot curriculum. We asked students to read and respond critically to complex texts like Aleya Rouchdy's "Language Conflict and Identity: Arabic in the American Diaspora" in which the writer's fieldwork was conducted in our own backyard: the Arab-American community of Dearborn. We also found essays by Lu and Anzaldúa useful both as prompts to introduce students to theoretical constructs connected to "the transcultural" as well as examples of texts that highlight, challenge, and even reject genre conventions. We reasoned that these readings could provoke the types of conversations we had envisioned among both the mono- and multi-lingual students and illustrate the types of writing we were inviting, writing that engaged in a deeper awareness of language conventions and genres (not to mention ideologies).

- *The literacy narrative assignment:* A central piece to the final portfolio was a literacy narrative that encompassed all of the above elements. Students were asked to tell detailed stories about some aspect of literacy in their own lives and connect those stories to the global ideas addressed in the readings. The literacy narrative also presented opportunities for reflection about language in the very local-global contexts we started off wishing to foreground. Further, the literacy narrative was a durable assignment across both monolingual BWs, L2 writers, the numerous Generation 1.5 students in the class, international students, and BW students whose language profiles cut across the above categories.

## **IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS: THINKING BEYOND THE WRITING PROGRAM**

The core elements of our pilot curriculum were conceived as a means toward the broader ethos we hoped to foster. More specifically, the ethos we envisioned sought to encourage transparent acts of negotiation in student writing and, by extension, program discourse. Negotiation in these contexts could be thought of in Canagarajah's terms, as "performative competence"—less a set of skills and more a broader ethos of flexibility and reciprocity across diverse, dynamic rhetorical contexts rooted in local practices (*Translingual Practice* 173). For the BW student populations in Dearborn, for example, navigating a semester of BW with classmates who are international students

from Arab nations (and elsewhere), who are second- or third-generation Arab-Americans from multilingual homes, who are more recent immigrants from the Middle East (especially Yemen and Syria), and who are monolingual working-class white students is just one example of many of multilingual-multicultural situations virtually every student would experience. As our study of 1) student writing and 2) teacher comments below shows, we struggled with all of the above concerns and realized that one of the main areas of intervention we needed to consider was how we were constructing and engaging the multiple stakeholders of BW on our campus.

“Stakeholder” is a term we use deliberately to consider the ways different audiences each have vested, and sometimes competing, interests in standard language ideologies. Gaining an understanding of stakeholders within and beyond the Writing Program seemed crucial for any kind of programmatic change. This idea of “stakeholders,” however, bears unpacking because, as Wendy Brown observes, its wide use is burdened by a neoliberal rationale within higher education. For example, the term “stakeholders” can imply that the voices of those invested in BW are more important than those voices within BW because the term “operates through isolating and entrepreneurializing responsible units and individuals” (129). BW becomes a commodity rather than a place of intellectual work. Likewise, stakeholders often have different understandings of student “success,” informed by competing, sometimes conflicting, agendas (McCurrie 30-31). So, our use of “stakeholder” comes with a degree of ambiguity: It has helped us identify important, competing interests, but we do so with a conscious knowledge that it is also symptomatic of the kinds of rushed, globalizing changes we saw taking place on campus.

At the center, we have students and teachers in the classroom, and this is where we began our work of renegotiation and revision. The stake students and faculty have varies. Many international students follow a strict program dictated by their sponsoring nations; our BW class is one of many language courses they have to take. Domestic students sometimes feel slighted to have been put in BW, and so teachers need to earn back their trust or help them (re)build confidence. Some student-stakeholders are matriculating in programs with curricula that leave little room for electives or for deviation from a strongly recommended, prefabricated course plan, and so an “extra” writing requirement seems like a burden. For instructors, student success can be a measure of teacher success, and so the stakes for our BW instructors had been shifting with the new struggles of this dynamic student population. Further, most other instructors of the BW course are part-time lecturers who

have fewer institutional resources than the two of us do. We believed all of these material conditions mattered as much as the conditions that created Dearborn's linguistic and racial diversity.

Most directly connected with international students is the newly accredited English Language Proficiency Program (ELPP), itself tied to international recruitment efforts. The ELPP is one of the audiences with which we have engaged in the most negotiation on our campus. For instance, the ELPP director shared writing prompts and grading scales with us early in this process. At first, we were pleased that ELPP rubrics had a rhetorical emphasis, but then we wondered why students were passing ELPP and then overwhelmingly placing directly into BW rather than our credited writing courses. Another important set of stakeholders, though a slightly more fluid one, includes faculty in other disciplines who have international students in their classes. They occasionally contact the Writing Program or the Writing Center to express concerns regarding student work. We imagined using the results of our study to engage these audiences in future professional development opportunities.

## **ASSESSMENT OF PILOT CURRICULUM**

The two of us piloted our code meshing curriculum in our own five sections over the course of three semesters. We graded our own students' work, and then presented final portfolios to the BW Working Group as artifacts that would prompt our programmatic reflection. That is, readers were not "grading" students, but reflecting on the work as part of a larger sense of program success. We received IRB approval and student consent to analyze eighty-eight student portfolios. Consent to use teachers' comments as data was also obtained. Each portfolio contained two critical essays, one literacy narrative, and one reflective piece. We also received a campus grant to support a reading of these portfolios that we hoped would fulfil at least two purposes: to determine the ways in which the curriculum served student and program needs and to reflect on teacher practice so we could formulate strategies for professional development. Portfolio readers (from the Working Group) examined portfolios by writing comments that contained open-ended questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the writing; the extent to which FYC learning outcomes were being met/approached; the level of language awareness and attitude toward literacy; and the manner in which students were representing culture.



Each portfolio was commented on by two readers, who were prompted to shift focus from the students to the textual performances and the broader program ethos those performances suggested. Data, therefore, for this study took two forms: student writing (final portfolios) and teacher discourse (portfolio commenter sheets). Results from commenter sheets were typed into a text document for coding. Codes were determined by looking at the words readers used to describe student writing (see tables 1 through 3 below). The two of us then collaboratively reviewed the final portfolios and the commenter sheets in an effort to assess the BW pilot curriculum and get a stronger sense of teacher disposition toward students' writing. Below, we present excerpts that reflect our own interpretations of themes we saw in the discourse of the two groups that we believe show how these specific stakeholders spoke to ongoing questions of language diversity in BW.

### **Findings and Themes: Student Voices**

Students described literacy events that illustrated how active “BW’s” take part in 21st century literate activities, like translating for their parents or acclimating to “U.S. culture” (see also Arnold et al.), wrestling with academic constructs from difficult course readings to varying degrees of “success,” and at times opting to utilize multiple codes. We would like to underline four key findings that emerged from student writing during the pilot project that we believe have implications for others interested in transcultural and translingual pedagogies, especially in the BW classroom:

1. Code-meshing seemed to facilitate vivid storytelling, particularly in the literacy narrative assignments.
2. At times these vivid narratives led to critical reflections about the domains of literacy, and these critical reflections incorporated many of the concepts outlined in a translingual approach, such as identity and metalinguistic awareness.
3. Code-meshing appeared to help students make critical connections between local-global contexts, particularly in reflections on their own personal experiences with language use.
4. Although vivid description was valuable, code-meshing did not consistently lead to the kinds of critical, analytic engagement with the contexts of language use as we had intended.

**Our code-meshing pedagogy appeared to facilitate vivid storytelling.**

We are aware that highlighting “interesting” or “vivid” code-meshed texts by students of color suggests a fetishization, or at least a commodification, of student writing (see especially Inayatulla; Matsuda, “Lure”). But we are hopeful that the idea of *negotiation* can provide a broad framework for how “monolingual” and multilingual students might perform a range of language strategies, including the use of multiple codes, and then seize opportunities for critical and contextual reflection on language choice. Though over half of the eighty-eight students in our pilot sections chose not to code-mesh in ways that included the combination of multiple languages and dialects, those who did tended to inject a level of sensory detail and creative voice into their writing that the two of us found compelling.

Consider, for instance, Ali’s<sup>2</sup> story about his grandfather. His use of vivid detail and translation *shows* how he imagines himself as a language user:

My grandfather has always told me that for every language I learn, it is as if I have another person within me. . . . For the first years of my life, I grew up speaking English and Arabic, and then learned Spanish in my four years at high school. As I spoke both languages I noticed some differences in each language’s use of a word. A simple example is how your friend would respond to the nickname “dog.” The English language I learned taught me that “Dog” could be used to refer to your friend in a more comical way. I can meet my friend and ask him, “what up, dog?” and he would respond with a laugh or, “what up, G?” In contrast, if I were to address an Arab as (kelb or الكلب), they would be heavily insulted, as we do not see the word dog as an endearment.

For Ali, critical reflection seems to be enacted not only through a discussion of different domains of literacy, but also through interactions with the literacy sponsors in his life (see Brandt). Ali considers his grandfather as an influential figure in his understanding of literacy, and this example also helps him invest in establishing a humorous voice. English idiomatic expressions (“what up, dog?”) and Arab-cum-Islamic constructs (dogs as unclean) converge as English and Arabic converge.

Ali uses familiar literacy narrative tropes—recalling familial memories and important lessons handed down from elders—and freshens these tropes with stories of the multilingual household in which he grew up. (We want

to acknowledge that we are white academics who for all of our training in rhetorical analysis cannot fully understand all the signification behind Ali's use of, say, the term "dog.") But it is not merely Ali's multilingualism that elevates the narrative; rather it's the manner in which the text *embodies* multilingualism: Ali's text plays with multiple languages, creating a kind-of translanguing word game with the "what up, dog?" idiom. His joke hinges on the cultural dimension of dog and the word's dynamic ambiguity to a nineteen-year-old Arab-American Muslim merging an Arabic and an English inflected with the idioms of youth culture. Ali's commentary on language demonstrates negotiation and awareness in ways that position his code-meshed text within the broader perspective of translanguaging. He uses writing to explain his own open disposition toward language use and identity. This kind of example embodies the notion that students in the course can be both learners and teachers (see Parmegiani), as Ali's writing not only is creative, but highlights important perspectives gained specifically from his lived experience as a language user.

**At times these vivid narratives led to critical reflections about the domains of literacy.**

Students who used code-meshing to show vivid detail sometimes also used code-meshing as a means to critically reflect on the various domains of literacy in their lives (see Barton). For example, Zaina contextualizes her experience with languages at home and at school:

If I try to explain to my mom what I'm doing or how I'm feeling there sometimes isn't the right word to describe in Arabic. My sentence comes out like this 'mama ana kteer z3lane w annoyed,' which translates to mom I've very mad and annoyed. Something that comes out more natural would be me saying something like 'mama ma fee school bokra.' This means mom there is no school tomorrow. . . . At school my language is very sophisticated and it's just one language which is English . . . at home my tongue is all over the place.

Like Ali, Zaina's work asks valuable questions about language-in-context. In this case, Zaina gives us an example of how she uses code-meshed, computer-mediated communications when having an everyday exchange with her mother. She moves toward a more metalinguistic awareness while also writing something engaging and "interesting" to many audiences, though

again we are aware of the problem raised by highlighting an “interesting” code-meshed text by a student of color. We wish to echo Lu and Horner’s suggestion that translingual pedagogies ought to focus not merely on whether student-writers code-mesh, but instead on “how, when, where, and why specific language strategies might be deployed” (“Translingual Literacy” 27). That is, instead of putting an undue burden on students of color, including multilingual students, to produce a code-meshed text, or as Jerry Won Lee puts it, to be “on display” (181), we want to foster a greater sense of agency and rhetorical awareness with all students. Indeed, practices of *negotiation* can provide a broad framework wherein monolingual and multilingual students might deploy a range of language strategies including multiple codes as well as multiple opportunities for critical and contextual reflection on language choice. In this case, it’s not so much a code-meshed text that we found important to highlight, but the adaptation of strategies as Zaina moves between different domains of literacy. Zaina uses the literacy narrative as an occasion not merely to engage in storytelling “enhanced” by the code-meshing “device,” but also to *investigate* how her language use shifts in those different locations. Also like Ali, Zaina *shows* language in flux, while also moving from narrative to critical insight.

### **Code-meshing was used to make local-global connections.**

Our assessment helped us observe more fully the kinds of significant experiences with dynamic language use in local-global milieus that so many of the students in these courses had, many of which challenged the notion that BWs are *deficient*. For instance, another student, Phil, identified as “monolingual,” but wrote about studying Arabic through several immersion programs. He reflected on a time when he got sick while visiting Jordan and was told to consume an entire lemon; the memory stuck. In his writing, he connected language use to this recollection: “To fully use language to your benefit you must taste and use the insides and outsides to receive the full strength of it.” Searching for a metaphor to describe his complex literacy history, Phil investigates and theorizes literacy, showing how slippery the ideas of “fluency” and “monolingualism” are. This metaphor brought his *global* experiences to bear on the specifically *local* contexts of college writing. Elsewhere Phil describes living in an especially multilingual area of Detroit. While shopping in a bodega one day, he witnessed a misunderstanding between the clerk and a customer who spoke different dialects of Arabic. Because the two used different words for “lemon,” they couldn’t understand one another.

Phil uses this as an example of the complexity of linguistic negotiation in a contact zone. Two Arabs from different regions of the Middle East, living in the West, having a misunderstanding overheard by a young U.S. American who happens to have lived in multiple Arabic-speaking nations. The moment also illustrates the value of critical sensitivity to language difference and fluidity. It's not lost on Phil that he was in a position to translate, not only because of his fluency, but also because of his awareness of dialectical difference.

Another student, Tony, typified many of the scholarly conversations on transnationalism that discuss how the nation-state is no longer a definitive demarcation. Tony wrote a narrative titled "Writing Back and Forth," a story of growing up and attending schools in both Mexico and the U.S. In his description of border crossing, he shows how the local and global can dynamically affect both cultural and linguistic practice. He references a saying, "*¿Que transita por tus venas aparte del colesterol?*" He goes on to write:

[In Mexico we] swirl around a topic until it gradually makes a point. . . . Moving back and forth between the two countries significantly damaged my capability to fully understand either English or Spanish. Even so, this constant move back and forth left me with a mixture of both languages. It has left me to see them in a new perspective. This perspective can seem to correlate with the belief that English is straight to the point while Spanish takes a little more deviation.

Tony points to the idiom above (literally "what moves through your veins besides cholesterol" but figuratively "what's up?") as illustrative of what he sees as the difference between Spanish and English. He incorporates Spanish, but, interestingly, is very much invested in a contrastive impulse, which leads to some rather generalized, unqualified statements about the languages. Still, Tony's work is reflective, rooted in his own experience and, like the written work of some of the other BWs in the pilot, made even more concrete and specific by practices of negotiation.

**Deliberate code-meshing did not always lead to critical engagement.**

At times, a high level of detail might open up further possibility for analyzing one's own language use and subject position—indeed, Ali's use of Arabic codes arguably opened up possibilities for critical reflection—but

as we found in our understanding of the following examples, the inclusion of multiple codes does not necessarily help writers meet program learning outcomes, like critical engagement with course texts and analytical thinking. For instance, Yasir writes about translating for his mother:

Doctor: Ask your mother how she's feeling?

Me: Mama, Doctor, puch raha hai, kesa lag raha hai?

Mother: Mere ser me dard hai. Doctor se pooch kafi din se dard kyu ho rahi hai?

Me translating back to the doctor: My mom is saying that she having a severe headache and she wants to know why she is having it for several days.

And here, Abdallah describes a common text-messaging practice:

There are some of the Arabs, uses English alphabet but the context is in Arabic. I sometimes use it while I text. Some of the Arabic words is not included in the English alphabet so I use numbers to express them here's a list of some words that I mostly use:

3 means ع

3' means غ

4 means ذ

6 means ط

These excerpts provide insight into the everyday realities of language users, but they also seem to stop their analysis at the level of the example. Abdallah started to make some connections by writing, "Not everyone knows how to write in this way. The young generation like me are the people who most uses it, so if I texted my parents using the English alphabet they may not understand what the numbers stand for." But, the two of us do not see the connection going far enough beyond a factual reporting, or translation, of the texting code, and toward a critical articulation of the context. Deliberate code-meshing does not itself lead the reader to a critical engagement with course readings or help the writer reflect on the global and local contexts of their examples. If we envision literacy narratives as moving from memory to insight, code-meshing appears to help with *memory* more than *insight*. Our goal was to explicitly draw students' and readers' attention to both, to a relationship between language use and critical analysis. But, as these examples imply, perhaps our own conceptualization of code-meshing practices within the literacy narrative assignment was limited. Only after our assessment did

we understand that code-meshing could serve as a stylistic device (especially in the context of a “personal” genre like the literacy narrative). The evidence we saw in student writing showed us that we need to continue to work on the best way to integrate code-meshing into a curriculum that asks students to become more reflective and analytic about language practices. If students thought it was enough to point out code-meshing without connecting such choices to the more global ideas in the readings, for example, then how could we more carefully scaffold the use of personal experience in their writing? Reading these excerpts alongside program outcomes helped us see these limitations. Our assessment *and* our reading of the literature also helped point toward ways we might continue working to avoid commodifying the code-meshed text.

### **THEMES AND FINDINGS: FACULTY VOICES**

A consideration of faculty voices was also important to program reform because it would re-emphasize the kind of ethos and ground-up approach the BW Working Group felt was needed. In fact, faculty voices were actual members of the Working Group who agreed to read student portfolios for this project. The two of us looked at the reader comments and identified at least three themes that indicated possible directions for developing a transcultural ethos in our program:

1. Readers clearly valued reflective student writing, both writing about one’s own struggles and successes as well as one’s place in the local-global contexts of language use.
2. We observed faculty’s attempt to negotiate with student writing in the kinds of “measured” comments readers made. Readers often hesitated when praising or criticizing student writing, and we saw such hesitations as evidence of BW instructors negotiating between the student writing and their own assumptions about language.
3. In explicit comments on grammar and mechanics, we saw a need for a shared vocabulary for talking about language use in our program, one that would deliberately engage teachers in negotiation with multiple stakeholders.

**Portfolio readers valued reflective writing.**

Reflective writing was valued highly by portfolio readers, who saw merit in writing that performed even minimal “self-awareness,” such as when students would discuss struggles and weaknesses (see table 1). Although perhaps not included in our own thinking about a transcultural ethos, students sometimes commented on their experiences of going to the Writing Center or participating in peer review. Readers also valued broader reflection on language use in local-global contexts, which appeared to help students respond critically to course readings.

Table 1: Reflection

<b>Code</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Excerpt</b>
Reflection total	110	“On next-to-last page . . . student recognizes how reading (“ideas come together”) sparks new ideas which then spread (writing). Nevertheless, recognizes a disconnect in himself.”
Reflection on own writing	26	“Self awareness”; “Portfolio demonstrates increased self-awareness and articulates student’s use of good habits like revision and reflections, which will serve her well moving forward.”
Reflection on language use	15	“Reflects on English as a lingua franca in various geographic and professional contexts in two different pieces in the portfolio.”
Needs more reflection	18	“Not much - the literacy narrative is all summary and doesn’t draw from the readings to reflect on own language use.”

The Working Group wanted to preserve and perhaps expand the program’s emphasis on reflective writing. In other courses, reflection often would take the form of a student commenting on their strengths and weaknesses or analyzing the specific choices they made in a given document. The group wanted to emphasize this in BW as well, but as comments showed the two of us, readers were open to seeing reflection on “English as a lingua



franca,” for example, and other ways students might write about themselves as language users.

In terms of fostering a transcultural ethos for our program, we see these comments on student reflective practices as a success, as both students and teachers seemed to consider reflection as something that was both individual and global. But, readers also commented that they wanted more reflection eighteen times, which mirrored our own observations of student writing, that code-meshing and reflection were not successful when “the literacy narrative is all summary and doesn’t draw from the readings to reflect on own language use.”

### **Negotiation was visible in the “measured” comments readers made.**

Excerpts from reader comments revealed to us the kinds of negotiations teachers enter when they encounter linguistic diversity in student writing. Readers confirmed our observations and also saw code-meshing being used to *facilitate vivid storytelling*, particularly in the literacy narrative assignment. Teachers often remarked on the creativity of these rhetorical moves, often saying that they expressed a “confident” tone. At the same time, readers were *measured* in their comments on this kind of code-meshing because the student writing did not always lead to *critical reflection*—a learning outcome of our introductory first-year writing course. Although readers saw promise in the writing, they were not always wholly convinced of the value of code-meshing strategies, partly because there was often a perceived “lack of analysis.” We identified a *measured comment* when a reader undercut their assessment with a “but” or “however.” Readers made some kind of measured comment 182 times, one of the most observable characteristics across all reader responses (see table 2).

Table 2: Negotiation and Measured Comments

Theme	Code	Excerpt
<i>Negotiation</i>	<i>Measured Comments</i>	
	Positive, but struggles	“Language is clear for the most part, but lack of analysis.”
	Negative, but potential	“Could be somewhat long-winded at times—but, wow, what an interesting perspective!”

	Measured, but more	“Speaks Arabic at home, <b>but</b> not mentioned much, only in Daily Writing? So, it’s hard to see the ideas that were connected to the readings.”
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Perhaps these measured comments are evidence of a struggle on the reader’s part to make sense of evolving dynamics in student writing while also holding true to various standard language ideologies. We might think of negotiation in this case as a “relationship” of “place” and “labor” (Inoue, *Antiracist Writing Assessment* 78-80). Readers articulated a relationship with the text that attended to not only the “place” of BW, but the “placement” of students into BW. Readers looked at portfolios alongside the learning outcomes for FYC, but also worked to see student writing within the contexts of the rushed relationships made possible (or imposed) by local-global power dynamics.

Measured comments also prompted us to further consider what a transcultural ethos might mean for our specific writing program faculty. For instance, some students described experiences with different dialects or studying languages in different contexts, but these explorations sometimes stayed at the descriptive stage (or more precisely remained in narrative mode), which prompted portfolio readers to express a desire for a deeper level of critique of these experiences. This resulted in a *measured* reaction from readers who appreciated—though perhaps sometimes commodified—the code-meshed writing as well as the global experiences described in the narratives as experiences. As Inayatulla argues, the literacy narrative assignment itself tends to elicit this kind of racialized, limiting response in academic readers (11). Likewise, this potentially problematic, potentially Orientalist engagement between faculty and student writing is something Matsuda has warned about, that code-meshing pedagogies and unreflective endorsement of a translingual approach to language risk losing critical and theoretical rigor, *our analyses themselves* remaining at the level of narrative description (“The Lure” 478). In fact, the disposition of the BW Working Group might show a lack of negotiation in regards to our role as readers. Perhaps our own readings of code-meshing parallel students’ performances of code-meshing in that if students thought it was enough to describe code-meshing without reflecting on their choices as writers, we also thought it was enough to point to instances of code-meshing without reflecting on our disposition as readers.

**Comments revealed an important need for a shared vocabulary for talking about language use in our program.**

We asked readers about “strengths” and “weaknesses” because we wanted to know what they might say if these were their own students. Although these were questions that most likely led to the commodification of certain student discourses, readers’ answers also helped us see to what extent standard language ideology was a part of their criteria for success. For instance, readers sometimes identified standard English fluency as a weakness, and from their comments, we identified a vocabulary of how “error” in student writing was described (see table 3). We believe that this vocabulary represents a disposition toward language use that should be a point of teacher self-reflection. The vocabulary for describing fluency was not necessarily a shared one. Terms like “syntax” and “diction” were used sixty-one times to describe “grammar issues” and appeared in comments like, “Paragraphing, diction, grammar, and syntax, occasionally obscuring the thought” and “Some diction/syntax problems become distracting at times.” Often, such grammatical terminology was left undefined.

Table 3: Disposition toward Language Use

Theme	Code	Occurrences	Excerpt
<i>Disposition Toward Language Use</i>	Syntax	38	“Paragraphing, diction, grammar, and syntax, occasionally obscuring the thought.”
	Editing & Proofreading	27	“Some proofreading and editing inconsistency.”
	Grammar	24	“Serious grammar issues, but a definite voice seems to be emerging.”
	Diction	23	“Some diction/syntax problems become distracting at times.”

These disparities show the two of us that we should work toward getting teachers to be more reflective, deliberate, and consistent in the ways they describe not just code-meshed texts, but all student writing. These “grammar” assessment terms appear to evince a type of monolingual ideology that presents the “construct of language” as natural and obvious (Dryer). This

vocabulary for grammar acts as a kind of “code” for a dominant, ideological discourse that hides its prejudice in a reader being “distracted.” If we are to assess language, then our terms for that assessment should be both transparent and arrived at through a more deliberate process of negotiation.

Developing a *shared* vocabulary with teachers through professional development opportunities would help make our grammatical discourse more transparent to one another as well as to students, which would help teachers and students work together to negotiate audience expectations. According to Sarah Stanley, who borrows the idea of “noticing” from second language acquisition studies of “error,” translingual approaches can help teachers and students develop a “disposition toward noticing” (39). Stanley sees value in the study of error *with* students rather than teaching error unidirectionally *to* them. Stanley argues that this collaborative approach can also “foster discursive agency” (39), and we can use such approaches to work with students *and* teachers to develop shared understandings of language use as we cultivate a translingual ethos in our program.

Perhaps identifying a code-meshed product is not as important as using code-meshing for the purposes of negotiation and assessment. That is, engaging in code-meshing pedagogies with both students and teachers opened up the possibilities for student writing and created more opportunity for reflection on how we read. We began to see assessment itself as an act of negotiation and dependent on the dispositions of faculty. In that respect, the pilot curriculum was successful in the eyes of the BW Working Group because it addressed our initial questions about supporting students and it helped us work toward this idea of a transcultural ethos for the program. For example, our inquiry can help teachers be more reflective and deliberate when commenting on student texts, on the grammatical features of student writing. If we are not practicing negotiation, our assumptions about language use fails to provide alternatives to dominating language ideologies, or to what Horner describes as “the English-only variant of the ideology of monolingualism” (Horner, *Rewriting Composition* 55). Similarly, if we are not practicing self-assessment and reflection on ourselves, we risk undermining a transcultural ethos of negotiation. We end up focusing more on the product of a code-meshed text rather than on the actual practices of composing. Perhaps working toward a shared vocabulary is one area in which, as a program, we could engage in a more explicit, sustained negotiation.

## **LOOKING FORWARD: FOSTERING AN ETHOS, PROBLEMATIZING OUR SUBJECT POSITIONS**

We are aware that although Dearborn has unique traits, our campus is most assuredly not the only campus where the BW class can serve as the departure point for critical, programmatic change (a *bottom-up* approach) rooted in student writing, the material realities of all stakeholders, and a critical awareness of global-local language use. In fact, given the frequency with which North American Universities are entering into fast relationships with international partners, we are aware of an *urgency* around building writing programs – especially BW courses and curricula – where inquiry into language diversity can thrive. Building on Horner’s call to situate BW at the leading edge of critical scholarship and work constructing code-meshing pedagogies by theorist-practitioners like Young and Canagarajah, we have documented our process and argued that the assessment and revision of BW curricula can serve as occasions for program-wide conversations about language change. Further, by narrating our pilot of a code-meshing BW curriculum, we show how these changes helped us move toward a greater accounting of local-global contexts, fostering greater student agency (evidenced by their use of a diverse array of “codes”) and a productive negotiation between our increasingly multilingual students and program faculty. We believe our pilot curriculum—which has now become part of program discourse during professional development meetings, interviews with prospective program lecturers and writing center staff, and even conversations with campus stakeholders beyond the program—made strides toward a more critical and transcultural ethos within our program while also highlighting the limits, risks, and problematics of our approach to code-meshing pedagogy.

While we do not see our own program’s narrative as a perfectly generalizable path for other BW professionals to follow, we do see value in creating opportunities for dialogue between multiple stakeholders around language diversity, and we want to advocate that others consider ways to create such opportunities. Our pilot fostered dialogue among students and teachers, including productive “dialogue” between code-meshed student texts and BW faculty of various rank. Ongoing, sustained change (not one-off workshops or brown bags, for instance) is especially warranted when it comes to asking all program stakeholders to reflect on language difference and the material realities of language diversity. And so the story we tell is only part of our program’s narrative.

Institutionally, we have started to meet our goal of provoking programmatic change. We envision ongoing interventions across campus—a sustained attempt to be visible and audible as a program and encourage useful dialogue. Our study led to these additional, tangible steps:

*Our BW Working Group began to reach out to multiple stakeholders on campus.* Our group attempted to create feedback loops with the rest of the Writing Program, including all full- and part-time faculty, at various points during our ongoing deliberations. The two of us conducted several workshops on working with multilingual writers. In keeping with our goal to dialogue with multiple stakeholders, these workshops were organized in conjunction with our HUB for Teaching and Learning (a campus-wide professional development resource for faculty across the curriculum) in order to sustain collaboration with that active and viable resource and attract as diverse an audience as possible. One such workshop included presenters like the director of the English Language Proficiency Program as well as a colleague from sociolinguistics, who could provide expertise on code-switching and language diversity from a distinct, disciplinary point-of-view.

*Our study laid the groundwork for developing a working set of student learning outcomes.*

Prior to our two-year project, BW lacked student learning outcomes. Whereas our standard FYC courses have for years been guided by SLOs collaboratively written by program faculty, BW lacked such a guiding or unifying set of principles. Subsequent to our two-year assessment and our pilot study, we worked with participating faculty (our portfolios readers), to write and revise learning outcomes for the BW course. The outcomes are informed by student work in the pilot BW sections and by our discussions of language diversity. Such outcomes are context-specific, and our study was invaluable in this regard because it gave us tangible evidence to present to other faculty invested in student success. The first SLO is “Use writing to make and support critical connections between texts and experiences” and is indicative of the value that portfolios readers assessing the pilot placed on the intersection of the stories that BW students bring with them and the new knowledge gained during the semester (see Appendix).

*Our study prompted a working document of “best practices” to share with new BW faculty.*

Based on the reflective discussions held by the aforementioned stakeholders, we composed a “Best Practices” document for use by the rotating program

faculty (especially new lecturers) who teach BW. This document contextualizes the learning outcomes and also foregrounds reflection and a critical awareness of language practices and is available to multiple stakeholders via various electronic file-sharing systems used by our program.

*Our pilot curriculum became institutionalized.*

The pilot curriculum described herein has become a more “official” BW curriculum by virtue of institutional and programmatic documents like those mentioned in this list. Given that our program does not have a “standard syllabus” for multi-section courses like BW, this essentially constitutes an institutionalization of the curriculum.

*The BW Working Group developed a new writing “studio” course.*

A key finding was the need to foreground opportunities for reflection and metacognitive awareness. Interest in Studio was acute and, building on the BW pilot’s momentum, we invited writing studio scholar John Tassoni from Miami University to lead a workshop for all faculty focused on the Writing Studio model as an alternative to BW “business as usual.” This workshop prompted subsequent meetings with faculty in engineering, history, and education as well as staff from the admissions office, who were all interested in student support. The BW Working Group morphed into a Studio Working Group and proposed and piloted a one-credit “Writing Studio” course, an elective opened to all students but advertised to (among others) multilingual and international students interested in an additional opportunity to reflect on language and the rhetorical situation of college writing. The Studio pilot followed a trajectory similar to the BW pilot: a diverse group of program stakeholders assessed student work during the initial offering and is currently engaged in analyzing the results and disseminating findings to various audiences on and off campus. While Studio does not have a curriculum that explicitly asks students to code-mesh, it is indicative of a burgeoning transcultural ethos by virtue of its mission to demystify a variety of conventions and its radical student-centeredness. Indeed, Studio largely lacks *any* content absent whatever artifacts students bring to class for critical discussion.

We are not holding up our own local situation as a model to be adopted wholesale in other contexts. Indeed, part of our argument is that Dearborn, like other cosmopolitan, 21st century sites, is idiosyncratic in ways that we were not fully considering—and in ways that still present imperatives for ongoing reflection. We also want to emphasize that the above, concrete

steps, though successes, did not materialize thanks to our own, individual or “novel” efforts. In fact, our Writing Program had already made valuable steps toward acknowledging global-local language use and material realities—including computer-mediated exchanges linking first-year and advanced writing courses with sections of English-language writing courses abroad (detailed in Arnold et al). We had hoped to extend these prior efforts in ways that even more systematically and more vertically involved students (especially BWs), and which moved toward fostering the “ethos” or “disposition” we have been describing, and in ways that sustained campus-wide relationships. Indeed the program writ large has sustained its relationship with the English Language Proficiency Program and has recently secured grant funding to collaborate across programs on a longitudinal study of the literate experiences of international undergraduates on campus. Like the Studio project, this initiative also seizes the momentum that started with the Working Group and has a spirit of collaboration around language diversity and continued program reform.

Further, we contend that the juxtaposition of student and instructor discourse in our study suggests that code-meshing has the potential to foster student agency *and* be a means of programmatic change. We recognize the imperative to continue a dialogic process of developing evolving, dynamic learning goals for BW. Students themselves are leading the way, demonstrating how they can deploy an array of language resources across forms, genres, and rhetorical situations. More specifically, we found that code-meshing as a performed, literate practice can foster vivid, detail-oriented prose and even critical self-awareness, though it does not always foster the types of analytic, *contextual* awareness that stakeholders like instructors wished to see. Likewise, program faculty are showing their own agency and responding critically and usefully to what they see and don’t see in student work. We saw the “measured comments” in our study as a small step in that direction, one we can more intentionally build on as we move forward.

A concern, rooted in our subject positions and our relationship to code-meshed student texts, persists as a caution of program reform, especially in how the two of us continue to work with faculty in our program. As we sought to include basic writers in our cultivation of a transcultural ethos, we still run the risk of commodifying student voices and place an undo burden on multilingual, international, and students of color. By giving (primarily Arab and Arab-American) students the option to code-mesh as part of the revised BW curriculum, to what degree have we perpetuated an Orientalist or racialized gaze (cf. Inayatulla; Matsuda, “Lure”), or what Matsuda calls “linguistic



tourism” (“Lure” 482)? Inayatulla warns that “reading for” certain elements in student writing can lead us to see what we want to see. If we encourage faculty to take up code-meshing pedagogy, they might “read for” those acts of meshing in ways that could celebrate them uncritically. They might see codes (say, for instance, a narrative composed in part using Arabic script, like Ali’s) as being merely *included* when our goal for student writing is similar to that of our programmatic changes: we want to change the space itself and craft an ethos, reflective awareness, disposition, and attitude.

We have steps still to take to continue the discussions about language that have begun within our program. In particular, we wish to continue interrogating our own practices at the *programmatic level*—to ensure we are moving beyond “linguistic tourism” (Matsuda, “The Lure” 482), or the uncritical iterations of code-meshing and translanguaging that are not mindful of social and theoretical context. For instance, our BW learning outcomes are still works-in-progress and could certainly better account for *the translanguaging turn*. Likewise at the *classroom level* we hope to remain mindful of similar, potential problematics raised by Inayatulla, who suggests that the literacy narrative alone can often fail to challenge assumptions or affect change. We recognize the imperative for greater structure on the literacy narrative as well as reader-response assignments to foster deeper engagement with readings and a deeper level of critique in line with *both* Inayatulla’s important call to contextualize critically and with faculty and programmatic expectations with respect to critical analysis and engagement with context. We underline that there is an ongoing, hopefully reciprocal, *negotiation* between ourselves as teachers and curriculum designers and our students. We hope that as we ask them to take risks and to be more aware of their own language choices, we are also taking risks and reflecting on our own choices as pedagogues.

However, just because we are invested in the work for material reasons and likewise are tied to the global narrative of the 21st century, our understandings and negotiations are limited by the political realities of BW, shaped by what we don’t know and can’t know. In terms of our own subject positions, as we stated at the outset we are mindful of our own status as mostly monolingual, white faculty members; though we have our own material and perhaps even personal connections to the language diversity of our BW communities, we continue to confront our own limitations and blind spots. As we consider these matters both within and beyond the context of the BW course, we have found that BW is an ideal site to *begin* conversations about language and language change.

## Notes

1. As described in Jane Gallop's essay, "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters."
2. All student writing is used with permission and all participant names are pseudonyms.

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## **Appendix**

Draft of COMP 099 Learning Outcomes

### **COMP 099: Writing Techniques**

By the end of COMP 099 students will be able to:

- Use writing to make and support critical connections between texts and experiences
- Apply the practices of summary, paraphrase, direct quotation, and close-reading to integrate the writing of others
- Develop strategies for revision and editing in service of clarity
- Demonstrate an awareness of essay genres (as shaped by purpose, organization, and audience awareness)

# Developing Translingual Disposition through a Writing Theory Cartoon Assignment

Xiqiao Wang

*ABSTRACT: This article explores the pedagogical implications of translingualism by offering writing theory cartoon as a pedagogical tool to support basic writers' development of translingual dispositions. In a curriculum that challenges the supremacy of standard English over other languages and modalities, this assignment supports basic, multilingual writers' representation of and inquiry into their own language practices. Drawing on analysis of interviews, student-generated writing theory cartoons, and written reflections, I discuss how such a pedagogical approach shifts our attention away from textual evidence of translanguaging to surfacing basic writers' struggles and triumphs in negotiating linguistic, rhetorical and cultural differences, thereby complicating our understanding of translingualism.*

*KEYWORDS: basic writers; multimodal composition; translingual pedagogy*

Writing teachers have begun to explore how multilingual students draw on rich semiotic and linguistic resources to engage in translingual practices, with negotiation of difference at the core of such language work (Canagarajah, "Shuttling"; Lorimer Leonard; Lu and Horner). But theoretical recognition of and empirical investigation into translingualism have yet to fully explore concrete teaching strategies to facilitate students' inquiry into language differences or offer ways to help students develop an attitude of openness toward such differences. In this article, I offer a writing theory cartoon assignment as one pedagogical enactment of translingualism, with its emphasis on helping multilingual, basic writers develop translingual dispositions through multimodal representations of and inquiry into their language practices. The assignment aims to create a space for teachers and student writers to describe, analyze, and strategize ways of negotiating language differences.

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With the increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of students enrolled in U.S. institutions of education, how to better support such students' literacy learning through strategic leverage of their rhetorical repertoire has become a critical question for literacy teachers across all levels. In writing studies particularly, scholars have called for a sharpened definition of translingualism and a nuanced understanding of the two inter-connected dimensions of the translingual phenomenon (Gilyard; Guerra; Matsuda). On the one hand, writing teachers should investigate what language users perform, often through specific practices such as code-meshing or translanguaging (Canagarajah, "Multilingual"; Creese and Blackledge). On the other hand, writing teachers need to explore what language users understand, often described as translingual disposition (Horner et al.) or rhetorical sensibility (Leonard, "Multilingual"). Such a distinction, which positions students' negotiation of language differences at the center of scholarly inquiry, has important implications for basic writing teachers. Particularly, scholars have invited basic writing teachers to examine the negotiative acts performed by "powerfully translanguaging students" (Gilyard 284) and to facilitate students' development of "critical awareness of language as a contingent and emergent [practice]" (Guerra 228).

While echoing translingual scholars' arguments that all acts of linguistic performance are essentially translingual (Horner et al.), I offer the writing theory cartoon as one pedagogical tool to help international, multilingual students analyze their struggles and triumphs when working through linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical differences. The design of the assignment is grounded in writing scholarship that maintains that our ability to move between, across, and within languages involves the creative and adaptive uses of linguistic and rhetorical strategies as well as the continuous tuning of translingual dispositions toward multiplicity (Canagarajah, "Shuttling"; Creese and Blackledge; Hornberger and Link; Leonard "Multilingual Writing"). Scholars have described translingual dispositions as consisted of an attitude of openness toward language differences and an understanding of all language acts as ongoing processes of negotiating linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural differences. Accordingly, the writing theory cartoon assignment uses multimodal composition to surface students' discovery and theorization of the negotiated nature of their own meaning making. Drawing on writing theory cartoons created by basic writers, I further develop the notion of translingual disposition as an attitude of openness toward language difference and negotiation, through which students develop metalinguistic awareness of their rhetorical repertoire and cultural knowledge as resources

for learning, and meta-vocabulary to describe, theorize, and strategize translingual practices.

This pedagogical innovation therefore adds to current conversations in translingualism in several ways. First, it shifts our emphasis from the production of code-meshed texts toward students' theorization of complex language negotiation that happens in all communicative acts, even those that seemingly adhere to and replicate standard conventions. Second, it positions basic writers' linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical knowledge as resources for learning and their linguistic performance as sites of innovation and inquiry. Centering on students' experiences and languages not only facilitates the development of rhetorical awareness—an understanding of how situations constantly influence linguistic performance—but also positions basic writing students as agents who draw on their multilingual repertoire to navigate such rhetorical situations. Lastly, its emphasis on multimodal representation provides basic writers with multiple pathways toward meaning making as negotiated across codes, modes, and languages. In so doing, the assignment gives writing teachers a glimpse into students' translingual lives. The strategic representation of student experiences also provides nuanced accounts of how writers negotiate language differences in distinct and similar ways, thereby responding to Keith Gilyard's call to complicate the tendency to "flatten language differences" in translingual scholarship (286).

### **The Need to Theorize Translingual Disposition**

Basic writing researchers have long challenged the political, economic, and institutional parameters that position basic writers as the linguistic other (Bartholomae; Jordan; Lu, "Professing"; Lu and Horner; Shaughnessy; Trimbur). Instead of seeing basic writers as constrained by their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds in performing a certain type of writing, basic writing scholars have sought to explicate the linguistic and cultural logic informing ordered patterns in basic writers' individual styles of making meanings and mistakes (Horner, "Sociality"; Salvatori; Shaughnessy). In so doing, these scholars not only examine the linguistic and stylistic features that inform errors in students' writing, but also reposition such errors as linguistic innovation, thereby fundamentally challenging a deficit view of language difference.

The translingual turn in composition broadly seeks to highlight the practice-based, adaptive, emergent, and mutually constitutive nature of



languages (Lu & Horner; Canagarajah, “Translingual”). In particular, Lu and Horner challenge a monolingual view of languages, such as English, Chinese, or French, as “discrete, preexisting, and enumerable entities” bound to geographical territories, nation states, or speech communities (587). While a static view of language provides the ideological foundation for privileging standard English as the dominant dialect, translingualism approaches language as inherently dynamic, evolving, and varied. Recognizing languages, including standard English, as historical codifications that change through dynamic processes of use, translingualism focuses on the innovative ways in which language users shape language to specific ends. Such a perspective not only recognizes the increasing linguistic heterogeneity as the norm, but also values the rhetorical and linguistic resources non-dominant students bring to their writing. Accordingly, language differences, manifested as accented Englishes in the basic writing classroom, are not interpreted as deviations, but as valuable resources that writers work with and against.

Translingualism provides a way to access and develop basic writers’ language performance through local, situated practices of communication, which involves dynamic negotiation of fluid and hybrid codes and cultures. The need to develop students’ translingual dispositions is central to a translingual approach. Horner et al. distinguishes translingual disposition from knowledge of multiple languages, highlighting an open and inquiry-driven attitude toward language differences (“Language Differences” 311). Similarly, Suresh Canagarajah emphasizes the importance of writers’ meta-awareness of the “possibilities and constraints of competing traditions of writing” as central to writers’ abilities to carve out a space for themselves within conflicting discourses (“Toward” 602). Using “rhetorical sensibility,” Rebecca Lorimer Leonard attributes multilingual writers’ success to their understanding of the inherent instability and contingency of languages as well as of the underlying material, emergent, and agentive nature of writing practices (“Multilingual Writing” 229-230). In important ways, the emphasis on translingual disposition recognizes that all students, multilingual and monolingual alike, already mobilize multilingual resources and deploy translingual practices to make sense of their life worlds, construct meaning across differences, and forge agentive identities. Continuous fine-tuning of such dispositions of openness and negotiation is critical to successful performance of translingual practices.

While research guided by translingualism has thus far approached the issue of negotiation through researchers’ inductive reading of students’ writing samples for textual evidence of translanguaging or code-meshing

(Canagarajah, “Negotiating”; Hornerberg and Link), there has been less effort in documenting and analyzing students’ inquiry into their own meaning- and error-making experiences. Indeed, the subtle and invisible acts of composing across differences often evade our attention because they function as such a routine part of our language work that they often recede into the background of our consciousness. If untapped, such cultural and linguistic knowledge that shapes basic writer’s language practices may very well remain invisible and never turn into transferrable meta-knowledge of writing (DePalma and Ringer; Leonard and Nowacek; Wardle). It is with such concerns that scholars have argued that the focus on visible examples of translanguaging risks flattening the nuanced ways in which writers from distinct backgrounds engage with language differences, thereby overshadowing the subtle examples of language negotiation (Gilyard; Matsuda). Inherent to such conversations has been an increasing attention to translingual dispositions and translingual practices as inter-connected aspects of the translingual phenomenon, with inquiry-driven dispositions guiding strategic practices and ongoing practices providing opportunities to enrich such dispositions. Weaving together and extending such insights, I use the writing theory cartoon to highlight students’ perspectives on their translingual practices and to sharpen the definition of translingual dispositions. As I will discuss, translingual dispositions encompass metalinguistic understanding of language as historically-conditioned linguistic, cultural, and ideological structures, meta-awareness of multilingual repertoire and cultural knowledge as resources for learning, and meta-vocabulary to describe, theorize, and strategize translingual practices.

### **Multimodality and Translingualism**

Similar to the less-bounded conceptions of language, proponents of multimodality have argued that students need to develop a full mastery of the rhetorical and semiotic resources at their disposal to address the “wickedly complex communicative tasks” in an increasingly globalized and digital world (Selfe, “Movement” 645). Jodi Shipka emphasizes the importance of using rhetorical analysis of multimodal genres as a way of helping students develop as “rhetorically sensitive individuals” who understand that meaning can be rendered in multiple ways in response to variant contingencies (“Including” 78). Such a view is coherent with translingual theorists’ arguments that all meaning-making acts involve “traffic in meaning,” where one negotiates “ideas, concepts, symbols, [and] discourses” (Pennycook 33) as well as

“competing ideologies, resources, representations, and assumed expectations of readers” (Horner and Tetreault 19). Scholars have also urged us to go beyond the symbolic dimension to include affective, bodily, and material connections that shape the work of the human rhetor (Canagarajah, “Lingua”; Gonzalez; Jordan). As such, translingualism and multimodality both encourage us to view writing as socially situated, emergent, and negotiated rather than as static, rule-driven phenomena. A translingual, multimodal view thus considers meaning-making as involving layers of translation across codes, modes, languages, and cultures. That is, an expansive view of composing explores the expressive affordances of multiple modes, including visual (Kress and van Leeuwen), auditory (Halbritter; Selfe), gestural (Prior et al.), and spatial (Leander et al.) as the first step toward understanding rhetorical situations as permeated by materials, places, bodies, and languages.

In similar ways, translingualism and multimodality speak against a monolingual/monomodal ideology that subsumes nonstandard languages, modes, and genres in ways that deprive students of access to valuable linguistic and semiotic resources. Cynthia Selfe, for one, calls for strategic scaffolding of multimodal composition as a means of cultivating students’ rhetorical sovereignty--their “right to identify their own communicative needs, to represent their own identities, to select the right tools for the communicative contexts within which they operate, and to think critically and carefully about the meaning that they and others compose” (“Movement” 618). Indeed, researchers have documented how multimodality enhances the expressive power of young authors (Hull and Nelson), affords productive identity play (Vasudevan; Yi), and engenders creative cultural production (Knobel and Lankshear). The development of translingual dispositions is central to negotiating meaning across hybrid ways of knowing, communicating, and performing identities.

Basic writing teachers have drawn on such ideas to develop pedagogical tools that support students’ sustained examination of language differences. Scholars have explored the use of translation practices (Horner, et al.; Horner and Tetreault; Jiménez et al.; Kiernan, et al.; Orellana and Reynolds), border-crossing narratives (Lewis et al.; Medina), and multilingual texts that encourage students’ reflection of translanguaging practices (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; DeCosta et al.). Among practical teaching strategies that support basic writers’ theorization of differences, my colleagues and I have explored the pedagogical affordances of translation exercises and multimodal representation in supporting basic writers’ negotiation of semiotic, stylistic, and rhetorical differences (Kiernan et al.; Kiernan “Multimodal”). To disrupt

the profound invisibility of immigrant writers' voices in public and scholarly discourse, Marko et al. ("Proyecto Carrito") has worked with janitorial workers and undergraduate students to create a textually decorated mobile bus capturing immigrant workers' struggles and resilience. Others (Shapiro et al.; Williams) have created authentic and relevant rhetorical contexts of writing (e.g. using twitter, film, writing beyond the classroom, and inquiry into religion) for students to develop greater awareness of and vocabulary for deploying rhetorical resources.

Considered together, such pedagogical work has explored ways to help students complicate language difference as entangled in drastically different material conditions and contexts. In so doing, basic writing teachers work to help students recognize negotiation across languages and modes as the norm and to develop meta-awareness and meta-vocabulary for describing and strategizing such negotiative moves. By the same token, such pedagogies reposition basic writers as agents of their learning and call into question what John Trimbur called the "unmarked hierarchies in US college composition that have long assumed basic writing and second language writing were ancillary activities and institutions at the margins, orbiting around the mainstream English at the center in first-year composition" ("Close Reading" 226).

### **Shifting Contexts of Basic Writing**

Like many institutions of higher education across the U.S., the public, midwestern university under discussion here has witnessed a rapid increase of international students: from 5 to 8% each year for each of the past five years, so that as of 2017 international students constituted 14.5% of the entire undergraduate student body ("University Registrar"). Such demographic changes have transformed the cultural and linguistic realities on and off campus--Asian restaurants and grocery stores flourish in the college town; license plates on students' vehicles are customized to reference linguistic codes and cultural tropes from diverse countries of origin; in and out of classes, students constantly switch between languages, dialects and distinctly accented Englishes as they engage each other in conversations around academic and social issues; instructors receive writing assignments completed in various approximations of standard, edited, written English.

*WRA 1004: Preparation of College Writing* (hereafter referred to as PCW), the basic writing course I regularly teach, is the only remaining remedial course at the university and currently serves approximately 900 first generation, heritage language, and English language learners annu-

ally. In the past five years, close to eighty percent of this student population were Chinese international students, the increase of which was motivated by the university's active recruitment strategies targeting a newly mobile and emerging Chinese middle class that desires global citizenship (Dong and Blommaert; Fraiberg et al., "Inventing"). On the fringe of this new demographic "mainstream" was a scattering of international students from countries such as Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Colombia, and Zimbabwe, as well as a few domestic African American students from a nearby metropolis that had suffered from steady economic decline and population loss. For most students, completion of the course is required prior to taking a regular first-year writing course. The small size of the class provides an opportunity for basic writers to engage in meaningful encounters with peers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

While the linguistic reality of the classroom reflects an increasing linguistic heterogeneity as the norm (Canagarajah, "Place"; Horner & Selfe, "Negotiating"), the institutional context surrounding PCW has historically adopted monolingual and deficit ideologies and pedagogies. The curriculum for the basic writing course has traditionally replicated the assignments used for first-year writing, with additional contact hours worked into the curriculum to allow longer time for completion, additional instruction on grammar and mechanics, and opportunities to "rehearse" for the same assignments expected in first-year writing. Such a curriculum actively marginalizes open-ended, negotiated semiotic performances that play an important role in basic writers' academic and social lives. More broadly, it does not recognize the unique needs and expertise of multilingual, international students and therefore fails to support their literacy learning and broader transition at the university.

Since 2013, a team of teacher researchers has engaged in a program-wide, collaborative re-invention of the curriculum and pedagogy for PCW, which now feature a series of assignments that reflect principles of translingual pedagogy. The re-invented curriculum foregrounds students' linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural resources as assets through such assignments as: 1) translation narrative assignment, which invites students' individual translation of cultural texts from home language into English and collaborative reflection on translation processes and strategies (Kiernan et al.); 2) culture shock assignment, which invites students to describe and analyze personal stories of adjusting to a new culture (broadly defined to encompass university, disciplinary, and national cultures); and 3) remix assignment, which invites students to remix previous writing assignments into multimodal artifacts.

At the core of such assignments are opportunities to recognize and analyze one's cultures and languages as resources for learning. Operating with the same translingual emphasis, I offer the writing theory cartoon assignment as an extension of the translation narrative assignment, using it to extend students' inquiry into language and cultural differences.

### **Reconfiguring Writing Theory Cartoons as Translingual Pedagogy**

Responding to institutional exigencies while paying attention to translingualism and multimodality, I offer the writing theory cartoon assignment as one way to support students' multimodal representation and analysis of their own translingual practices. In working with students on the remix assignment in previous semesters, I had witnessed "struggling writers" flourish when they used infographics, stop-motion animations, cartoon drawings, and videos to create successful remixes of cultural stories. Such observations were mirrored in empirical research my colleagues and I conducted of multilingual, international students' informal literacy practices, which revealed distinct cultural logic that powerfully mediated students' multimodal composition but often remained invisible for instructors (Fraiberg et al., "Shock"). For example, when reading one student's rage comics rendition of her literacy narrative, we struggled with the organizational principle of her visual, where she used remixed images of popular cultural icons to represent herself. Recognizing my lack of understanding of students' multimodal composition, I began to explore pedagogical means to surface and leverage such expertise, such as using children's books as models for retelling traditional cultural stories, helping students create digital book trailers, or using infographics to represent cultural differences.

In the fall of 2014, I first introduced the writing theory cartoon assignment as a way to extend such pedagogical work. My intention was to offer more scaffolded instruction that moved students from random to strategic incorporation of the visual mode and facilitated collective exploration of our translingual practices. According to Prior and Shipka ("Chronotopic"), writing theory cartoons can be a useful tool in helping writers access a range of rhetorical options at their disposal, negotiate conventions and rules, and understand such choices as tied to identities, values, and interests. In their study, where the researchers sought to describe the writing processes of writers across formal and informal contexts, Prior and Shipka used student-generated cartoons to capture the "territory of the writer's consciousness

[and] interior practices” (181). Writers (college students, graduate students and professors) engaged in the creation of cartoon drawings, which became “visual metaphors of thought processes and emotions” and were used to elicit accounts of the material, cognitive, and affective dimensions of writing experiences (182). Writing theory cartoons, when used as a research procedure, allowed these researchers to explore literacy practices as co-constituted by social worlds, historical trajectories, and identities. As these authors argue, writing theory cartoons help to capture the multiple layers of historical, personal, and social meanings encoded in acts of writing (183).

Indeed, the socio-historical emphasis described by Prior and Shipka in their theorization of writing as a distributed phenomenon is consistent with translingual scholars’ concern to understand writing as unfolding through the intersecting forces of histories, social worlds, and affective contingencies. It is in this spirit that I adapt the writing theory cartoon into a pedagogical tool, which encourages basic writers to understand their semiotic repertoire as fluid historical, cultural and ideological structures. Multilingual and monolingual students alike create cartoon drawings to represent and reflect on important aspects of their translingual practices. In rendering such insights into multimodal forms, students engage in complex representational practices, as they discover, clarify, and transform meaning across multiple modes (e.g. writing metaphors, writing theory cartoons, written explanations, class discussions, conferences, and reflections). The primary learning objective is therefore the development of translingual dispositions through basic writers’ recursive discovery of meaning across modes/languages and inquiry into their own multimodal representations as sites for translingual practices.

The assignment involves a sequence of activities that typically unfolds across six regular class meetings. The recursive process creates a space to sustain and deepen conversations around translingual practices, introduce grammars of visual composition, and leverage students’ informal literacies. Each of the stages in the composing process offers opportunities to explore translingual relationships (see Appendix). Throughout the process, principles of multimodal design are discussed and practiced to extend students’ multimodal skills.

*Sampling multicultural texts.* At the outset of the assignment, students bring short, multilingual texts from their home cultures for sharing and discussion. When explaining and retelling a story, a song, or an idiom, students often encounter the difficult task of unpacking and translating key cultural

concepts to a diverse audience. The class discusses how similar themes might be delivered in different linguistic and genre forms across cultures.

*Constructing writing theory metaphors.* Drawing on initial exploration of translingual relationships, students create metaphors as a pathway to theorize languages as linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical structures. As Wan Wan argues, instruction and construction of explicit metaphors are particularly useful in broadening ESL writers' conceptions of various aspects of academic writing ("Constructing"). For example, identification and articulation of influential metaphors, such as "writing is a tour," allow ESL writers to identify their beliefs about their own writing practices and to grapple with abstract conceptions of writing (62). By the same token, the use of writing metaphors here functions as an inventive activity that generates ideas to be taken up in cartoon drawings that represent students' beliefs, attitudes, and theories about writing.

*Drafting writing theory cartoons.* After sharing and revising writing theory metaphors, students are invited to use flockdraw.com, an online drawing tool, to generate the first drafts of their writing theory cartoons. The basic task is described in these terms:

Using metaphors you have generated, draw a set of two pictures to represent your experiences with and relationships to multiple languages. These images might show how you feel about writing in different languages, memories of reading and writing in different languages, or characteristics of different languages. Also, you are encouraged to consider why you feel in certain ways.

The drafting process involves little guidance and encourages students to creatively explore their complex feelings about and experiences with multiple languages. While most students struggle with visual representations of their metaphors at first (with most first drafts featuring clumsy sticky figures and smiley/grouchy faces), frequent informal sharing often leads to chuckles, discussions, and ultimately a collective recognition of the attributes of successful visual representations. It is often through continuous, seemingly random experimentations with colors, shapes, and visual symbols that students gradually work toward more insightful and pointed representations of their ideas.

*Constructing grammars of multimodal composition.* Upon the completion of the first cartoon drafts, principles of "grammar of visual design" (Kress and van Leeuwen) are introduced to frame collective discussion of exem-



plary student work and peer review, with attention given to what, how, and why symbols, shapes, colors, and spaces are arranged to articulate certain meanings. Using frames of ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (15) of visual elements, students discuss and evaluate each other's visual designs for rhetorical effectiveness. Multimodal design is revisited during written explanations and text-based interviews, where students explain their ideas and visual design in both written and verbal forms. This recursive process provides multiple opportunities to play with personal theories of translingual practice.

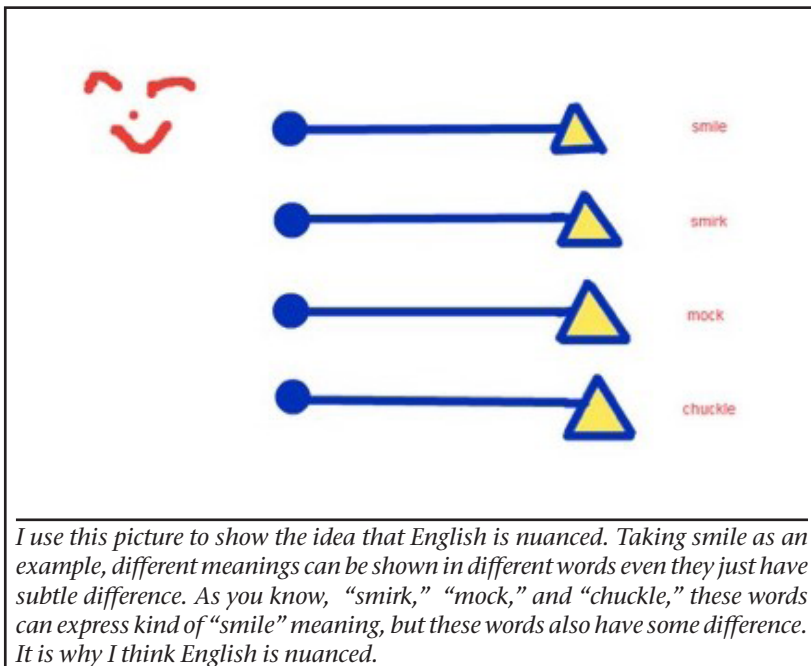
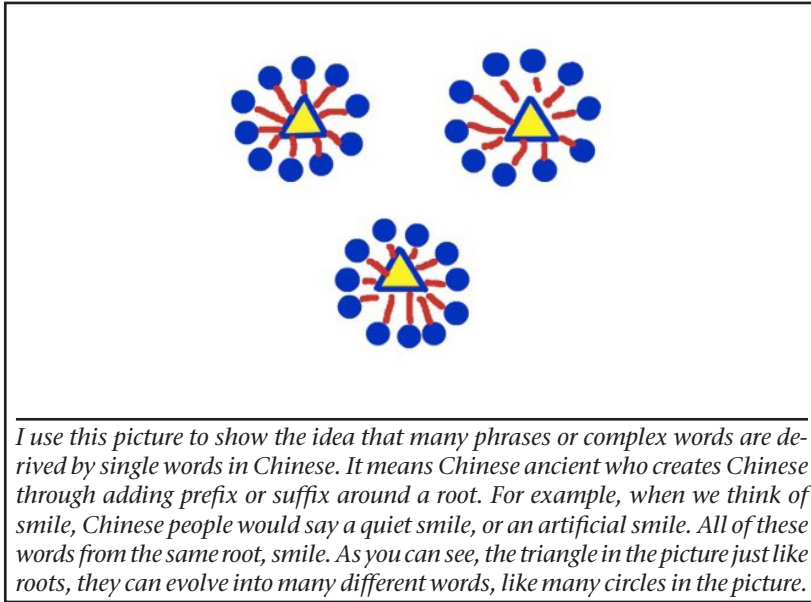
As the following examples will show, the assignment recognizes that meaning making is negotiated through translation of meaning across languages and modes. Such traversal literate activity serves as a pathway to describe and strategize translingual practices. By highlighting students' languages and translingual practices as a highly nuanced form of knowledge, this assignment offers one way to disrupt institutional and disciplinary circumstances that position the writing classroom as a monolingual space. By centering students' literacy experiences from home communities and cultures, the assignment positions the writing classroom as a space to negotiate meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

### **Making Sense of Language Difference: Ru**

Many students approach the writing theory cartoon as an opportunity to examine linguistic differences that contribute to their own struggles with language learning. In this section, I offer an example of such linguistic inquiry from Ru<sup>1</sup>, a sophomore marketing major from China, who uses the assignment to reflect on lexical features of Chinese and English. Before the writing theory cartoon assignment, Ru worked with two other Chinese students to translate a fable written in classical Chinese into English. In this process, they engaged in a heated discussion about finding the right English equivalent for the Chinese word (狡猾), an adjective used to describe a fox in the original text. They differently translated the Chinese word into "crafty," "sneaky," and "smart" without being able to reach a consensus. Such in-group discussions ultimately directed Ru's attention to the linguistic features of Chinese and English.

Ru's cartoon attends to distinct lexical rules for inventing words across linguistic systems. As Ru points out, one of the major distinctions between English and Chinese was that "English words perform functions individually, while Chinese characters act in group and combination." Ru describes how

**Figure 1.** Ru's Writing Theory Cartoons and Explanations<sup>2</sup>



Chinese root words, such as 笑 (smile/laugh), can be used in combination with different adjective characters to render different types of laugh such as smile (微笑) and chuckle (窃笑), while English denotes close meanings of laugh through distinct lexicons such as smirk, chuckle, and mock. Her visual design mirrors such distinctions: her purposeful juxtaposition of the images visually demonstrates the linguistic difference; the replication of yellow triangles allows her to represent the importance of root words across languages; the flower design for Chinese versus the one-one match for English allows her to visually demonstrate the lexical features of the two languages, with colors (blue, red, and yellow) strategically orchestrated to highlight similarities and differences. Ru's metalinguistic understanding of languages as rule-governed systems arises from a systematic comparison of and reflection on the two languages she constantly manipulates in everyday and academic circumstances.

The metalinguistic awareness Ru demonstrates here is mirrored in a design research conducted by Jimenez et al., where middle school students learned to collaboratively translate carefully selected excerpts from grade-appropriate literature in Spanish. Jimenez et al. not only observes how translation activities encourage students to “draw on their cultural and linguistic knowledge to derive meaning and use information found in written text” (249), but also argues that translation is an especially important metalinguistic activity because it requires students to compare, reflect on, and manipulate multiple languages (251). Similarly, Ru's theorization of her everyday translation practices (notice her choice of mundane and everyday vocabulary) brings to the surface linguistic skills Ru already practices. Among a host of other metalinguistic skills researchers deemed critical to students' development of translingual competence (Hall et al.), Ru's reflection provides a window into her metalinguistic knowledge of vocabulary as partially determined by grammatical overlap and divergence between English and Chinese. The assignment, in strategically targeting students' experiences juggling such differences, helps Ru recognize that meaning making is negotiated through flexible uses of and translation of meaning across languages and modes, a view raised in Pennycook (“English”), who sees English as a language always in translation. Ru's cartoon reflects her consideration of different ways in which grammar and lexicon are formulated and defined to allow the passing to and from of social, cultural, and historical meanings and how such linguistic conventions need to be reconfigured to allow such passing.

In addition to helping Ru surface her meta-awareness of language differences, this assignment also encourages her to consider her multiple

languages as equally important components of a holistic linguistic repertoire, which not only works in concert to help her deliver meaning, but also presents tensions that should be carefully resolved. In important ways, the assignment encourages an analysis that uncovers the logic of linguistic differences present in her own writing. In exploring how different languages distinctly organize lexical elements to articulate similar meanings, Ru approaches language differences as logical and historical choices. Additionally, she begins to strategize her own negotiation with language differences to better support her writing.

Vocabulary is a major problem. My vocabulary does not catch up with what I want to say. How am I to memorize all these miscellaneous words? In China, teachers just tell you to memorize new words in the textbook, but Americans don't use these textbook words in everyday conversations. I need to read more newspapers and I use my dictionary more often. Dictionaries tell me how to use words with close meanings in sentences. I especially study and copy these examples. (Ru. Personal interview. 14 March 2014)

Ru's reflection challenges a monolingual view of her lack of a sophisticated English vocabulary as a deficit, as she begins to attribute much of her struggles with English learning to lexical features of the language, which leads to the abundance of "miscellaneous words." Also, she begins to see this "problem" as the product of language acts sanctioned by institutional structures unique to traditional Chinese education. In so doing, Ru performs the difficult task of determining "what kinds of difference to make through [her] writing, how, and why" (Lu and Horner 585). This understanding in turn helps Ru strategize her learning to facilitate such linguistic crossing (e.g. extensive reading, strategic use of dictionaries, and imitation). As such, the assignment allows Ru to take up an issue from group discussion (finding the English equivalent for the Chinese word) and turn it into an opportunity to deepen her understanding of language differences as partially derived from linguistic features and educational backgrounds. It also helps Ru develop metalinguistic awareness of languages as rule-governed structures, meta-awareness of her everyday "working" across languages as sites for learning and innovation, and a meta-vocabulary to name and strategize negotiative moves that she already possesses and can further develop.

## **Theorizing Language as Cultural Structure: Fan**

Foregrounding translingual practices as resources for learning, the assignment not only invites critical consideration of languages as rule-governed, linguistic structures, but also leads to discussions of how meanings are derived in socioculturally ascribed ways. In the following, I provide Fan's example to illustrate how students make sense of language differences in light of a dual set of cultural sensitivities. Fan, a freshman business major, worked with two Chinese peers to translate a classical Chinese poem that utilized various rhetorical devices to construct a moment of solitude. During their translation process, the three students recognized the inadequacy of literal translation, which failed to capture the subtle expression of the poet's feelings of nostalgia. Fan used his writing theory cartoon to continue his ongoing consideration of the rhetorical tradition that informed the literary work.

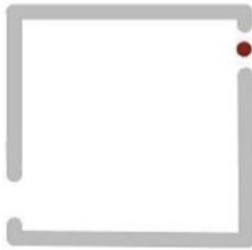
Fan's writing theory cartoons focus on unpacking and articulating culturally specific aesthetics, rhetorical styles, and ideological features of languages as operative within community, disciplinary, and national contexts (see figure 2). His reflection points to an increasing sensitivity to language as indexical of cultural ways of thinking and behaving. Both images follow a simple visual design, with a red dot placed on the upper right corner of a grey square to indicate the destination, or the "intention" of a communicative act. The first image, with intricate lines built into the grey square, mimics a maze and helps to deliver the insight that a person communicating in Chinese often masks her true intention, with subtle cues (visually signified by turns in the maze) given to facilitate the audience's navigation of the rhetorical situation. The second image, with a small gap on the lower left corner of the square and nothing in between the destination and the entrance, helps to deliver the insight that communication in English is often more straightforward. Through the first image, Fan comments on one dimension of Chinese rhetorical tradition--indirect expression of emotions. He elaborates:

When Americans love someone, they say 'I love you.' When an Asian man loves someone, he says 'The moon is beautiful tonight.' What does [the moon] have anything to do with love? That's because we are implicit. Even when we love someone deeply, we don't go crazy. We don't necessarily say what we are thinking. We just do what we should do to express our love, in a quiet way (Fan. Personal interview. 17 March 2014).

**Figure 2.** Fan's Writing Theory Cartoons and Explanations



*Chinese language is mealy-mouthed and profound. Some Chinese people may not tell you something directly. Sometimes they are why to speak out, for example, they want to borrow money from you or they broke your plates. Sometimes they don't want the other people find that they tell you this secret, for example, the conversation between the politicians and entrepreneurs. In that case, you need to guess their thoughts. And the Chinese poet also like to say somethings profound. They always involved their emotion like ambition, sad, happiness and worry in their poems. Thus, Chinese language always be mealy-mouthed and profound, a short sentence may be contain with several different emotions and meanings.*



*English language is direct and specific. If you regard the Chinese language as they maze, you may think the English language is the road which has only one way to go. Admittedly, English language are also meaningful and philosophical. But related to American people's moral quality—straightforward and simple, you will feel easy to say with American. Furthermore, Americans are friendly and warm-heart. Thus if you ask them questions, they usually would like to explain these questions detailedly. Getting to know about Americans, you will easy to find these two characteristics.*

Fan uses this example in his written explanation to explain how Chinese culture operates with rhetorical strategies to express emotions implicitly. For one thing, he describes how ancient poets drew on a rhetorical device called “combine emotion with scenery” (寓情于景) to articulate their emotions and aspirations. The moon is one such symbol that is frequently used to embody “family union.” In the example above, the man takes up this symbol to express his appreciation for a moment of solitude with his loved one. In Fan’s opinion, such rhetorical features make the language “mealy mouthed and profound,” which makes reading such texts a guessing game--a maze. In order to correctly decipher the author’s intention, Chinese audience relies heavily on acquired knowledge of cultural frames, tropes, and conventions. In comparison to his knowledge of his home culture, his emerging knowledge of American culture is reflected in a cartoon that provides a sweeping generalization of American people as polite, warm-hearted, and straightforward. In taking courses in ESL classes, Fan was impressed by the demeanors of his teachers, whose patient and personable approach to teaching contrasted with his previous experience with Chinese high school teachers he described as “harsh and demanding.”

Fan’s reflection sheds light on the complex ways in which rhetorical traditions inform his understanding and use of the language. The assignment facilitates the development of a meta-awareness of languages, cultures, and peoples as dialectically connected components that provide resources and impose constraints on language practices. Through sustained individual and collective exploration, Fan begins to recognize the importance of decoding the “hidden meanings” and unpacking the rhetorical traditions that inform his language use. For one thing, his peers provide comments on the different symbolic meanings of the moon (or the lack of such meanings) across cultures. These comments invite Fan to clarify and articulate his observations for a heterogeneous audience. Fan notes that he needs to unpack culturally specific expectations through giving examples, referencing canonical texts, and explaining people’s ways of behaving and valuing. In answering questions from his audience, Fan temporarily suspends established, familiar assumptions about his language and culture, while learning to consider his language/culture in the context of another.

As translingual theorists have argued (Horner et al.), students need to learn to recognize rules and conventions of language use as historical codifications that inevitably change through dynamic processes of use. In this instance, the writing theory cartoon invites Fan to consider how he might negotiate rules embedded in the context of his home language in light of the

new exigencies of communication--how to explain the symbolic meaning of the moon to a diverse audience. While his analysis seems to essentialize the two languages as operating with distinct rhetorical conventions, such analysis points to how rhetorical demands are contingent and negotiable when one crosses genre, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Fan's analysis goes a step further than Ru, whose concern with words focuses on linguistic structures and stays at a local level. For Fan, translating the poem and using the writing theory cartoon to consider his challenges in carrying meanings across cultures foreground his rhetorical repertoire and cultural knowledge not only as resources for learning, but also as differences to be negotiated. When I asked him to elaborate on the implicit rhetorical tradition, he discussed the challenge of operating with an established social norm to solve a strife with his American roommate, who accidentally used his decorative heirloom dish to eat cereal.

When I discovered that he used my grandfather's dish to eat cereal, I felt a burning anger. But he didn't know; he was just sitting there not knowing what he'd done. Knowing that I needed to be polite, I didn't say anything and pretended nothing was wrong. The more I tried to hold my anger, the worse it got. Finally one day I yelled at him for some other thing. We then fought over all the little things that had been bothering me. When I finally told him about the dish, he looked shocked and said he was so sorry. He said 'Dude why didn't you say anything?' Yes, why didn't I tell him? We Chinese fake our feelings just to be polite, but they just tell you how they feel (Fan. Personal interview. 17 March 2014).

The assignment values students' experiences and languages from their home communities and cultures. It allows Fan to identify a focal point of negotiation through the lens of a personal experience and an academic exercise. It leads to an understanding that language practice involves the negotiation of rhetorical conventions and cultural frames. The assignment also creates an opportunity for Fan to develop a meta-vocabulary for describing and theorizing his struggles as grounded in "strifes" between two rhetorical traditions. Such a recognition of his rhetorical and cultural repertoire as fluid and negotiable resources provides a space to devise concrete strategies useful in resolving similar problems.

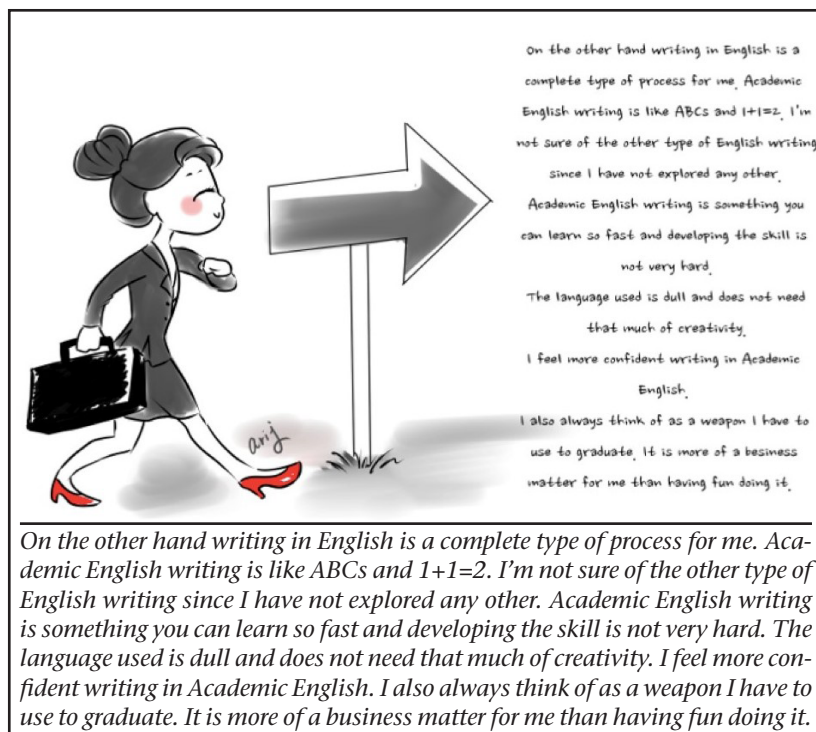


## Understanding Language as Ideological Structure: Airuwa

In addition to theorizing language as linguistic and cultural structures, students often become aware of the power relations that render certain languages visible, appropriate and dominant. In the following, I draw on Airuwa's writing theory cartoons to discuss how the assignment encourages basic writers to consider their multiple languages as ideological structures. Airuwa, a young woman and a mechanical engineering major from Saudi Arabia, is among 60 recipients of a prestigious corporate scholarship that funds her studies in the U. S. This scholarship comes with an obligation to work for the oil company upon graduation. In her writing theory cartoons, Airuwa explores the complex ways in which her language capacity is tied to social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of her transnational past and present.

Airuwa's cartoon on English portrays her as a young professional (wearing professional attires and carrying a suitcase), for whom English is

**Figure 3.** Airuwa's Writing Theory Cartoon on English

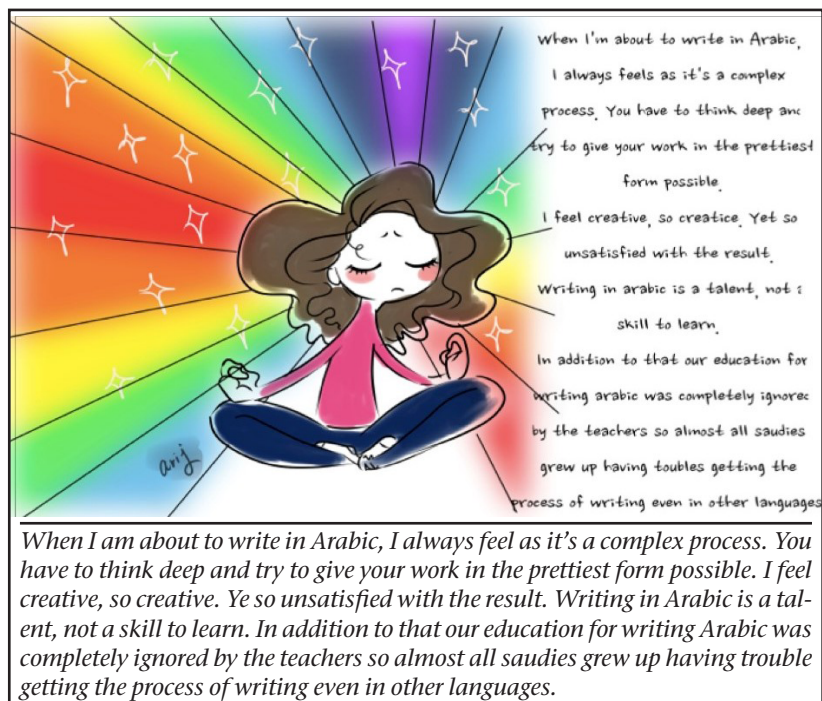


a tool for achieving success in her discipline and globalized marketplaces (with an arrow denoting a clearly defined professional goal). In her reflection, she celebrates English as her “armor and sword against ignorance [and] her weapon to be good at science and to know the world because it is the channel through which 98% of scientific knowledge is disseminated.” Simultaneously, she problematizes the status of English as a global lingua franca-- “just like Greek and Arabic were once the languages of science long ago, there might be another global power and another language of science fifty years from now. I will be ready to learn that language.” While the assignment does not specifically address ideological issues surrounding language diversity or the dominance of English, various invention activities provide opportunities to bring these issues into focus. For example, during the public sharing of multilingual texts, Airuwa brought an excerpt from the Koran. When introducing her text to and answering questions from the class, she engaged a Chinese student in a rather heated debate about the status of ancient civilizations, as each student drew evidence from history textbooks to showcase significant contributions one’s home culture made to humanity. Such a conversation eventually informed Airuwa’s view of language as an ideological structure, whose status is entangled in changing social circumstances, geopolitical power structures, and socio-economic forces of globalization. She recognizes that historically demonstrable fluctuations in world languages are tied to social mechanisms that produce and sanction certain types of literacy practices, ways of knowing, and knowledge. Such an understanding creates opportunities for Airuwa to imagine and strategize her language learning as a continuous process and her multilingual repertoire as social capital. While she sees the lingua franca English as an essential tool for professional growth, she also recognizes the inherent variations and changes of languages, a view that helps her place value upon her linguistic dexterities.

In contrast to English, which she characterizes as “ABCs and 1+1s,” Airuwa describes her experience with Arabic writing as a “hunt for phoenix”—a journey filled with mystery and unfulfilled aspirations. In this image, Airuwa casts herself in a private setting, with her eyes closed and her body relaxed in the act of meditation, with rainbow-colored stripes surrounding her to depict sources of inspiration her religion provides.

I love Arabic so much, but I am not capable enough to handle writing in formal Arabic. In other languages, the more you read, the better you write. But in Arabic, it doesn’t matter. Like the Koran, it has the most beautiful Arabic in the world, but no one can write

**Figure 4.** Airuwa's Writing Theory Cartoon on Arabic



anything like it. Just to read to understand the meaning of the Koran is like solving a really hard puzzle. No matter how much you read it, you still don't get enough from it (Airuwa. Personal interview. 24 March 2014).

To Airuwa, the ability to write in formal Arabic is tied to her religious identity. Having tried and failed to write poetry in formal Arabic, she concludes that formal writing in Arabic is a rare talent that one does not acquire through effort. In the cartoon image, she portrays herself performing a daily ritual-meditation. An awareness of her spirituality was heightened by an ongoing dispute with her American roommate, who found it hard to accommodate her morning prayers. Amidst their arguments, Airuwa felt increasingly attached to Arabic, which embodied her religious identity and her creative aspirations. This cartoon sheds light on her literacy, professional, and religious identities as entangled in complex processes of negotiating translingual and transcultural relationships.

While her theorization of her languages seems to treat languages and language practices as discrete structures tied to distinct social spheres

(professional, private, creative, religious), it is important to recognize how such juxtaposition creates opportunities to unmask politics involved in hierarchically ordering such languages and social spheres. As we see, Airuwa honors formal Arabic as embodying wisdom and creativity that she desires and works hard to achieve. In so doing, she demonstrates an increasingly clarified understanding of how her rhetorical repertoire, consisted of multiple languages, could be deftly deployed in response to the exigencies embedded in different social situations. Her Arabic provides a space to release creative energies and connect to spirituality, as her English enables academic achievement, professional growth and global mobility. Each language has its own value and plays an important role in her social and academic lives.

Similar to Fan, Airuwa also uses the assignment to explore tensions embedded in her transition into the university. When her religious and language practices in Arabic come in contact with dominant monolingual and monocultural ideology (represented by her roommate's protest against her morning prayers), the assignment creates a space for her to process such struggles. In creating a space to share multilingual texts and multicultural knowledge, the assignment helps Airuwa recognize the ideological struggles inherent to global and local efforts in managing the fluidity and multiplicity of languages. In particular, her theorization of such ideological struggles as historically situated and fluctuating demystifies the lingua franca status of standard English and instead positions her multilingual repertoire and linguistic dexterity as valuable assets in pursuing new knowledge, new ways of knowing, and reconciliation. As such, the assignment supports Airuwa's development of a translingual disposition toward language, semiotic, and cultural differences as laden with ideological values and entangled in social political parameters.

### **Toward Translingual Dispositions**

Students' development of translingual dispositions is grounded in collaborative creation of a meta-vocabulary to name translingual practices they already perform. For many, the difficulty of finding the right word in English mirrors the frustration they encounter in negotiating small mundane details, including ordering food from the cafeteria, seeking help from a professor, or having a conversation with an American roommate. Analyzing these daily struggles creates an occasion to sharpen strategies that facilitate students' transition into the social, cultural, academic and language practices of the university. For students such as Ru, Fan and Airuwa, reflections on their

translingual practices help them articulate and sharpen strategies that guide their choices and actions in academic and social situations. The validity of such theories aside, such meta-awareness and meta-vocabulary allow for the transfer of writing knowledge and strategy into unfamiliar situations.

The inclusion of translingual themes, through purposeful centering of students' languages and cultures as objects of inquiry, invites students to recognize and negotiate the vast range of literate experiences they mobilize from one place in the world to another. Basic writers learn to configure and reconfigure rhetorical resources and strategies at their disposal in response to rhetorical situations that demand informed explanation of one's social and cultural experiences for a diverse audience. Placing multiple languages in juxtaposition to each other, basic writers learn to challenge binaries that separate languages as sealed and isolated entities, while developing meta-linguistic understandings of language as linguistic, cultural, and ideological structures that can be negotiated and recasted. In the case of Ru, recognizing language differences as derived from linguistic features enables her to develop meta-awareness of language differences, name her successes and challenges, and strategize her negotiative moves. For Fan, thinking about English compels him to examine his home language, which often leads to recognition of languages as historically fluctuating and language differences as a norm. For Airuwa, problematizing the status of English as a *lingua franca* from a historical perspective helps her to see herself as an agentive user of an integrated linguistic repertoire. As such, writing theory cartoons not only render visible some of the linguistic and cultural struggles that often remain invisible or peripheral in writing classrooms, but also encourages students' negotiation of such struggles.

While the cases presented here illustrate broad patterns of how students navigate the assignment, they have not captured the full range of student learning. For instance, students draw on a far broader range of metaphors informed by different facets of their cultural lives to discuss language differences (religion, food culture, politics) than what this study has the space to discuss. It is in this access to a range of experiences that we find the pedagogical appeal of the assignment— it encourages basic writers to draw on familiar rhetorical and cultural resources to make sense of unfamiliar aspects of their social and linguistic reality.

Evidenced in these images are also complex ways in which multimodality enables rhetorical sovereignty as students derive meaning from personal experiences, engage in creative work, and forge agentive identities. Multimodality gives shape to experiences and emotions that are hard

to describe in linguistic terms. Meaning arises from the emergent process where ideas are tested, translated, and represented. The recursive process of drafting, reviewing, and revising the drawings creates many opportunities for developing and translating ideas across languages and modes. For each of the three students, access to a fuller range of semiotic resources and writing systems provides multiple pathways toward meaning making.

The assignment also creates an exigency for teachers to reconsider the role of their own language repertoire and pedagogy. It not only encourages me to draw on my multiple languages to model and analyze my approach to negotiating language differences, but also invites me into the unfamiliar dimensions of students' linguistic and cultural realities. Every student in the classroom serves as a teacher for someone else. I learned, for example, to hear the subtle variance across Arabic dialects that was critical to Airuwa's accurate identification of the place of origin of an Arabic speaker; I listened to an explication of the Korean writing system by a student, Grace, as she taught me to write the character for "rice" stroke by stroke; I listened to stories of lost languages and cultures from Andala, a student from Zimbabwe, whose home language disappeared in the manner of a decade; I ventured into the game world of League of Legends through Yu's laptop just to get a sense of the aesthetic style he sought to emulate. It is in these moments of learning to see the world from the perspective of another, celebrating the "aha" moments, and revisiting our own biases, that multilingual and monolingual writers alike recognize the value of composing across differences.

## Notes

1. All student participants were invited to construct pseudonyms while some preferred to use their first names. I defer to students' choices for how they want to be addressed.
2. In my transcript, I have replicated students' written explanation of their writing theory cartoons, including all grammatical and spelling irregularities.

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## **Appendix: Stages of Implementation**

Frontloading: Develop conceptual understanding

- Read, translate and analyze short texts from multiple languages (e.g. idioms, poems, Children's books)
- Develop conceptual understanding of languages (e.g. words, sentences, storytelling, styles)

Freewriting: Generate theories of languages

- Students use free-write prompt to develop individual keywords and elaborate
  - Prompt 1: When I think of English/home language, I feel . . . because . . .
  - Prompt 2: English/home language is like a . . . because . . .
  - Prompt 3: Living with multiple languages is like . . . because . . .
- Instructor uses wordle.net to generate word maps displaying class themes
- Discuss common reactions and themes
- Students choose a key theme of personal relevance

Drafting: Develop visual representation

- Use flockdraw.com to complete first draft of writing theory cartoon
- Export and upload drafts to class repository for public viewing and peer review

Multimodal workshop: Develop conceptual understanding of multimodal composition

- Students provide peer review to each other's drawing
- Instructor leads class discussion around exemplary student work, with the focus on multimodal design principles (e.g. components, color, shapes, spatial relationships, textual and visual symbols)

Revision: Further develop conceptual understanding of languages and multimodal design

- Students revise and finalize a set of cartoons, each representing a language
- Students provide bilingual explanation on theory and design

Reflection: Develop metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness

- Students develop a written reflection
- Use insights from assignment to focus on issues of translingual practices and transnational experiences

# Cultivating Places and People at the Center: Cross-Pollinating Literacies on a Rural Campus

Wendy Pfrenger

*ABSTRACT: Students in rural communities often describe themselves as unsuccessful readers and writers in a university context, yet off-campus their literacy lives may be avidly experienced and richly valued. This article investigates the layered literacies of student clients and writing center consultants on a rural, regional campus in an Appalachian county of Ohio with particular attention to the dissonance between students' success in extracurricular contexts and their perceived inadequacies in academic contexts. The theoretical frame for this investigation draws upon place-based pedagogies, extending notions of literacy sponsorship and multiple literacy strands to a strongly place-identified, age-diverse student body negotiating college composition courses on an open enrollment regional campus. The author describes the varied means by which peer writing consultants and students may work together to construct hybrid academic literacies, highlighting an appreciation for the value of their community-based literacy practices.*

*KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; literacy sponsorship; place-based pedagogy; rural education; writing center*

*I am observing a writing session in which a consultant and a client, both young men, are struggling to make progress. The client, pleasant but uncommunicative, gives brief replies to the consultant's questions. The consultant, attempting to draw attention to the immediacy of the assignment's central question, asks the writer to talk about how a relationship to audience impacts his choices as a writer. The writer shrugs and grins apologetically, expressing the opinion that he is not, in fact, much of a writer. The consultant, in desperation, grins back and takes an unexpected tack.*

*Consultant: "Are you a grade A or a grade C sexter?"*

*Client: "What?"*

*After a quick flush of initial embarrassment, the writer warms to the task of describing the rhetorical moves involved in texting romantic partners*

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*and comparing those moves (somewhat more hesitantly) to those used in intellectual writing.*

Out of many visits throughout the semester, this was one of the few moments we had with this client in which he was able to take a more active role in constructing a metadiscourse about his own literacy practices, and he did it through applying knowledge of his everyday practices to what he supposed was expected in his basic writing course. The writing consultant, in maneuvering the client outside of the role he had chosen (passive, empty of relevant knowledge), and into a more humorous, self-critical perspective, made it possible for the client to stand with feet planted in a new, third space.

After this session, I began paying closer attention to the role that extracurricular literacies were playing in the Learning Center on the regional, rural Kent State campus where I have worked as Learning Center Coordinator for the past five years. When were they explicitly explored in a session and who brought them up? To what use were they put? When did they have a more subtle, but still apparent, influence? And what webs of connection (or disconnection) gave shape to the hybridization of literacies in these sessions? The consultant's dual role as a literacy sponsor and a member of the client's home community clearly seemed to have a significant impact on the shape of a writing session. In order to understand what was happening, it seemed necessary to consider more fully the ways that writing centers, particularly in small campuses like ours, can become places where community-based literacies and academic literacy practices come together in a confluence of diverse expectations, practices, knowledge systems, and cultural associations.

In our community, everyday literacy practices look like this: Melanie journals for her counseling sessions. Mark watches historical documentaries and discusses them with his father. Nick argues politics in the apartment complex courtyard with his elderly neighbors, while Sarah uses her Facebook posts to share her poetry and songs. Brittany, a mechanic's wife, assists friends with advice grounded in a combination of experience and research on car purchases and repair. Justin analyzes draft picks and interprets ambiguous girlfriend-texts with his brother, and Erin produces textual commentary regularly for her Bible study group. The dissatisfaction both students and professors express with the writing produced in entry-level college composition courses seems oddly dissonant when contrasted with the students' own avid and personally valued literacy lives.

The literacy practices students bring to academia are resources too often left largely untapped; at best, they are acknowledged only so they

may be consciously set aside in the composition course to be replaced by the communicative norms of the university: literacy code-switching. The profoundly personal enthusiasms and deeply felt, shared experiences captured through these literacy practices do not often enough receive our respectful, sustained attention as we assist students in their efforts to develop academic literacy practices.

Some college writing instructors may invite elements of those extracurricular literacies and communicative norms into student writing for portions of the semester in the form of literacy narratives, but the understanding is that, for the most part, the stylistic aesthetics, cultural orientations, and habits of mind characteristic of these literacies will not be incorporated into the students' more "developed" academic work if they are to succeed in later courses. Anne-Marie Hall and Christopher Minnix argue that, contrary to what they refer to as "the bridge metaphor" of the literacy narrative, in which the narrative serves as a "bridge" for "easing students into" more conventionally valued forms of academic writing, we might instead enhance transference by exposing for students the ways that "the literacy narrative [like other genres] gains its power and meaning from its relationship to other genres and the hierarchies of value that shape particular contexts of writing," explicitly demonstrating for students the ways that "Writing a text about oneself (the familiar part) and turning it into a sophisticated critical analysis is a problem-solving skill that transports to other areas of learning" (78). What Hall and Minnix are advocating with their emphasis on the social construction of textual value in the university is a shift in how we encourage students to imagine their literacy purposes in various contexts and transposed to multiple settings.

Regional campuses occupy an advantageous position with regard to the question of contexts for understanding literacy, because the mission of a regional campus is specifically to serve place-bound students in a geographically defined area. This affords professors and students alike opportunities for deeper, more sustained engagement with literacy contexts because so much of the body of knowledge, practices, and values around literacy are shared in common. As part of a discussion of the physical spaces of composition learning and instruction, Nedra Reynolds has pointed out that the "actual locations for the work of writing and writing instruction coexist with several metaphorical or imaginary places where we write" (13). Rather than accepting as "transparent" the spaces and settings of higher education, she argues that we must work to recognize these places and their features, interpreting the layerings of space and place in ways that inform and enrich a critically

reflective approach to writing and writing instruction in the university. For Reynolds, composition classrooms and writing centers are given form by their physical spaces, by the place-based metaphors that shape our thinking about writing, and by the geographies within which our campuses are situated. She, like Hall and Minnix, advocates for a shift in emphasis toward a more intentional examination and use of the contexts of reading and writing as they are learned, taught, and tutored on university campuses which are in turn, as physical buildings and as ideas, situated within layered histories, geographies, and spaces.

I would suggest that when we consciously make similar shifts in our writing center practice, pointing explicitly and regularly to ways that students' literacy lives outside the university give meaning and shape to their emergent academic literacy lives, we are making a subtle but important change. By doing so, we encourage the purposeful valuation and cultivation of extra-curricular literacy practices in the hope that they might thrive alongside and even cross-pollinate with the intellectual work students perform throughout their time in the university. If writing centers are to successfully address themselves to strongly place-identified clients, they must recognize and make use of the unique resources possessed by peer writing consultants who are similarly place-identified. Peer consultants fluent in translating the literacies they have learned *outside* the university into practices useful *within* the academy may prove effective in assisting other students as they attempt to do the same. In identifying approaches to a client's agenda that include a sustained engagement with personal and place-based literacies, writing consultants may then be prepared to "follow more deliberately those 'detours' taken by the writer that challenge our habitual way of viewing the self in relation to the world" as Min-Zhan Lu has suggested (Brandt et al. 54). As both consultants and clients come to view such detours less as evidence of academic illiteracy than as evidence of other literacies with potential utility for academic projects, they open the way to a more personally meaningful, place-based experience of higher education.

This article takes as its starting place a concern with the gap between students' often successful and personally valued community-based literacy experiences and their perceived inadequacy as they struggle to acquire the literacy practices required by their coursework. We have taken an ethnographic approach to the study of these processes in our own writing center, focusing primarily on the work of systematic observation and interpretation. Over the course of two semesters, peer writing consultants were asked to reflect in brief, informal writings about the relationship of their "outside" literacy practices



and experiences to the literacy practices they were engaged in developing as university students. I also participated as a writing consultant, both observing and participating in sessions described here. The ways in which we have shifted our writing center practice to include routine consideration of non-academic literacies are documented in these session reports, reflections, and audio recordings, providing an ethnographic portrait of consultants and students on a rural campus engaged in a project of self-study. The resulting vignettes of consultants' and students' work illustrate the fruitful potential of directing our writing center practice toward the cultivation of what Deborah Brandt terms "hybrid" (182) or "re-appropriated literacies" (179).

The theoretical frame for this investigation draws upon place-based pedagogies, extending notions of literacy sponsorship and multiple literacy strands to a strongly place-identified, age-diverse student body negotiating college composition courses on an open enrollment campus in a rural corner of Appalachian Ohio. I examine the means by which peer writing consultants and student writers may work together to construct hybrid academic literacies, combining an appreciation for the value of their community-based literacy practices with an awareness of academic literacy practices; such an account, I hope, may provide a compelling case for the role writing centers may play in recasting the enculturation of first generation and non-traditional rural college students.

## **PLACING THE RURAL WRITING CENTER**

In Columbiana County, where our Kent State University regional campus is located, there are many kinds of divides and many kinds of conversations that result because of them. There are divides between incorporated townships and villages; between farmers and small manufacturers; between the broad, rolling corn/soy fields and Quaker-born towns *north* of the Lincoln highway and the forested hills and hollows, the Copperhead heritage *south* of the Lincoln highway.

The portrait presented by socioeconomic data shows a county divided within by barriers of opportunity and divided from the surrounding region by deepening poverty and economic isolation. 3.3% of the population of Columbiana County earns a household income of \$150,000 or more annually, while 45.7% of the population report earnings below the county's median wage of \$43,700 (Ohio Development Services Agency). Our county earned mention in *The Upshot's* 2014 analysis of U.S. Census data, ranking it in the top third of most difficult counties for American families to live in,

based on a variety of measures including unemployment, disability, poverty rates, health, and affordable housing (Flippen). Educational barriers present obstacles to available jobs, frustrating area employers as well as aspiring workers. Just 22.4% of Columbiana County residents over 25 reported attaining an associate's degree or higher compared to 34.3% of the broader Ohio population of residents over 25 (U.S. Census Bureau). These numbers are especially daunting given that Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce projects that 64% of jobs available in Ohio in 2020 will require at least some post-secondary credential or degree (3). In part, this is because academic preparation has lagged in Ohio. Though progress has been made in recent years due to implementation of new standards, just 18.7% of the high school classes of 2014 and 2015 in our county graduated with remediation-free ACT scores (Ohio Department of Education), and 81% of students enrolling at our local Kent State campuses in the last year placed into at least one remedial course (Kent State University IR, *Remediation Rates*). These statistics have prompted dialogue throughout our university system and our region, but conversations around retention and improving student preparation are sometimes inhibited by the same barriers they are meant to address.

The writing center is one place where students themselves—peer writing consultants and student writers—may step into the space between these divisions, a third space in which no one is quite on one side or another—and sometimes find ways to do something better than merely cross the divide. The writing center on the Kent State University Salem campus serves approximately 14% of the overall campus population every year, affording us many opportunities for the kind of close engagement between consultants, student clients, and professors that may offer alternatives to failure or, alternatively, transformation and outmigration. Attempting to pause in that alternative, third space as we have done in the process of this study may allow us to take stock of our students' literacy resources, measuring the potential to grow a hardier, more resilient and adaptive academic literacy than the more limited literacies we usually aspire to cultivate for students emerging from college composition courses. If we assume that college student writers like the ones described above possess in some measure “rural literacies . . . the kinds of literate skills necessary for sustaining life in rural area” (Donehower et al. 4) or, in the case of younger students, may be in the process of acquiring them, cultivating both academic and rural literacy may strengthen both for our writing clients and for our writing centers more broadly. In her seminal study of literacy sponsorship, Deborah Brandt remarked the multiple domains and

points of contact that shape literacy in communities—in faith communities, the workplace, and the justice system, for example—pointing to the “deep hybridity” inherent in such overlapping. Brandt suggests that we, as educators in the university, should respond to this awareness by creating literacy models that “more astutely account for these kinds of multiple contacts, both in and out of school and across a lifetime” (179). I would argue that writing centers can and should help students foster a richness of meaning through the cultivation of hybrid literacies, and that we are best prepared to do this work by immersing ourselves as writing consultants in hybridity, in reflection on the layered literacies that we and our clients bring into the university. Such an approach requires an explicit embrace of the moves readers and writers make, and of the relationships and social contexts that lend meaning to lives led on our campuses and in our rural communities.

Rural education researcher Michael Corbett has written extensively about the need to differentiate between the challenges rural students face on college campuses and the challenges faced by other student populations. In reflecting on the contrast between his own educational journey, rooted in an appreciation for mobility and the abstract, thanks to his proximity to the railroad life, and the place-based educations of his students in a rural, coastal community, Corbett suggests that although the “place-specific identity constructions” of rural college students “represent a complex set of resistances and accommodations” (1) to the educational setting of the university, their ability to successfully navigate this territory is uneven and fraught with obstacles. The obstacles posed by the university setting may not significantly impact students fluent in the decontextualized, comparatively rootless identity constructions of the contemporary suburban middle class in the same way that they impact rural students. For this reason, these obstacles—of uncommunicated assumptions about authority, the purpose of education, how to read and study, how to generate ideas and write—may go unaddressed by the university even as they impact metrics for persistence, achievement, and post-graduation outcomes.

The presence of these obstacles at Kent State’s Salem campus is evident in the number of students placing into developmental composition courses and then failing to complete these courses successfully. During the period from fall 2013 through spring 2016, 27% of the students enrolled in composition courses on our regional campus were enrolled in developmental courses. D-F-withdrawal rates during the same period for those developmental courses averaged 32.7 percent (Kent State University IR, *Grade Distribution Reports*). 34.6% of the students enrolled in the first of the developmental

courses never appear in the record of composition courses a second time, suggesting that they dropped out of the university altogether. Why they vanish and where they go, we don't know, because our university, as is the case with many, has no formal method of systematically tracking students like these who fail to persist or graduate. We suspect that they disappear for the reasons they gave us when they missed classes and assignments before leaving: they didn't feel like they were "college material"; they didn't understand "what the professors were asking for" because they weren't like the high school teachers; or that caring for the farm and an ailing father while going to college got to be too much and the family told them that family should always come first. We are sure that the students are still nearby, just down Route 45, but place has played a role in ending their educations just as surely as it played a role in getting them started at our campus originally.

Institutions of higher education in rural areas are often the inadvertent purveyors of two kinds of loss. Lamenting "the routinization of failure, its virtual acceptance amongst typical educators, and the all too common acquiescence in the process on the part of most failing students themselves," (2) Corbett calls for greater attention to the problem of the links between education, rural outmigration, and access to resources. When rural students succeed in higher education, on the one hand, their success may contribute to the problem of outmigration. A recent United States Department of Agriculture report notes that "Rural outmigration is highly concentrated among young adults, especially those possessing or acquiring education and skills" (2). The second kind of loss, failure in the realm of higher education, contributes to a larger narrative of systematic loss and decreased quality of life in areas where access to economic resources has eroded over time.

Identifying Corbett's account as one which delineates "the educational discourse of loss and place," (1) Ursula Kelly emphasizes not only the consequences Corbett has identified but also the ways we interpret those consequences and the inevitability of loss as a result of rural education. For Kelly, loss has transformative potential—but only if it is intentionally addressed within the educational framework. More routinely, we accept loss and failure as inevitable outcomes of the clash between institutional uniformity and the heterogeneity of the students who pass through our doors. If we assume that failure is simply a function of the system as it sorts those that belong from those that do not, there is no mechanism for considering possible paths leading to hybridity, transmutation, or other collaborative imaginings of literacies that might bridge the everyday and the academic. Alternatively, Kelly argues for an "acceptance of loss . . . [that] would create

a space in which one might plan and preserve, turning love of place into an ethic of responsibility and sustainability” (3), viewing loss as an opportunity to create new knowledge.

For an adult entering the university and undertaking the educational project of acquiring a new literacy, some loss may be an inevitable part of succeeding, but complete loss, total change should not be treated as a desirable or unavoidable side effect of assimilation. Collaboration between the student and the university in generating a new, hybrid literacy grounded in both the local and the global may prove a stronger, more resilient foundation than displacement can provide. Because writing centers employ peer consultants who, in the case of commuter campuses especially, are likely to come from the same communities as their clients, writing centers can offer a uniquely place-based form of literacy sponsorship for students.

Writing center pedagogy has long privileged the agenda and agency of the client in a way that would suggest an asset-based approach to each session. Yet we may not always do enough in the writing center to consider the social and practical context of literacy itself. For a symposium published in *College English*, Richard E. Miller suggested that it is important to be “as interested in the expectations that we bring to the activity of writing as . . . in the writing we produce to meet those expectations” (Brandt et al. 50). If we consider the foundation of literacy to be “the culturally appropriate way of thinking” for a given society (Langer 13) and the expectations generated by these cultural paradigms, then we must move beyond discussing skills and strategies, even beyond demystifying one specific cultural context (the academy), and instead invite examination of the multiplicity of cultural contexts layered within the campus setting. In a case study of an off-campus writing center, a space described as “both curricular and extracurricular” (678) Deborah Minter, Anne Gere, and Deborah Keller-Cohen noted that peer tutors often “initially [take] literacy to be a context-independent bank of knowledge of a set of skills” (678) leading them to focus on guiding a writer in developing those skills rather than developing an examination of the *context(s)* of those skills. However, the longer the peer tutors in the study worked in the writing center, housed in an urban community center and serving local elementary-aged students, the more they were challenged to “respond to or manage the surplus of meaning” (678) resulting from the overlap in space usage, the juxtaposition of work and community roles, and the layering of various kinds of literacy practices and values held by both adults and children involved with the center. As the peer tutors gained their own cultural competency in the extracurricular space of a community-based

writing center, they came to see the features of their clients' texts as more than mere deviations from (or models of) academic literacy; rather, they were able to see them as literacy products constructed at the intersection of the cultural contexts of school and home, of decontextualized, national standards-based instruction and their familiar, urban neighborhood.

Writing centers, then, can become a critical intervention for students struggling to participate in the literacy culture of the university at the same time that they strive to find their place in the global economy. By offering a space where students may sort through the layered literacies of their extracurricular experiences, they assist students in finding ways to make use of these literacies for academic purposes, though perhaps in an altered form, and open new ways of considering narratives of mainstream cultural supremacy. A "surplus of meaning" may manifest in student texts in ways often regarded by professors or skilled peers as evidence of disadvantageous differences. In response to this negatively tinged lens, we may very well need "conceptual frameworks that *simultaneously* assert shared cognitive and linguistic competence while celebrating in a non-hierarchical way the play of human difference" (Hull et al. 326); such frameworks could instead shift the focus of a writing session from excising all evidence of difference from a text and toward leveraging that difference productively, converting a surplus of meaning into a richness of meaning.

In the first chapter of *Rural Literacies*, Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell make the case that in higher ed "we need to work with students to help them see the economic, social, and political issues encountered in rural areas as interconnected with the larger social and political patterns present in urban and suburban contexts and vice versa" (30). They advocate such work as the basis of a critical public literacy of greater utility to all students, no matter where they are from or where they choose to locate themselves. Donehower recommends that "By acknowledging how loaded the topic of literacy may be for [rural] students, by exploring ways to validate students' existing knowledge and literate practices, and by encouraging appropriative relationships with the types of literacy we offer," (76) we may be more effective as literacy sponsors serving place-bound students and even, I would suggest, problematize our institutional models of success and failure in significant ways.

## OFFERING LITERACY SPONSORSHIP

Many studies have noted the critical role that literacy sponsors may play in the success of traditionally underrepresented students (Brandt; Carrick; Heath; Shepley; Webb-Sunderhaus), and both new literacy and social constructivist learning theories suggest that the educational impact of sponsors is amplified when they share with learners a common set of communicative norms and cultural contexts. For these reasons, writing consultants on local, non-residential campuses may offer their clients a unique form of literacy sponsorship, unique because, though located within the university as successful students, the consultants nonetheless share in common with writers a location within the community.

Deborah Brandt, introducing the notion of literacy sponsorship suggested the tension of power inherent in the role of a sponsor, defining sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way” (166). Noting that sponsors unavoidably wield disproportionate power in the relationship and “represent the causes into which people’s literacy usually gets recruited” (167) Brandt expressed a sense of unease as a self-declared “conflicted broker” (183) of literacy in the classroom. In the nearly two decades that have passed since Brandt’s initial research, we have sought to make peace with this power dynamic through various reformulations of the literacy transaction, through altering its terms and players. In the writing center, sponsors proficient in navigating what geographer Doreen Massey terms “the simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (3) available to the specific locale of their campus may be particularly effective in constructing together with their clients a metadiscourse about the choices they can make as readers and writers, selecting moves from their literacy repertoire outside the university for adaptation to the expectations of academe and perhaps simultaneously modifying the terrain of academe through manipulation of their local rhetorical space. The discursive nature of these analyses of writing “moves,” informed by the “simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” shared by writing consultants and clients alike, may diminish, to an extent, the conflicted nature of literacy sponsorship in the rural writing center.

Writing consultants in our center, for example, often find writers favoring “short and to the point” as a writing aesthetic that causes problems when they are expected to sustain complex reasoning in essays. Rather than simply explain academic aesthetics and begin the process of re-writing, how-

ever, our consultants inquire into what “short and to the point” means to a writer and why it seems desirable. Many of our clients tell us they learned this style in the military, or as prison guards, or as they completed government documents for various purposes. As a consultant learns more about why and how a writer favors a set of choices, she can help a writer recognize 1) that these are indeed choices; 2) that they can be savvy ones, not “wrong” choices demonstrating their lack of writing ability; 3) that the reasoning behind those choices might have utility in an academic context, even if stylistic adaptation may be needed.

For our purposes here in considering students’ lived experiences of literacy, its mutability and adaptation, the notion that literacy is fundamentally a social practice is key. Understood in this way, the literacy required to assess, for example, the information gleaned in Columbiana County’s most widely circulated newspaper, *Farm and Dairy*, is given form and meaning by social context. An article about valuing antiques (written by one of my student’s mothers) draws upon locally lived experience of history, the rapid passage of generations, and the disruption/repetition of cultural trends as experienced by Columbiana County residents. The writer’s purpose is shaped by her knowledge of a local audience of contemporaries, nostalgic for a past their children may never wish to celebrate and enriched by a material culture which she understands to be changing, though not perhaps in the sense of diminishing which we often associate with change. She advocates for celebration and use of treasured family items, remarking that, “The memories will keep moving forward as we fold these items into our lives,” (Seabolt). For Kym Seabolt and her readers, locally sourced literacy is clearly not simply an all-purpose tool, but one embedded in a social context that includes articles about turkey-hunting and grain storage alongside antique valuation.

Extending our interest in literacy promotion to include development and hybridization of extracurricular literacies shifts our practice toward an appreciation for our students’ potential as adults knowledgeable in their communities who may themselves “fold” literacies, as they may do memories, into their layered lives. Noting the damaging ethnocentrism of skills-based notions of literacy, Francis Kazemek has called instead for an acknowledgement “that literacy is constrained by social and cultural practices and is not merely a private accomplishment” (473), thus liberating literacy education from reductive approaches that emphasize individual effort and “acquisition” of modular, decontextualized literacy practices. Adults in the literacy programs that Kazemek studied were spending time performing reading tasks often identical to those used with primary school children despite



the inappropriateness of such tasks and topics for the literacy contexts of adult life. The alternative, shifting from skills-based instruction to creating socioculturally-motivated, context-based literacy instruction grounded in the adult needs and applications of the students, encouraged students to adapt and revise their existing literacy strategies, has become a model for contemporary adult literacy programs (Hull; Muth; Weiner) though not, typically, in basic or first-year university courses. If we are to create in university spaces the opportunity for students, whether traditional or nontraditional, to make use of their primary literacies, we need forms of academic literacy sponsorship that draw upon extracurricular literacies and social contexts, and we need ways to talk about the academic setting itself as a particular site for literacy within a larger community of spaces where literacy is constituted. Space must be made for conversations about discontinuity and disruption at the same time that we foster an appreciative recognition of the literacies students bring with them into the university.

### **CULTIVATING HYBRID LITERACIES: THREE WRITING CONSULTANTS IN CONTEXT**

As we have observed, university students acquiring academic literacy practices are engaged in a social transaction composed of literacy histories specific to them personally, to the practices and traits of the individual teacher and class, and to the place and time in which they are being educated. Assisting adult students as they adapt their literacy to academic requirements must make *social* sense, not only academic sense, perhaps particularly in communities and on campuses where students aspire not to use education to leave, but to return equipped to succeed there, as many of our students do. The old adage of writing centers, that we make “better writers, not better writing” (North 68) might as well be adapted to include “better connections, not better grades.” In the working class southern towns where she did her ethnographic work, Shirley Brice Heath suggested that both teachers and learners could better “learn to articulate relations between cultural patterns of talking and knowing, and, understanding such relations [could] make choices” (13) when they shared cultural context. The construction of literacy through shared inquiry and relationship makes sense in an education inclusive of situated learning, with writing consultants or tutors assisting their peers in becoming part of the university’s community of practice.

My own investigation of this process has formed itself around the encounters of individual students interacting in our campus spaces, giving

particular attention to the value of multiplex relationships in promoting the formation of hybrid literacies. What Beth Daniell terms “The little narratives of literacy [that] connect composition to culture” (405) can illuminate the dark corners of our classrooms and writing centers. To collect these little narratives, I worked with undergraduate writing consultants employed in our regional campus Learning Center to gather and interpret reflective accounts of writing sessions. I also requested that the peer writing consultants create literacy reflections detailing their own adaptation and use of extracurricular literacies within the university. Most of the material described in this article derives from the consultants’ experiences as developing academic writers and as literacy sponsors working with their clients. The consultants’ reflection papers described the evolution of their tutoring pedagogies and, in the process, remarked the ways that their own literacy lives had influenced their growth as academic writers. I had also instructed the writing consultants in periodic staff meetings to look for opportunities to learn about students’ extracurricular literacies and, where appropriate, make use of those practices in the course of ordinary writing sessions. They were given a specific set of questions addressing conversations about extracurricular literacy to answer in their session reports.

Ultimately, the accounts chosen for inclusion here were selected because the consultants and clients involved were typical of our student population—most of them non-traditional students, none of them having graduated high school with an intention to enroll in college, all of them born and raised in the county where our campus is located. The consultants had each distinguished themselves as being particularly invested in their personal literacy lives, though only one was a self-identified aspiring professional writer. In addition, their ability to represent in their reflections specific aspects of the ways extracurricular literacies had influenced the formation of their academic literacy practices made rendering their experiences for research purposes a more equitable and accurate process, as they provided ongoing clarification and feedback for this article. I have chosen to emphasize the accounts of the consultants rather than those of the clients in large part because I feel they tell in their own words (better than I could and in a way the client writers were not asked to) the story of how the extracurricular literacies they practice off campus influence the academic literacy they have acquired as college students. Three out of the five consultants who were active that year have accounts represented here.

It is worth noting that the remaining two consultants (both traditional-aged students) perceived themselves to be less located in place due to family

background and socioeconomic class, so their accounts of their literacies were strikingly place-less by contrast with the three accounts of the writing consultants represented here. The focus in their accounts is on learning the superficial conventions of academic work (e.g. accuracy in citation style, avoiding the “five paragraph essay”) and acquiring habits of mind characteristic of the disciplines in which they were learning to write.

The accounts of writing sessions in the subsequent section offer, by contrast, a suggestion of how consultants fluent in both place-based and academic literacy practices may help writers explore their extracurricular literacies and make use of them in cultivating academic literacy. These were selected on the basis of a greater availability of descriptive information (some writing consultants wrote fuller session reports than others, and in some cases I myself was the consultant and had available recordings). I only used information from clients whom I’d had the opportunity to observe in session at least once or with whom I had worked myself.

### **Stacie Crawford—A Literacy with Many Roots, Many Purposes**

Stacie Crawford, in her time as a Human Development and Family Studies major on our campus, was one of our most sought-after consultants. Her story suggests a complex of economic and personal motives, the richness of her experiences prior to college, and the value of stitching a college education into the larger patterns of her life. In her reflection, she writes, “I certainly am not an early achiever (way passed [sic] the 20 something mark) . . . I am a mother whose husband is on disability and just want to have some security in a society where the financial climate has gone haywire . . . I certainly have been known to say ‘Algebra 3? . . . Why do I need so much math for Human Services?’ ”

At the time when she was employed in the Learning Center, Stacie had a college-aged son enrolled at the campus, and he was the one who had encouraged her to return to school and get a degree. Stacie entered the university motivated by economic need and was, at first, puzzled by requirements she saw as unrelated to her purpose in seeking a higher-paying job. She seems more willing, however, to mark the value of a broader, less instrumentally driven education when she describes in her account the indirect routes by which she had pursued education in her youth. In relating her “vagabond years” after high school graduation, she refers to her experiences as “an education of a different kind that is irreplaceable.” This contrast between an impulse to education as economic necessity and one driven by curiosity and

a taste for novelty is striking, suggesting as it does one more tension inherent in the acquisition of new literacies. Higher education with its general education requirements and graduation formulas does not always seem to students particularly conducive to either of these more personal educational aims. Even Stacie's emphasis on her age as a returning student points to an assumption she shares with many others—that book-based education is for younger, inexperienced people and may prove inaccessible or even redundant for those schooled in the book of life. For Stacie, travel provided a way to gain knowledge about the world that she could bring back and use in her home community. Her educational experience in the university, though motivated by pragmatic purposes, only became more satisfying as it took on other, more personal, dimensions.

As an adult student, Stacie was initially uncertain whether her ways of thinking and learning would work within the university, an uncertainty refracted into a different shape by friends who worried that rather than struggling to adapt to the university, she would adapt too successfully and so be changed. Prior to entering the university, she was known for her skill at facilitating a Bible study group that met at her house, and she was also an avid reader and poet. As her first writing instructor on the campus, I watched her initial hesitation and nervousness turn to confidence and even joy as she found through her academic writing a new form of exploration not unlike the types of writing she already valued: her inspirational Facebook postings or the contemporary spiritual music she composed. In the composition classroom, Stacie's writing—initially rich with ideas, but fragmented in structure—reflected a mind conversant with textual analysis and a writing life that placed value on the connotative potential of word choice. These characteristics, derived from her experiences as a poet and student of the Bible, became valuable in the service of composing essays, and they were ones that I, as her instructor, emphasized as strengths to be cultivated even as she tried out new skills and approaches needed for academic essay writing. This sense that her skills prior to entering the university were valuable ones helped Stacie relax into her role as a university student, since it did not necessarily require a rejection, as her friends had feared, of her preferred forms of expression, her personal convictions and beliefs. In fact, Stacie describes in her reflection “realizing that there is so much more to know” and that “by knowing something more . . . I become more. Well at least I open the door to the possibilities of more.”

Stacie did indeed find much success. Although she became a high-achieving student in many courses and in her major, a highly-sought-after

consultant in the writing center, she remained a member of her close-knit community as a leader of her Bible study group, a musician performing at local churches, and a good friend to her high school classmates. When she graduated with her associate's degree in Human Services, she celebrated with a bonfire in her backyard attended by friends, family, and professors alike.

### **Joseph Pritchard—Relational Literacy**

Another writing consultant on our campus, Joseph Pritchard, has found his place as an English major and is currently working to complete his honors thesis while his wife pursues a nursing degree. Joe is known in the Learning Center for his patient silences and thoughtful, open questions, his willingness to sit with uncertainty and vulnerability. On Fridays, his sessions often run long as students sit beside him, writing independently while he does his own work, untroubled by the hectic pace characteristic of the rest of the writing center weekly schedule. In his approach to his writing sessions, Joe is thoughtful about how the pressures of “real life” schedules and health problems and family commitments make investing in time-intensive homework assignments (like essays) particularly challenging for students on our campus. His pacing and relational style encourage student clients to treat writing sessions as a social space separate from their college lives (less scheduled, less instrumental) and perhaps resembling more the kinds of personally meaningful forms of literacy he (and they) practice in their everyday lives in the community.

In his second year of college and his first year as a writing consultant, the reflection Joe composed relates the overlap between his on- and off-campus literacy lives and comments on how his own experiences compared to those of his peers. As a self-described “recluse” Joe writes: “I get my sports news from my wife’s dad who’s an encyclopedia on the matter; and I just shoot the shit with my crazy, old neighbors if I desire human interaction.” He compares this to the literacy practices he associates with university work, noting that in his community, “People don’t read, it certainly wasn’t emphasized at . . . [my high school].” Joe does not see his home community as a community of readers, and yet he describes in a brief, vivid burst the literacies prized by his family and neighbors, literacies which he, too, values: sports, politics, history, and outdoorsmanship. In conversation, Joe often refers to the pleasure he takes in online interactions and friendly argumentation with his neighbors.

Before the motorcycle accident that placed him in a wheelchair, Joe lived a physically active life, hunting and fishing and generally (by his own account) not taking school too seriously. But once his mobility became limited, Joe turned to reading as an alternative to the activities he could no longer manage. Reading and writing have since re-formed themselves in his life as social activities connecting him to others in ways that his previous hobbies once did.

The social role of reading and writing practices derives its meaning and shape in Joe's life from the relationship contexts within which those literacy acts take place, and in turn these relationships take their form from the rural town where he grew up and the online spaces which, for many in rural areas (particularly those with limited mobility), provide a valuable alternative place for dwelling and for exchanging information. Continuing with a discussion of what he believes to be his peers' difficulties in acquiring academic ways of reading and writing, Joe describes "main campuses" as "full of scholarship chasers [and] early achievers," noting that regional campus students are more likely to be "rusty on time management (hell, I still am), basic writing skills (still sharpening that sword myself), and trying new things (luckily, I kind of enjoy this)." Joe also writes about the social interchange of his off-campus life with the arbitrariness and performative pressure of on-campus literacies, conditions which favor, perhaps "the scholarship chasers." In Joe's first semester as a student, his ability to see diverse points of view and craft nuanced positions on topics new to him were a strength, even as he struggled with issues of syntax and paragraphing. By the time he became a writing consultant, Joe had forged strong mentoring relationships with several professors in the English Department, having met frequently with them to request assistance in improving as a writer. As a writing consultant, his embrace of a style of interaction more consistent with the laidback, unfocused exchanges of off-campus life simultaneously replicates for many students the more socially-motivated dynamic of interpersonal relationships in the community while still accomplishing the intellectual objectives of the academic writers he is assisting.

### **Heather Haueter—Reading with and against Place**

I will offer one further story of a student writing consultant whose account contributes another facet to the diversity of literacy as it is experienced in our local community and the uses to which place-based literacies may be put when combined successfully with academic literacy. Heather Haueter

entered the university as a developmental writing student and, after a year or so, was recommended by her instructors to be a writing consultant in our writing center. She was known for her blunt but empathetic approach to peer review, her skill at making explicit the conventions of intellectual writing for the university in a way her fellow students found easy to apply.

Her experiences as a student in developmental courses may have provided a helpful grounding for her unique skill in demystifying academic conventions, but her experiences as the daughter and confidante of an alcoholic taught her at an early age that *everything* could be a text, subject to interpretation and re-interpretation. In her reflection, which ultimately became a paper she delivered in a joint presentation with me at the Eastern Central Writing Center Association Conference in 2014, Heather writes, “My literacy does not come from books and what I’ve learned to write came from passion to leave a world I didn’t want to be a part of but had no control over” (Haueter). In Heather’s account, acts of reading and writing become critical for survival, tools for pulling the tangled web of her life apart and reassembling it in ways that made sense.

She describes how her father used to wake her up after returning home drunk because he was looking for someone to talk to. Heather acknowledges that “as bad as that sounds, because we’re raised in world that teaches us that’s bad parenting, it really wasn’t horrible” (Haueter). She portrays her father as “a logical man with a sarcastic attitude [who] knew he wasn’t prepared for the world” (Haueter) and who wished to provide her with a critical perspective on how to read people and their actions. When other children were learning the authority of received knowledge as it was taught by parents, grandparents, and schools, Heather was learning that truth and knowledge were social constructs, dependent on one’s position in an eroding rural, rust-belt economy in which family and future and jobs were ever-changing, and that acts of reading, of interpretation, of that world were essential to survival.

Heather spoke with her dad about this section of her paper before presenting it, perhaps as a way, after years of sorting through her complicated feelings, to acknowledge both the pain and the value of this part of her childhood. She says that gaining access to the messiness of the adult world through the critical eyes of her father as he told his stories late at night played a key role in forming her skeptical, analytical approach to intellectual work, an approach that later was valued and further developed by her university education. Heather writes, “When I was young, I would write poetry to handle the pain and smile through the storm” (Haueter). Her response to the strong emotions of her childhood—writing poetry—planted the seeds

of a fundamental confidence in writing as a meaningful form of expression and communication.

### **A Meta-Review of Cross-Pollinating Literacies in Practice**

Students from rural or Appalachian backgrounds may experience the process of “inventing the university” in the college classroom very differently from suburban and middle class students for whom there may be more overlap in the literacies of home and university, and in many ways this difference may prove an advantage. Discourse in writing sessions about the assumptions and uses of literacy in its various contexts can prevent writers from experiencing erosion and loss, particularly when the conversation is led by peer writing consultants who practice literacy with skill both in the community and in the university. Placing a value on the knowledge that peer writing consultants and their clients already bring to the questions and challenges presented in the classroom represents an inversion of conventional models of literacy sponsorship in which, as Deborah Brandt has described, “although the interests of the sponsor and sponsored do not have to converge (and, in fact, may conflict) sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty,” (166-7). Campuses that enroll significant percentages of their students from their home communities should make use of the full range of their writing consultants’ literacy knowledge, not merely that which they use in classroom contexts. In their study of a rural community college campus, Howley et al. problematize what they term “the deficit views of rural life” (10), suggesting that on rural campuses students find the overlapping system of relationships and connections familiar to them from the home community. The complex web of interconnected relationships and roles evident on such a campus may make it easier for rural students, particularly non-traditional students who may be displaced workers or otherwise economically disadvantaged, to more effectively navigate the challenges of college because they can leverage relationships and operational modes from the community. Howley et al. contend that, as a result of this embeddedness, students under pressure from family, work, and economic distress may be more likely to persist and transplant to the college environment successfully because “rural community members are more likely to respond to each other in ways that do not threaten their multiple commitments but rather support and maintain them” (8). The stories of the three writing consultants described above point



to the rich promise that an embrace of multiplicity in the writing center may offer university students as they construct their academic literacies.

Stacie's story remains, in some ways, something of an exception on our campus. Whatever losses she sustained as her relationships were strained by the changes she experienced were incorporated into the unbroken fabric of her life narrative because of the way education, for her, came to represent continuity with her past literacy life and practices. Stacie, with her bonfire and friendships maintained after graduation, succeeded in integrating her campus and community lives more fully than most. For students motivated primarily or solely by economic need, cultivating academic literacy on a rural, commuter campus may ultimately prove to be unnecessarily difficult if the process can be completed only at the cost of displacement or a devaluation of one's prior experiences. Cultivating a garden of sweet corn, tomatoes, and greens, the familiar things, in one's backyard is a long way from cultivating a soyfield in the monoculture of contemporary agriculture. As Stacie's story demonstrates, when we encourage students to locate and employ their personally and community-valued literacies in the service of their academic growth, rather than displacing those literacies with some imagined, homogenized academic literacy, there is greater potential for productivity and sustained growth both for students and the university community itself.

For Joe, the integration of campus and community literacy has become far more than a success strategy or an area of personally satisfying growth (though it is, of course, those things). Since writing his reflection piece, Joe has published several poems in literary journals and contributed to the growth of an active literary community on our campus and in our county. He speaks often of what it has meant to connect to others on our campus with whom he found common experience and could cultivate shared aspiration grounded in both the local community and a college education. His insight into the range of students' primary identities underlying their "student-at-university" identities and his perception that "people don't read" illustrates the gap between students' perceptions of their community context and university context, but in writing sessions his stylistic embrace of an appreciation for the texture of social exchange and the ambiguous feelings students have for acquiring academic literacy position him as a highly effective tutor. As the experiences and practices of Stacie and Joe suggest, such sponsorship may be most effective when such validation takes social forms recognizable to students and explicitly acknowledges the moves required by these shifting literacy contexts.

Heather's adult experiences of literacy in the community as a single mother offer insight into the ways that critical literacies may be cultivated through oppositional encounters with authority and through storytelling imbued with relationally-constructed meaning. Her literacy practices in the community—producing statements for court and completing paperwork for the county bureaucracy, helping her children with their own educations—became to an extent acts of resistance to what she perceived as the prevailing narrative about who she was and what her potential might be. Just as Heather sought to take control of the narrative of a childhood that included late-night chats with an alcoholic father (parenting which “wasn't all that horrible”), she formed her aspirations around a life of writing in resistance on behalf of others. That very positioning as an outsider became an asset once she decided to apply to her local Kent State campus and pursue a degree in Human Services. As Heather saw it, she was bringing to the university valuable insights and literacy experiences that would enrich her value as a student and professional. Heather continues her account by observing the ways that her integrated, hybridized literacy practices in college enabled her transition to full adulthood as a parent and professional in the community:

Everything in my life has been [a search] for meaning and the exchange of information, but I had never realized it. . . . it all was starting to form a web and connecting in the middle to this one goal: to make a difference. College is my way of trying to make a positive change in such a negative world. (Haueter)

Heather's observations about her application of previous literacy practices and experiences in the development of academic literacy illustrate not only the practical benefits of gaining fluency in academic writing (making progress toward a degree and career goals) but also the healing power of living a life undivided by uneasy barriers between the worlds of on and off-campus. Her ability to read texts critically, taking them apart and then rebuilding meaning, offers another example of the means by which place and community may prepare a student for college in a fashion that the university does not typically anticipate or access.

For Stacie and Joe, continued engagement with their own non-academic literacies and those of their clients offers them what they perceive to be accelerated and personally meaningful progress toward becoming more proficient academic writers. As Heather puts into practice some of her community-based notions about literacy, critical thinking, and identity in

her role as a writing consultant, she advances her own skill and confidence at the same time that she assists other students in doing so. Heather concludes her reflection by noting that “the most compelling literacy . . . [she has] been involved with in the Learning Center is the writing for [developmental writing courses]” (Haueter) because of the value she sees in helping other students gain a more nuanced and compassionate view of others and of themselves. These students’ stories of reading and writing began with literacies they had practiced alone and with others in Columbiana County long before they entered college, and their extracurricular literacy experiences continue to contribute in powerful, positive ways to their formation as academic writers.

### **TUTORS CO-SPONSORING LITERACY/ HYBRIDITY**

Given their tremendous resource base and their rootedness in place, consultants can promote hybridization by encouraging students to explore the literacy knowledge and practice they employ outside the university in a variety of other settings. Doing this requires a willingness to follow conversational tangents and personal stories, indeed to build them into a session’s agenda. In one case, Joe related to me a difficult session in which a student trying to analyze the movie *Freaks* was able to make progress after Joe discovered the student had been avidly following news of an NFL scandal; Joe used the student’s knowledgeable analysis of the news reporting to encourage him to make similar reading moves as a viewer of *Freaks*. As Joe has suggested above, many students also perceive themselves as non-readers and non-writers, so recasting this perception through curiosity about personal and place-based literacy practices valued by the student may help clear the ground of counterproductive notions about the difference between academic life and “real” life. Here follow a few similar cases of consultants assisting students to see the academic moves in light of their extra-curricular literacies.

#### **Adam<sup>1</sup>—An Aesthetic Move**

A student, “Adam,” who is himself an avid reader and non-traditional student working in manufacturing, brought a nearly-complete draft into the Learning Center, hoping to work on what he felt were problems with how he was making use of his lens text, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In working with him, I could see his enthusiasm for the material and that he clearly had synthesized the material in order to investigate U2’s *Zooropa* album as required by the assignment, yet he was not doing so in a way a reader fresh to the material would be able to interpret. As the

writing consultant, I began the session by responding to his stated goal for the session by describing a section in his work where the problem seemed apparent. He responded by suggesting that he was “trying to be vague” in order to produce “better writing” that would not be “glaring” in making the point he wished to make.

At that point in the session, rather than “correcting” his perception of academic style, I asked why he had made the aesthetic choice he was making, where he had developed his mental model of “good” writing. At this point Adam, warming visibly to his subject, briefly described the ending of *The Life of Pi*, its ambiguity and appeal, explaining that the novel was typical of the reading he preferred to do. He explained, “I really like metaphors is what I’m saying as opposed to like a simile . . . Simile dumbs it down.” He went on to explain that he found similes predictable and they don’t “challenge the reader to use his own mind.” He added that he felt it was beneficial to allow a metaphor to play out in his essay because it “leaves a reader time to try and figure it out.” The emphasis on extending time in his essay is also significant, reflecting as it does the different rhythm of Adam’s reading life off-campus, in which ideas and literature are consumed for pleasure, as opposed to the more instrumentally-driven consumption of academic work in university life. Once I understood that Adam wanted to engage his reader as an active partner in interpretation, I could help him identify the moves he needed to make in order to support his reader.

### **Melody—Why We Write**

Stacie was partnered on a weekly basis with “Melody,” a non-traditional student who expressed at first a great deal of self-doubt and concern about writing. She was direct in relaying to us that much of the trouble she was experiencing related to trauma and ongoing medical issues, and that as a high school student she had been “a really good writer” according to her teachers. Stacie, responding to Melody’s visible agitation, reassured her that they would take the reading and writing tasks piece by piece so she could stop at any point if she began to feel overwhelmed. My account here covers multiple sessions over the course of a semester which are summarized for the purpose of offering a longer view of the process of cultivating hybrid literacies.

Stacie began most sessions by asking Melody to read the assigned text aloud and discuss as she went so they could identify any problems with comprehension as they occurred. This had the effect of focusing Melody’s

attention on the act of simply reading aloud rather than worrying about how she was measuring up. Very early on it became clear that she did have some difficulty comprehending, but once she did, she readily connected the texts to her own life experiences and feelings. Because Melody was generating so many thoughts that seemed only loosely associated with one another, Stacie encouraged her to note them down as she was reading. Melody immediately recognized in this common reading strategy a connection to advice her counselor had given her, suggesting that she journal in order to process her feelings. This insight led to a conversation about why both student client and student consultant write, what role the act of writing plays in their lives. Stacie shared that she also keeps a journal of her thoughts, though for her they represent a more spiritual investigation. Both women talked about identity, how it changes in response to experience, and how writing can be a way to track those changes, making sense of them through re-reading and revision.

In their sessions together, Stacie was able to re-direct conversation from the purposes of their extracurricular literacy practices to the question of why we write intellectually, pointing out to Melody that her professor was asking her to use writing to think through the problems of the text, just as she used it in her journaling to process her emotions and make sense of her experiences. Melody noted that her professor did not want her to use lots of “I think” or “I feel” language, and she expressed frustration with the problem of how to represent her own ideas about the text without marking the origin of her thoughts in this way. This led to a brief discussion about the conventions of intellectual writing—why they are different from those of journaling—and how Melody might draw on her journaling practices to develop her reading of texts before using her ideas for more formal papers.

### **Meta-Review of Tutors Co-Sponsoring Literacy/ Hybridity**

What makes these session worth remarking is that, once again, the barrier between these two students was at least partially dismantled by the consultant’s decision to work with, rather than work against, the student’s extracurricular literacy experiences. By encouraging Melody to see connections between a literacy practice she already valued and the new one which she viewed with such trepidation, Stacie helped restore to her a sense of place. Melody had been under the impression that nothing she thought or could write would be appropriate for the assignment, and though she felt it was expected she should transform herself into a college student, she also seemed determined to assert her sense of herself as a survivor. This latter identity

and her healing process were of greater interest and importance to her than her identity as a student. Stacie, in acknowledging the connection between her college literacy experiences and her own non-academic, more spiritual journey, was attempting to demonstrate for the student the possibility of multiplicity, of layered literacies and selves that complement rather than conflict with one another.

Throughout the semester Melody continued to write her way across a spectrum that often resembled journaling more closely than the personal intellectual essay assigned by the professor teaching her basic writing course. Around mid-semester Stacie noted with chagrin that although she had tried her best to show Melody how to make use of her journaling style for pre-writing and then adapt it for her essays, Melody still often chose to turn inward, taking assignments in directions she preferred for their therapeutic value rather than addressing the professor's intent. "But," Stacie said to me, "I think maybe that's just what she needs to do right now, you know? If college is a part of her therapy, that's just how it is. Hopefully when she gets to College Writing I, she'll be ready to change it up a little more."

This consultant's realistic acknowledgement of the gap between the student's purposes and the university's purposes, and her willingness to truly collaborate with the student—which meant, at times, simply offering her choices and then accepting them, whatever they were, without further comment—are exemplary, I think, of many similar stories. Although in other stories it might not be therapy journaling we're working with as a literacy practice—perhaps instead it's politics or religion or story-telling or crime dramas—we need models of literacy sponsorship that include an appreciation for the value of layered literacies in the writing center. In practice, this means that consultants like this one should actively invite those literacies into the discussion so that they can be examined and used rather than resisted. Stacie, while frustrated that she could not assist the student in more rapidly making progress toward success in the class, was only able to make progress with this particularly challenging student because, as the student client acknowledged to me, Stacie had established trust with her by respecting her choices and constructing with her a way for talking about those choices. This trust kept her engaged in her class and engaged with the writing center despite her ongoing extracurricular struggles. In this case, Stacie, by accepting the dissonance between the student's intentions and the university's requirements, was able to continue engaging the student in a conversation about the dissonance itself. This remained productive for the student, helping her continue with her university education.

Differences in purpose may be one challenge that writing consultants sensitive to the idiosyncratic contexts of place and personal history may effectively address; differences in aesthetic and intellectual style may similarly benefit from an approach to literacy sponsorship informed by curiosity and a receptivity to context. Early in the session with Adam, I had clearly expected to assist him in understanding typical academic essay moves like transitions and claims sentences, moves that would help him bridge between the two texts and give the essay a recognizably academic cast. Instead, the session shifted focus to acknowledging and making use of his interest in offering less explicit guidance for his reader, a guidance more similar to the spiritual adventure novels he favors, works whose meanings “you’re kind of left trying to decide” and which, perhaps for thematic reasons, offered an appropriate aesthetic for an essay in which he clearly had engaged in his own spiritual adventure of sorts.

If instead I had viewed his moves as mistakes to be corrected, we might have missed developing a deeper understanding of his intellectual project in the essay, a project mirroring the spiritual quest of both works and adopting something of the Socratic flavor of his preferred recreational reading material. Not only did we gain some needed perspective on the project he was pursuing in his writing, but through metadiscourse about the writing process, Adam also became more aware of himself as a purposeful decision-maker balancing the challenge of satisfying his own aesthetic preferences against the needs of his academic audience.

In each of the above sessions, writing consultants and clients perceive a lack of continuity between their familiar literacy practices and those they must adopt within the university. In the case of Adam, he retains an aesthetic from his recreational reading that influences his academic writing. Making him aware of the moves he’s making as a writer, their source and their use, assists him in adapting his aesthetic more intentionally to academic requirements. In this way, he is able to develop rather than erase his distinctive writing style. For the sexter mentioned much earlier in the article and for Melody, active investigations into their non-academic literacy practices evolve into conversations about their identities as academic writers and introduce modes of critical thinking that can be adapted for use in academic contexts.

## TOWARD A PRAGMATICS OF PLACE

A recent article by Marc Scott written in collaboration with peer writing consultants at Shawnee State University in another corner of Appalachian Ohio suggests that building rapport with first generation college students is fundamental to success and may look different with Appalachian students than building rapport with students of other backgrounds. In particular, Scott and his consultants recommend altering the politeness norms of the middle class university writing center to more regionally appropriate norms, for example, offering a more direct explanation of *why* a particular feature in a paper is successful, then making a clear and direct transition to what is *not* working in a paper and why (58). They also describe writing consultants speaking in regional dialect themselves as they tutor (“this part needs revised”) (55) and the value for writers in seeing their own linguistic and literacy journeys reflected in that of the consultants whom they trust to assist them along the way. Extending this discussion of language and social behaviors to embrace the entire complex of literacy practice, we might strive for what Kurt Spellmeyer calls a “way of reading that restores a sense of connection to things, and with it, a greater confidence in our ability to act” (168). Spellmeyer contends that such a “pragmatics of reading” accomplishes the “most essential work of the arts” (168), thus affording students access to their cultural inheritance as a tool for making sense of their contemporary context. Likewise, pragmatics of writing on a rural campus requires an attention to the relationships and social contexts that shape literacy practices on the campus and in the community and a critical examination of loss when—and if—it occurs. Such an awareness supports students’ ability to act and make decisions with an authority derived from knowledge grounded in place, relationship, and the academic literacy they are in the act of acquiring.

In his handbook for students, *ReWriting: How To Do Things with Texts*, Joseph Harris unpacks for his audience the “moves” of intellectual writing and reading, emphasizing the need for them to work with the understanding that “Our creativity . . . has its roots in the work of others—in response, reuse, and rewriting” (2). For students learning to identify and make moves between and within multiplex literacies, there is much to be gained from Harris’ approach of explicitly commenting to students upon the pragmatic workings of intellectual reading and writing; by sifting the pragmatic from the conceptual, he makes possible the comparability of these moves to the more familiar moves of students’ community-based literacies. A student who composes music for her faith community may readily recognize in Harris’



descriptions of forwarding or “taking an approach” the moves she makes in referencing a line from a well-known hymn or riffing off a favorite inspirational writer’s work in order to bring those insights to a religious context. Harris calls upon students to make conceptually sophisticated choices about their writing moves as readers and writers informed by their own evaluation of the rhetorical spaces they occupy. For the student steeped in making these same moves for other purposes outside the university, the act of naming the moves and demonstrating their utility for intellectual work may be game-changing. Writing consultants fluent in the use of these moves both on and off campus are more likely to see the potential for making these connections.

In our writing center practice, then, cultivating literacy hybridity requires an intentional pursuit of several aims that may inflect our sessions with a slightly different feel.

- *Establishing community-based identities as writers and readers:* As the experiences of Joe and others described above suggest, when students arrive at rural and regional campuses, they often do not identify as successful readers and writers simply because they do not recognize their non-academic reading and writing practices as having value in an academic context. Many student writers expect, early in their academic careers, to write only “what the teacher wants.” Others, like Heather or Adam, may see themselves as successful readers and writers but lack an awareness of the utility of their community-based literacy practices. Writing centers serving strongly place-identified clients may benefit from inquiring into the literacy identities of their clients in order to help them tap into their competence as literate adults, in this way establishing a fertile ground for the cultivation of academic literacies. A writing center that asks not only, “what do you know about this?” but also “how do you know it?” may offer students new ways to ground their authority in the classroom.
- *Leveraging our multiple relationships:* Similarly, part of training writing consultants on rural campuses should include drawing their attention to the complex of relationships and knowledge they bring with them into the university, helping them appreciate the ways that their community-based social contexts may animate and enrich their roles as writing consultants and literacy sponsors on the campus. Successful peer tutors like Stacie, Joe, and Heather ground much of their literate practice in community-

based social relationships and histories. Their awareness of the contrast between their forms of social, literate exchange and the social literacy exchanges of the academy give them an edge as they seek to make sense of why they think as they do about the questions posed by their professors. The result may be a generative disruption, both of their position in the academy and their position in the community.

- *Making use of dissonance and a surplus of meaning:* Writing sessions should routinely include questions not only about what a writer hopes to accomplish, but about the choices and histories leading up to what a writer has already done. In this way, dissonance between a writer's accustomed literacy practices and the practices favored in academic settings may lead not to displacement of known practices but instead adaptation and hybridity. A writer might choose to be restrained and direct in language in one portion of an essay while elaborating and taking calculated risks in another. Complementary plantings and hybrid cultivars may, in the end, result in more lively and productive academic work.

Writing centers on rural campuses must cultivate connections between consultants and student clients with particular attention to creating space for the inclusion of the multi-layered literacies of community belonging that, if consciously propagated and combined with academic literacies, have potential to transform both the lives of students and of their university communities. The key here is that notion of cultivation: without planning and intention, the literacies that grow will be wild and variable in their use or else monocultural and lacking in resilience. Because of their position within the academy, writing consultants are uniquely positioned to do this work of cultivating places—and people—at the center.

## Note

1. All students were invited to remain anonymous or be named in the article. Consultants chose to be named individually, while clients either had no preference or indicated they would prefer anonymity. The names here given for consultants, then, are their real names while clients' names are pseudonyms. Consultants reviewed the article and, without exception, gave feedback approving the accuracy of the representation of themselves contained here, at times even offering additional insight.

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