OPEN WORDS: ACCESS AND ENGLISH STUDIES

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Open Words: Access and English Studies is dedicated to publishing articles focusing on political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to teaching composition, rhetoric, reading, creative writing, ESL, and literature to open-admissions and "nonmainstream" student populations. We seek original scholarship in areas such as instructional strategies, cultural studies, critical theory, classroom materials, technological innovation, institutional critique, student services, program development, etc., that assist educators, administrators, and student support personnel who work with students in pedagogically difficult settings. Articles should consider the particularities of context—issues, for example, surrounding the identifier of "open access," intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, regional and cultural differences, and the range of competencies students bring with them to classrooms—in conjunction with the goal of English studies to empower students' critical and creative endeavors. We value works pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists, and we encourage submissions that take into account what interactions with students teach us about the broader, democratic goals of open-access education and English studies.

Open Words is an established journal, which began in 2007, and has produced at least one issue a year since then with the support of Pearson. John Tassoni and Bill Thelin served as the previous senior editors. In 2016, the journal was handed over to Sue Hum, who brought on two additional co-editors, Kristina Gutierrez and Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa. The work of producing an annual issue—reviewing submissions, identifying reviewers, sending manuscripts out for peer review, working closely with authors on revisions, creating proofs, and making copyedit corrections—is handled by the three senior editors. The first issue under their editorial leadership was published on March 13, 2017.

In 2019, the new editorial team transitioned the journal away from Pearson and to the WAC Clearinghouse for ongoing support and as the venue for publication. The open-access approach of the WAC Clearinghouse aligned with the philosophy of Open Words as an open-access journal with goals to cultivate a robust and dynamic body of scholarship on issues of access in higher education institutions and within communities. By addressing issues related to class, this journal has been historically a part of the CCC Working Class, Culture, and Pedagogy Working Group with a target audience that includes scholar-teachers and practitioners in rhetoric and composition, education, and affiliated disciplines who want to read critical discussions about issues of access. The scholarship published by Open Words complements the scholarship highlighting issues of access in other Clearinghouse journals, such as *The Journal of Basic Writing* and *The WAC Journal.*

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Editor's Introduction: Assessing the Value of Experiential Learning in Community-Engaged Projects

Kristina Gutierrez, Ph.D.
Lone Star College-Kingwood

My experience organizing service-learning projects influences my understanding of the goals of a community-engaged project, which the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* defines as "scholarly, teaching, or community-development activities that involve collaborations between one or more academic institutions and one or more local, regional, national, or international community group(s) and contribute to the public good" (p. 2). I see the value of community-engaged projects informed by experiential learning theory. Experiential learning describes the new knowledges students nurture from their critical reflection on the relationship between hands-on learning experiences and course concepts and applications. Such projects aim to undermine passive, rote, and uncritical learning. Community-engaged projects also stress the importance of students cultivating a strong work ethic and maintaining a high-level of professionalism, particularly when students represent their respective colleges and universities at their service-learning sites.

I entered college as a first-generation student with a GED. I enrolled in a local junior college because I believed that I could do something positive with my life by earning a degree. I felt some isolationism at my college, primarily because it is a commuter campus. However, that sense of isolation also came from a feeling of being an outsider since I entered college with a GED instead of a "real" high school diploma. I have always felt ashamed. In hindsight, I believe a community-engaged project would have helped me feel more connected to my college and to the local community. I would have also had the opportunity to participate in a professionalization experience that emphasized the importance of critical, self-reflection on learning. Community-engaged projects can invite students who feel isolated or see themselves as outsiders to participate in learning experiences that engage them in problem posing and self-

reflection about their learning. As the ability to self-reflect on learning is a higher order skill, it is essential to perseverance in college.

Well-conceptualized community-engaged projects not only "contribute to the public good" (p.2), but also enhance course learning outcomes. The latter provides students' opportunity to reflect critically on their hands-on learning experiences, with the hope that experiential learning shapes knowledge in different terms than those of traditional schooling. It is this important approach that *Open Words* foregrounds.

I have had the opportunity to collaborate with nonprofit organizations on service-learning projects. For example, two of my former students served as informal mentors to community youth participating in the San Anto Cultural Arts' (SACA) *El Placazo Community Newspaper* and Mentor Program. Located in the historically dominant Mexican American community of the Westside in San Antonio, Texas, the nonprofit organization seeks to "foster human + community development through community-based arts" ("Our Roots"). For National Poetry Month, my students held workshops on how to compose cinquain poems focusing on the themes of nature and sustainability. For the event, community youth employed the expressive genre of poetry within the Mexican oral tradition to encourage community dialogue about environmental sustainability (McDowell, Herrera Sobek, and Cortina 218).

In her service-learning journal, my student Naya describes the SACA's mentoring influence on community youth, specifically its role in providing them access to informal mentors from diverse sociocultural backgrounds and experiences. Naya appears to be thinking about cultural identity as well as the role of cultural arts organizations, such as the SACA, have in creating mentorships, suggesting that she sees the service-learning project as a cultural experience. In the following passage, Naya underscores her investment when she highlights that she has "become part of a close knit community which regards highly the act of mentoring students and helping them become part of their own academic community." It is through the cultural experience and how Naya views her role as a mentor that she becomes invested in helping community youth recognize that attending college can also be an option for them.

However, community-engaged projects, such as the one I described with SACA, may not create transformational learning experiences. While service-learning is considered a high impact practice in higher education (Kuh), it often fails in practice to produce transformational experiential learning, or the expected greater investment in cultivating students' sustained relationships with their community partners. When students understand the methodology and the purpose of service-learning, they may be more prepared to collaborate with their community partners and work toward

achieving the objectives set for their service-learning projects, a first step toward investment.

The March 2017 issue of *Open Words* highlights community-engaged pedagogy informed by experiential learning theory. By so doing, this issue hopes to encourage conversations about the ways in which such pedagogy may help first-generation college students persist in college.

This issue opens with a polemic from **Victor Villanueva**, Regents Professor and Director of The Writing Program at Washington State University. In "Of Communities and Collectivities," Villanueva points out the challenges of engaging in community work in a political economy and ideology that prioritizes individualism and competition. To address the problem of "universal othering," Villanueva explores the relationship between subjectivity and community, highlighting how we are all part of the "decentered subjectivities of the collectives." Drawing on the work of Brazilian sociologist José Maurício Domingues, Villanueva works through two central terms—"collective subjectivity" and "collective causality"—which in turn may help writing teachers deal with the double bind of working within and against an institution. This theory finds its way into Villanueva's classroom by way of an anecdote, a retelling of how a student seeks not only to give voice to his Christian beliefs despite how they might be regarded, but also to demonstrate a deep understanding of those conflicts. For a polemic, Villanueva's is a hopeful essay, particularly fitting for the contemporary challenges we face as writing teachers.

In "On the Cusp of Invisibility: Opportunities and Possibilities of Literacy Narratives Reflections," **Romeo Garcia** proposes a literacy narrative assignment that encourages students to reflect on literate and rhetorical practices as part of a *geo and body politics of knowledge*. To help students think about the ways in which the interaction of time and space shapes and rhetorical practices, Garcia offers a literacy mapping exercise, an example of community-engaged project. Students may choose to engage in ethnographic research (ethnographic interview or participant observation) in order to produce a microanalysis of the interaction of time, space, and literate and rhetorical practices in three to four of their discourse communities. Garcia opens his article with a literacy narrative in which he reflects on how his grandma positioned him in "a history and memory of survival, preservation and resiliency" through their conversations and their walks. He explains, "She was showing me the paths 'we've' walked together all along. Grandma, entiendo, I continue to listen at to know and learn. I've learned to speak back for 'we' are always on the cusp of invisibility and silence." Building on his literacy narrative, Romeo examines the potential of literacy narrative assignments to resist and reject invisibility and silence.

In "Your Voice is Your Weapon! Empowering Youth Through Community-Based Writing Workshops," **Robin D. Johnson, Kimberly Reinhardt, and Sarah Rafael Garcia** discuss the potential of the Barrio Writers Workshop model, which employs experiential learning to help urban youth of color reflect on their cultural identities. This approach culminates in counternarratives written by those youth that talk back, resist, and undermine hierarchical, normative narratives imposed on them by the dominant culture. Johnson, Reinhardt, and Garcia conducted an ethnographic study focusing on youth participants in South Texas. In 2009, Sarah Rafael Garcia founded Barrio Writers, a nonprofit reading and writing program. Barrio Writers holds week-long, college-level, creative writing workshops in California and in Texas, collaborating with higher education institutions and with cultural arts organizations. Johnson, Reinhardt, and Garcia provide an illustration of a community-engaged project that seeks to contribute to the public good of a diverse population by helping youth participants counter the negative self-conceptions that they may have internalized *and* use their own voices as weapons for creating transformative social identities.

In "Constructed Spaces and Transitory Decor: Georhetorical Practices as Experiential Learning in Rhetoric and Composition," **Chelsey Patterson** proposes a georhetorical pedagogy, drawing from the concepts of time, space, and experiential learning. Her pedagogical approach prompts students to analyze and evaluate the ways in which their identities are constructed within institutional settings, including classrooms, and within their larger communities. For example, Patterson's activity, "Mapping the Classroom," prompts students to interrogate the artificial space of the classroom that reinforces the power dynamics between students and the teacher, a representative of the institution. Students also reflect on how the artificial space of the classroom as seen in elements, such as traditional rows of desks, may also hinder meaningful collaboration with their peers and instead reinforce the ideology of competition in the classroom. The "Mapping the Classroom" is a geographically oriented activity that Patterson uses to help students reclaim the space of the classroom, a space in which they can take ownership over their writing and learning. She uses the activity to boost students' self-confidence in their writing as well as their self-perceived abilities to critique their peers' writing.

I have come a long way since earning my GED. I earned my Ph.D. from The University of Texas at San Antonio. In my dissertation, I analyzed the potential of community-engaged projects to create transformational experiential learning experiences, drawing from scholarship and from what I learned from coordinating a service-learning project with the San Anto Cultural Arts. I now teach writing courses

at Lone Star College-Kingwood. I believe that my personal educational experiences influenced my pedagogical choices, particularly when working with first-generation college students who are most in need of community-engaged pedagogy.

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About the Author

Kristina Gutierrez is an Associate Professor at Lone Star College-Kingwood, situated in a suburb of Houston. She received her Ph.D. in English from The University of Texas at San Antonio, where she specialized in rhetoric and composition and in Latin@ cultural studies. Her research interests include service-learning, visual rhetoric, and technical communication. Her book project thematically analyzes visual rhetoric in Latin@ communities, specifically visual rhetoric used in murals to document local histories and to advocate for social justice. She has presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, National Council of Teachers of English, Rhetoric Society of America, and the IEEE ProComm-International Professional Communication Conference. In the IEEE ProComm 2016 conference proceedings, she co-published**, "**How Do Voice to Text Apps Change the Act of Writing? Research on the Effects of Voice to Text Applications When Used as Part of the Writing Process" with Susan Garza and Frances Johnson**.** She had also taught full time at Texas A&M University at College Station and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Since moving to Kingwood, she has become a member of the nonprofit organization Houston Arts Alliance because of her interest in popular art, including murals.

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Of Communities and Collectivities

Victor Villanueva
Washington State University

Thoughts. I'll get to the classroom in a minute. But hear me out. I think that the political economy and the ideology that supports that political economy makes it hard for us to do community fully. The liberalism that has defined our society—and I mean classical liberalism—makes it difficult to think in terms of community, fully, truly. In part this difficulty is because at the heart of classical liberalism is individual rights, individual freedoms. We are individuals, equal. That's the ideology. When the economy is poured into the mix, it too is built on the premise of the individual in competition with other individuals—dogs eating dogs, rats racing. Now, look where this mix has taken us: the collectives we recognize are those who have been seen as excluded from the equality that is supposed to be at play: Black, Latino, LGBTQ+, and the like. And the result of that focus on the traditionally excluded is that those who once could assume a certain amount of power now also feel excluded and start to assert another kind of power. Within our profession, we have seen Whiteness Studies, for example. Its work is necessary and important, but it clearly comes as a response to identity politics. And in the political arena, we have seen the assertions of those whose identities are tied to class, the white working class or particularly American religious associations. The American subaltern spoke. So we go around bemoaning the lack of equity. Microaggressions. All groups now feeling more victim than power (with those in true power either silent or claiming associations with the disempowered). In our classrooms, we hear the grumbles of group work and hear the complaints from those who feel exploited—someone always complaining about having had to carry more than the fair share. It's hard to do community work when the very idea of the community is in flux.

It's a funny thing to realize the vastness of my Otherness at this age in life. I am an academic in an anti-intellectual society; a humanist in the world of science; a person of color, Latino, Puerto Rican, yet not of the Island, not even of my original New York any longer; working class in my head,

middle class in my newer economy. Could go on. And so my identity has to be uniquely my own; yet my identity has also to be the Othered—and not just because I am a person of color but because of what I do, how I spend my time and thought-energy. Strange. And somehow, then, the Othering itself has become a broader notion of the collective.

So where does this kind of universal othering take us? A couple of theoretical concerns and then a kind of simple pedagogy, basic, things we probably all do. But I am always of the mind that we do our pedagogies better when we understand the theoretical basis for those pedagogies. Good to know why, beyond it works or a now clichéd assertion about social constructions (as true as the cliché might be).

At the heart of my thinking of late has been the philosophy of subjectivity. It was a big deal when I started in this profession, but like many theories, it seems to have receded. Yet if the most powerful ideology of our society is individualism, then the philosophy or the psychology of individuation which is subjectivity has to be equally important, especially as we see the need for our collectivities to grow larger, stronger, a greater self-interest than self-interest. Subjectivity reminds us that the self is always a self that is tied to others. We know we are individuals, of course, wonderfully unique in so many ways, yet we are formed in relation to others, to common experiences, to community. Subjectivity looks to what makes me who I am and how I respond to or react within society. Now that gives rise to the question of how "I" become I. The only way we know, structuralists and post-structuralists alike remind us, is through language. It's the only way we can assess the Self. And this assessment is where Brazilian sociologist José Maurício Domingues comes in. He reminds us that the individual subject isn't always aware of the psychological influences in what we do. That is, the Self, is never truly known. We've all experienced extreme cases where we've asked ourselves "Why did I do that?" Domingues calls these moments of not knowing a "*decentering of the subject"* (Collective Subjectivity, 41). And the subject, the self, is decentered in that each of us is a product of the communities in which we are contained. But that also suggests, according to Anthony Giddens in *The Constitution of Society,* that society, its communities, must then be more than sum total of individuals. We are in part our communities; and our communities are only in part all of us.

So this understanding of community leads to what I think is important in a society that we're often told has become more fragmented than ever before. Domingues suggests that it's the very individualism that gets in the way of coming together, or at least of knowing where we are together. He argues for "subjective collectivity." In the same way that individuals affect the social and are affected by the social, so too do collectives influence other collectives and can be affected by them.

To understand how these collectivities come about, Domingues turns to Aristotle's four causes. Now, because our focus on Aristotle tends to be less about his *Physics* and more about his *Rhetoric*, we come to the four causes in rhetoric and comp by way of Kenneth Burke, the degree to which he incorporates the four causes within the scholastic questions to arrive at the pentad (*Grammar* 228), to which Ann Berthoff applies the four causes in *Forming, Thinking, Writing* to a lesson on how to create definitions. These applications make sense, of course, but Aristotle's aim was to get at the "why" of things, where "cause" would be better translated to "because"; that is, Aristotle's four causes are the four explanations of why things are or how they come to be. Now I belabor this explanation because to get at Domingues's "collective subjectivity" one must first work through "collective causality" (and why we're going through any of this theorizing will soon become clear).

Individuals are psychologically complex, affected by all sorts of stuff in the mind, some of which we are conscious, some not. Our subjectivity is necessarily decentered. There is no central, centered, "I" that we can tap. That is no less true for collectives. The collective subject is also decentered; that is, the collectivity may not be able to recognize itself, undergoing a different kind of decentering than individuals undergo. Like the psyche, "previous patterns of interaction and institutions, shared symbolic systems (although they are always idiosyncratically absorbed by actors), in short shared memories are an important influence upon actors [within a collective] and furnish patterns for their behavior" (Collective Subjectivity 42). The decentering of the collective is what Domingues terms a *conditioning causality*, akin to Aristotle's formal cause, because it constitutes a pattern (Collective Subjectivity 42). That is, when the collective acts, engages in an *active causality*, that activity is a transformed version of Aristotle's "final cause." The act itself becomes the goal. Black Lives Matter might march to make a point, but it is the visibility of the march that is the immediate goal. "Illegal aliens" who nevertheless make their presence known seek to highlight the need for immigration reform. The change in the current conditions might be the long-term goal, but the immediate purpose (or motive, in Burke's term) is in the visibility itself. And for a collective subjectivity to be realized, the collective must share memories. It is the shared memories, then, that help to establish the genre of a movement, the pattern or form—a conditioning causality "decisively contributing to shape social life" (Collective Subjectivity 42). In between these two causalities—the goal and the memories—there is, according to Domingues, *collective causality*. Just as in individual subjectivities there are unforeseen consequences and thereby a decentering, collectives must have different ways of centering, a more ambiguous or even amorphous

intentionality. They are multilayered interactions, though the greater the identity and organization of a system, the greater the centering.

Why is all of this theory important? Because those of us who seek to change the system while working within the system are caught in a bind—the amorality of bureaucracy (guided by rules, giving grades that make for individual competition, say) and the idealism of our work (and I always draw a distinction, sometimes minor, sometimes great, between my work and my job). Graduate students who first come to Freire inevitably ask if they are the oppressed or the oppressor. And the answer is "Yes." Both. But what if we see ourselves as members of collectives, not neatly balanced but not necessarily opposed? I am a traditional teacher within the collective that is the university. I am also a member of the Community of Color. They're not intentionally opposed (a difficult matter to explain to folks of color who find themselves the victims of the system; a difficult matter to explain to those in power with good intentions and outrageous ignorance—different subjectivities; difficult when I find myself teaching the Standard and opposing the Standard or arguing that Spanish is no less the language of the oppressor than English, just different oppressors historically). But there are possibilities within the decentered subjectivities of the collectivities of which we are a part.

Domingues demonstrates the workings of collective subjectivities by the one reliable collectivity he has at his disposal, the central collectivity of Marx and of Weber (Domingues is a sociologist, recall). But it's also the one that has recently displayed the greatest power—class (where the middle class in 2016 was trumped by the working class and the truly wealthy, classes who joined collectively, whether intentionally or not). Domingues begins with class, which he calls *antonomasia* (Latin America 85), a rhetorical term, the metonymic epithet that represents something larger and more complex. For Domingues, "class" is a metonymy for collective subjectivity (along with nation and state). Marx's hope or vision or prediction was that the class system would simplify, its many classes finally reduced to two: the bourgeoisie or owners of the means of production, the accumulators who accumulate for the overall purpose of further accumulation (as opposed to saving for the kids' college education or saving for retirement or even saving for those two weeks of vacation) and the proletariat, the workers, the wage earners. What this antonomasia signifies to Domingues is that if such a class simplification were the case, then the working class would be able to achieve "a very high level of centering—hence of intentionality" (Latin America 86). But he realizes that this possibility of nearly-centered working class is complicated because of the rise of the middle class, or in Weber's terms, the difference between the economic order and social status, which allows, for instance, for academics to live

in poverty yet enjoy a privileged status. Accordingly, Domingues turns to Nicos Poulantzas. Here's my own reading of Poulantzas, a reading which agrees with Domingues:

> Poulantzas–describes the middle class as a new petty bourgeoisie, a kind of update of Weber's contention that the proletariat would move more and more to a class that fills the space the petty bourgeoisie would leave behind. Or, better, that the petty bourgeoisie would be eaten up by bigger economic fish while the rise of bureaucracy would make for a new class of white-collar workers. What Poulantzas does with this is not to say that there is a class displacement but that the middle class joins with the petty bourgeoisie, given their similar ideological predispositions. For instance, the petty bourgeoisie and the middle class, says Poulantzas, display similarly firm beliefs in the sanctity of individualism, liberalism, rather than a collective sense. The middle, then, joins the petty bourgeoisie in disparaging workers because they are lazy, unwilling to pick themselves up by their bootstraps. Poulantzas also sees the middle class as occupying basically the same position as the petty bourgeoisie in the structure itself, a position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Both are structurally in the middle. (An Introduction 267)

But though Domingues places Erik Olin Wright in the same category as Poulantzas (reducing Wright to a "see also" in the footnote for Poulantzas), he seems to overlook how Wright argues that the class system is more a matrix than a simple hierarchy, that there are contradictions within the class system, so that one might be the working class and move up, yet it's not a move up at all, just a move within—that is, a different working class. But more important is his overlooking the Ehrenreichs, who coined the "Professional/Managerial Class," a term which seems to resonate in the United States. But here's what's most important: Domingues observes how Giddens, like Poulantzas and others, notes that "class awareness" is different from "class consciousness" (Latin America 88). That is, it is possible to have a collective subjectivity that does not carry a collective causality. There can be awareness without a clear direction for movement. And that lack of a clear direction, perhaps, is where we might walk in as teachers.

Chantal Mouffe makes the point that we, society, have always been fragmented, that there are always communities which see "opposing" communities. As such, she opposes consensus in a large political scale. John Trimbur long ago argued that the search for consensus in our classrooms would not serve all students

well. For both, the logic is simple, really: majority rule means minority silenced. But notice how profound that silencing becomes manifest when the numbers are nearly equal. Consider the 2016 election (not to discuss it, just what happens when collectives are neatly divided). 45% didn't bother to vote. Already we have a nearly equal divide The Silent Community v. The Voting Community. Of the Voting Community, 46% voted Republican; 48 % voted Democratic, the numbers so close that the Electoral College negated the popular vote. Half saw no reason to vote; and half of the remaining half were nearly equally divided. How was consensus possible? These were subjective collectivities, collective ideologies within the greater liberal ideology of individuals voting. But it was more a conflict among subjective collectivities, with one collective believing itself excluded except by the Republican candidate. While the Democrat vied for Women, People of Color, LGBTQ+, the white working class appeared to be excluded. Consensus among subjective collectivities was not attained, wasn't even sought. In the language of Kenneth Burke, we watched two collective divisions with no real attempt at rhetoric. Although rhetoric and composition tends to define Kenneth Burke in terms of identification, Burke is clear that where there is identification there is always division: "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division … [O]ne need not scrutinize the concept of 'identification' very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its ironic counterpart: division" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 22-3). It is in the interstices between identification and division that rhetoric lies. That is, if there is complete division, rhetoric will fail; if there is complete identification, rhetoric is unnecessary. Rhetoric is where we agree and disagree.

So, to the classroom. Although there is always a danger in identity politics, the danger of essentialism, the danger of singling particular students out, there is something that students take to when "collectivities" are named in class (as in "What are the communities you belong to?"). Students begin by wanting to belong to some community, some collective, that none other in the class belongs ("Upper Peninsular farmers" spoken in a class in the Pacific Northwest, the student having to define "the UP"). This is the need to assert uniqueness, an individualistic impulse. Push for commonalities—they're all Team Mascot ("We're all War Eagles," or Cougars, Huskies, Tide, whatever the school mascot is). More. The range astounds, as do the good- natured conflicts ("We're all Americans." Are you? "Well, in some sense." I never point to the international student(s). The class does that). We open up the possibilities of many collectives, great and small, breaking down the primacy of individualism. And in so doing we open up the possibilities for problem posing. Since I believe that writing and rhetoric courses should be concerned with writing and

rhetoric, I will eventually take the class to variations on language politics: translingualism, dialect, English Only laws, official bilingualism in Canada, etc. The class decides on the particular focus.

And the papers take over where the class discussion began. Having heard the various collectives to which the fellow students claim allegiance, each is asked to write about his and her principal community. How is it characterized? How is it like some of the others discussed in class? How different? Then group work, co-authoring. Two papers: on the subject at hand (say official bilingual nation-states); and on the points of agreement and disagreement. That is, consensus in terms of a silencing is not the goal. The goal is to rise above the self (to the degree to which that is possible), recognizing commonalities among communities, and realizing that agonisms nevertheless remain.

In very pragmatic terms, students come to recognize and articulate underlying assumptions. Aristotle's distinction between the dialectic and the enthymeme is precisely here, in the unstated assumption. Once that's articulated, we can work on the argument more than the ideology.

> *One student, for example, wrote about his professor, a good man, well intentioned, but falling outside the student's Christian beliefs (and many years later, stopped that professor on the road to introduce him to the student's wife). I (the "professor") might not have sympathized with the political implications of his views, but I could see in his papers a real understanding of those views and a real understanding of how another community might regard those views while nevertheless remaining true to his community.*

And what more can we hope for? In a Rogerian rhetoric, understanding is sufficient; a true conversion in one class paper is unrealistic. He had found points of identification *and* division. Good enough.

Our students are surely individuals, but like all individuals, they are tied to communities, to collectives. Some of those are, perhaps, unique given a particular context, but there will also be collectivities in common. The only way to engage without seeming to attack is to move beyond the individual onto the collectives in common and the divisions even within those identifications. Like every classroom strategy, there are failures and successes, but moving to a series of subjective collectivities has, in my experience, generated some great discussion and interesting papers, taking comfort both in our similarities and differences.

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About the Author

Victor Villanueva is Regents' Professor, Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor, the Director of The University Writing Program at Washington State University. He is the former editor of the Conference on College Composition and Communications' *Studies in Writing and Rhetoric*, the author of the award-winning *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, the 1999 Rhetorician of the Year, the 2008 Advancement of People of Color Leadership Award winner from the National Council of Teachers of English, and the CCCC 2009 Exemplar, among other awards and honors. In eight books, over fifty articles or chapters in books, and over a hundred talks, his work centers on the connections between language and racism.

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On the Cusp of Invisibility: Opportunities and Possibilities of Literacy Narratives

Romeo García, Ph.D.
Syracuse University

Reflections

2828 East Grimes was removed from Ona and Cora Street in Harlingen, Texas. My mom saw it as progress and a new opportunity. Yet, year after year, we barely made it. Jumping into dumpsters around the apartment complex to collect cans for money and watching our vehicle get repossessed was embarrassing. "Embarrassing is when you steal," mom would say. I was embarrassed, embarrassed by the fact that my mother had to be both my dad and mom. One of my first recollections of reading and writing was to a person I only knew through letters and pictures. "I want you to be better than me, stay in school and do good," he'd say. As a child I felt like I was seeing and experiencing the world differently. I worried that I could not be better than him as my mother herself barely had a high school diploma. "There is no manual for how to raise a child as a teenager," my single mom would tell me, as she tried to sooth my concerns. I turned to writing at a young age in an attempt to understand my situation. My friends and I teetered between what was and what could be, never without the overriding sense of knowing our place and knowing our differences. These differences for some of us would make all the difference between "what was" and "what could be." 2828 East Grimes may have been removed from the barrios, but we were not.

In her cocina I'd sit after school every weekday. "¿Como te fue en la escuela?" she'd ask, both out of concern and longing for a formal educational experience. When my grandma came to the U.S. from Xilitla, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, she was denied the opportunity. She didn't know how to read or write in Spanish or English. In fact, whenever a signature was required, she'd mark the line with an "x." Yet, on the mesa would be a tape recorder that would say words in Spanish and translate them into

English. When I'd get to the house, she'd practice with me, speaking in English, and I would practice with her, speaking in Spanish. On the mesa, as well, there would be evidence of her practicing the English alphabet, numbers, addresses, and her signature (See Figure 1)

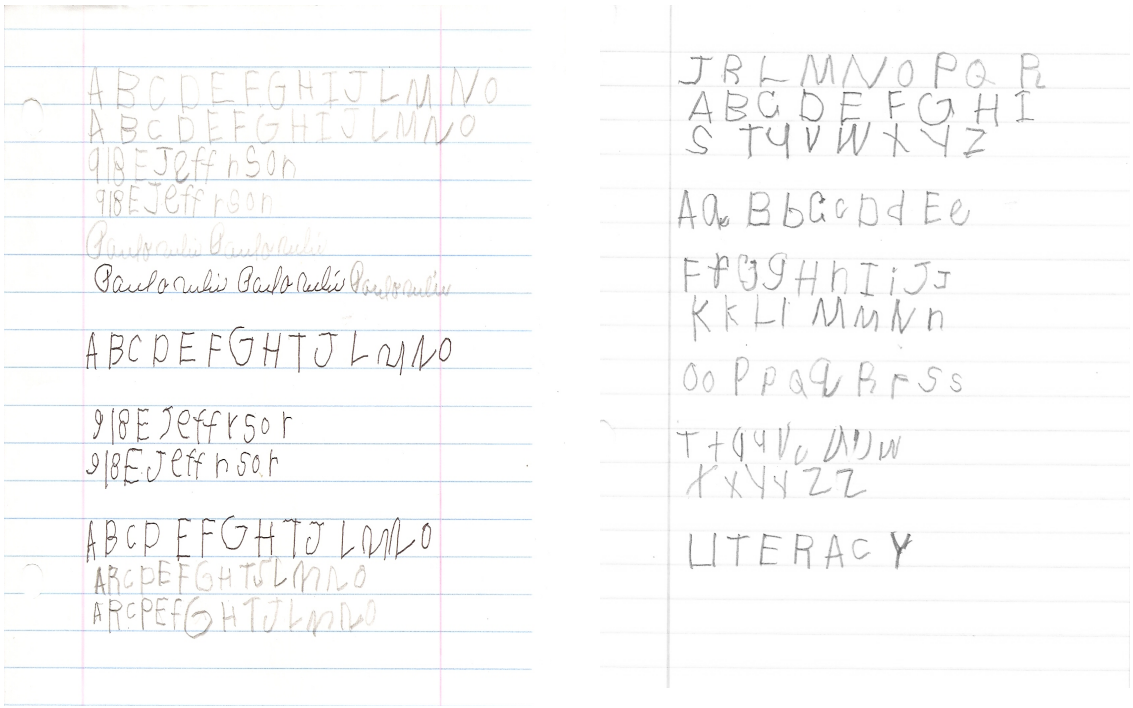


Figure 1: Grandma Practicing the Alphabet, Numbers, Addresses, and Signature

"Siéntate," she'd say as I entered the kitchen. This was platica, cuento, and testimonio time for us, which would eventually extend from the kitchen to walking. There were several important parts to our conversations: 1) she'd ask/say, "¿Entiendes?" 2) she'd say, "Te digo esto para que sepas y aprendes," and 3) she'd underscore all this by saying, "No te dejes." Then, we'd go for walks, sometimes to the mall, other times to go visit comadres. Our conversations were never just unintentional and our walks involved more than just the physicality of movement. My grandma was situating me in a history and memory of survival, preservation and resiliency. She was showing me the paths "we've" walked together all along. Grandma, entiendo, I continue to listen at to know and learn. I've learned to speak back for "we" are always on the cusp of invisibility and silence.

On the weekends, we'd head to Brownsville or Weslaco for la pulga. "Tengo botas, vestidos, zapatos," a man in the distance would yell out. The pulga had

everything from ropa to animales to food. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), la pulga was a space for our people and it is a place maintained for the benefit of our people. I was always curious of the white man who displayed confederacy memorabilia. He was one amongst many, pero nos dio un sentimiento malo. After the pulga, we'd head over to my tíos. I'd go to the backyard to "help" my tíos work on cars. There were life lessons to be learned with them too. "Mi'jo listen to the car." He'd lean back in and then out and ask if I could hear it. The first lesson—the capacious work involved in listening, well and deeply. "Mi'jo, eres inteligente. Pero, tienes que enseñarles que puedes abrí un libro y leerlo también." The second lesson is self-evident even in translation. What I knew then, and today, is that the series of events that have played out in my life to remind me of my otherness—the man selling confederacy memorabilia at la pulga, the agent at the Sarita, Texas checkpoint checking for my papers as I travelled to College Station, Texas, and the constant "checking" of my body in gringoland and gringodemia—is the consequence of whiteness. Whether in the majority (the LRGV) or the minority (higher education), I've internalized difference brought on by whiteness.

A couple of years ago, in a course taught by Chandra Mohanty, I had the opportunity to listen to and read Judy Rohrer's work. She writes:

> We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us, and the possibilities of new stories. I am these stories. I lived them or I inherited them, and they live vibrantly and turbulently in and around me. All stories are political; they involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences. (189)

This passage had an impact on me. It made me reflect. In graduate school, I opened up and read everything I could get my hands on pertaining to race, oppression, and resistance. Yet, my individual experiences, and the opportunities I've had to teach at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi and Syracuse University, have reminded me that theory does not and cannot account entirely for how people are shaped by historical and material conditions, how people are agents in the production of meaning in space-time. Today, I speak in the register of pedagogy and rhetoric. Before all this, my interest in praxis began in the intricate conversations with my family and community and my experiences of survival and resiliency. This is where my story began. Today, I focus on the plight of the Mexican American student. This is where my past meets the possibilities of "new stories." The import of "entiendes," "para que sepas y aprendes," and "no te dejes" stands across space and time because we remain on the cusp of invisibility. I return to the literacy narrative for its opportunities and possibilities.

I am aware of the critiques of literacy narratives. Ann Feldman in, *Making Writing Matter*, discusses how literacy narratives "embody contradictory rhetorical and generic aims" (101). I beg to differ—I will expand later—with Feldman on such matters. This contention does not weigh in on the discussion of modes of composing and genres, but on the opportunities and possibilities afforded in assigning literacy narratives. Literacy narratives can be about inhabiting space and place-making, recalling and memory-making, shaping and meaning-making, knowledge and community-making. In this dialogical and dialectical and residual and emergent experiential process of being and becoming, literacy narratives offer the possibility of representing and presenting epistemological practices as strategic methods of being, seeing, and doing. Through my teaching experiences, I have observed what literacy narratives can do for marginalized students. I am interested in re-imagining literacy narratives in the contexts of place, knowledge, and meaning-making, difference, and community-building in the classroom. In this article, I provide a review of literacy narratives and briefly re-imagine literacy narratives in pedagogy throughout.

Literacy Narratives as Potential Praxis

There is plenty of scholarship on literacy narratives. In this section, I review two pieces of scholarship pertaining to narrative and literacy narratives. In the first close reading, Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen focus on the elements of historical bodies and space, in place/out of place binaries, and rhetorical agents in the production of meaning. In the second reading, Mary Soliday situates the student body as text—as read, as accessed, and as performed and translated.

In, "Reading Literacy Narratives," Eldred and Mortensen write that literacy narratives offer a way into studying the social process of language acquisition and literacy. Their close reading of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* as a literacy narrative, and how it is constructed out of a "literacy myth," is interesting. Henry, a central character, is the educator, a "creator of something from nothing," invested in 'inventing new Eliza's' at the expense of Eliza's cultural and social displacement (515; 518). Eliza, the other central character, is the subject of Henry's obsession with control and power, a sponsor of literacy (Brandt 167-168) and a gate keeper, who "writes in a code intelligible to only a few" and who "inscribes language according to an exclusive standard in order to make it 'properly' readable and in order to represent its deviant qualities" (517). Eliza's vernacular body, language, and literacy are suspicious and seemingly empty of knowledge and meaning, at least from Henry's perspective. Eliza

is "caught between old and new selves" because of Henry, but eventually begins to contemplate at what expense (519).

The close reading illuminates several important factors about language acquisition and literacy. First, identity, language, literacy, and region (and place) are bound together. Yet, the question of "where to locate them" and what "to say about them" highlights the undertones of colonial tendencies of situating who/what is in place/out of place. Eldred and Mortensen write: "regions, like maps, describe space: they enclose homogeneity and thereby mark difference" (524). Second, language, literacy, and identity are shaped by space and time. Yet, the impact of spatial and temporal colonial difference reinforces literate/illiterate spaces just as they reinforce the absence of bodies or bodies present in objectified ways. Eldred and Mortensen write: "Henry believes in a primitive/civilized distinction…he is Culture, and Eliza that savage Other" (527). Stereotypes have affective value because they rely on "historical narratives about identities and human characteristics" (Wingard 21). Lastly, people are shaped by space and time, but they too are rhetorical agents in production of it. Reading literacy narratives, Eldred and Mortensen write, is to focus "on a battle over language" and "movement into multiple literacies" that "are rarely isolated, uncomplicated" (530). While language and literacy are in polylog with and intertextualized in histories and memories, I also believe Eliza's movement draws "attention to a relationship between time and space," where the corporeal body (and consciousness) and language are always becoming, created out of "purposively or habitually adding action elements" that helps define, renew, and/or redefine the self (Pennycook 140; "Social Reproduction" 12; 19).

In "Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives," Soliday states that literacy narratives are told in "ordinary people's conversations about their daily lives" (511). Her focus is on the "passages between language worlds," the "liminal crossings between worlds," and the possibility of literacy narratives as "sites of self-translations where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds" (511). Soliday believes literacy stories can offer a lens by which students view language as unusual. This approach, she contends, enables students not to see language as natural but as strange. She argues: "When they are able to evaluate their experiences from an interpretive perspective, authors achieve narrative agency by discovering that their experience is, in fact, interpretable" (512). The arch of Soliday's essay relies on this argument that student's stories matter, that they are interpretable, and that they provide the opportunity to explore and interpolate the interplay of their dialectic and deliberative performances. The latter offers the occasion for students to be in polylog with and intertexualized themselves in histories

and memories of language and literacy acquisition in and across the dialogues of other classmates' literacy stories. Soliday emphasizes how students are constitutively shaped by and shaping meaning.

Soliday believes that literacy narratives can be a site where students consider rhetorical choice and re-invention. She writes: "Stories of self-translation involve representing difference, and the representation of difference is at the core of today's struggles" (513). This belief not only applies to curriculum, but also to students' own struggles over the very meaning they participate in creating. For Soliday, literacy narratives offer a space for students to enter, evoke specific experiences, and render those experiences as socially and culturally shaped and produced. Essentially, making the common uncommon and the familiar strange. The disposition of looking to the past to understand the present and foresee a future anew ensures "a dialogical account of one's experience rather than a chronological report of verifiable events" from the "vantage point of a critical present" (514-515). To illuminate all this, Soliday focuses on two written texts by a student named Alisha. Alisha exhibits the performativity of languaging[1] across affective borders, edging and challenging "neutral truths" about language. Astonishingly, and what often is overlooked, is how students like Alisha make distinctions between hybridizing and assimilating language, between strategic approximation and assimilation. In negotiating the "complex demands of her cultural situation" (518), Alisha reveals how she is a multiply-situated subject, shaped by historical and material conditions, an engineer of negotiated languages and literacies, and a rhetorical agent in the production of place, knowledge, and meaning-making.

There are concerns regarding assigning literacy narratives. There is the reality that acquiring literacies and languages come with some kind of cultural and/or social sacrifice (Corkery 62). Are students prepared to come to terms with this sacrifice? There is the reality that some educators do not acknowledge difference in generative or productive ways. As a result, there can be both a "polarizing rhetoric of difference that turns on a reductive view of culture" (Soliday 522) and a "[d]evaluing of the historical and unresolved struggles of groups that have been traditionally underrepresented" (Gilyard 286). Are compositionists and rhetoricians, whether "right" or "left," able to "check" their agendas and acknowledge students desires and intentions with languages, literacies, identities, and education? For me, this is a matter of social and ethical responsibility.

[1].Merrill Swain writes that languaging is a "means to mediate cognition" and a "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (96; 98).

Concerning matters of social and ethical responsibility, I am reminded of students like myself from the LRGV. Yes, we embody and carry the legacies of spatial and temporal colonial difference and the import of a paradigm of rational knowledge (Fabian 78; Mignolo 470; Quijano 172). "The Mexican," a palimpsest of identity or archetypical inscription of racial symbols and myths, is a testament of this colonial legacy we embody and carry. "The inferior races are inferior," says Anibal Quijano, "because they are objects of study or of domination/exploitation/discrimination" (211). And, "[co]lonizing of differences by dominant groups," claims Henry Giroux, "is expressed and sustained through representations: in which the Other is seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of the Other is posited either as cynically problematic or ruthlessly denied" (103). So, it is on the matter of humanity, of social and ethical responsibility, that we owe it to students to work from the pedagogical situation of the composition classroom and utilize the constellative and epistemological legacies students embody and carry into it. By constellative, I mean the idea that we are of historical bodies that have traceable histories and geographies ("Towards a Politics of Mobility" 18). For a student of the LRGV, such constellative and epistemological legacies look differently.

Pa' los que saben, no passport is needed to get in or to leave the LRGV. Yet, an almost 100 mile geopolitical border at the south end and an almost parallel border of internal checkpoints at the north end perimeter the region. Before leaving the LRGV, a pass through the checkpoints is necessary to enter the interior parts of Texas. This restricted access is not about theory; this is about what the border/checkpoints mean and what effect they have on the physical body and psyche. There is a historical legacy behind the border/checkpoints. Arnoldo De Leon's study on Texas Mexicans reminds us: "What whites found in Texas…was that Mexicans were primitive beings who during a century of residence in Texas has failed to improve their status and environment" (12). This colonial logic was the occasion for colonization. But, checkpoints and borders are the effect of colonial management and control long after colonialism as an explicit political order is destroyed (Quijano 170). Places are "about relationships, about the place of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform" (Sheller and Urry 214). Place is also "produced through action and action is produced in place through a constant reiterative process" (*Place* 7). Students from the LRGV live within this juxtaposition of incoherencies.

If I gave the coordinates—26.1906° N, 97.6961° W—one could not gather from it a sense of the histories and mobilities and materialities that run through and make place possible. My question is this, is it socially and ethically responsible to assume all borderlands are created equal or deploy pre-commitments of pedagogical

resistance based on universal characteristics of students? Pa' los que saben, the people and culture of the LRGV continue to challenge English as the lingua franca, destabilize national historiography, and undermine colonial projects through body-graphical, geo-graphical, and mobile-graphical displays of expression. The local and regional history of the LRGV (and the South Texas region) has been acknowledged as a *Tejano Cultural Zone* where full assimilation has been resisted, despite colonial conditions (De Leon 78-79; Mejia 123; Arreola 7-9; 24). In this region, our ethnolinguistic identities promote "social cohesion and solidarity" ("Linguistic Contact Zones" 15). We must remember Mexican Americans have evolved in disparate ways (Munoz 9). So, on matters of humanity, place is a "meaningful component in human life" and it is struggled over and re-imagined in practical ways (*In Place/Out of Place* 51; 71). The stories we tell others of ourselves are those that indicate constellative epistemologies. The stories we tell of where we are from and going are those that indicate the emergent component of our being, seeing, and doing. The histories and materialities that run through the LRGV are reflective of a people adapting, rejecting, and/or transforming meaning. These are stories that we inherit, that surround us, that are stories of the politics of knowledge.

The potential of new stories becomes transformative in the reconciliation of memory, history, and trauma. In the LRGV, over 90% of the population are Mexican American—Cameron (+85%), Willacy (+87%), Hidalgo (+90%), and Starr (+95%). According to the United States Census Bureau, these counties have some of the highest poverty rates—Cameron (+35%), Willacy (+40%), Hidalgo (+35%), and Starr (+36%) compared to the U.S. (15%); some of the lowest high school graduation rates—Cameron (-63%), Willacy (-63%), Hidalgo (-63%), and Starr Count (-45%) compared to the U.S. (85%). Also, according to the Texas Center for Advancement of Literacy and Learning, above 40% of the population demonstrate "below" basic literacy skills—Cameron (+43%), Willacy (+40%), Hidalgo (+50), and Starr (+65%). I am not presenting these statistics to suggest anything but the legacies we embody and the challenges we face in the LRGV amidst designs meant to limit our economic, educational, and political visibility. The predicament of the Texas Mexican American is the disposition to colonial conditions. In the matter of literacy stories, I am reminded of its value as it ties literacy to epistemology and ontology, as it ties embodiment and performativity to composing from the body, and as it signifies the communication of "selves" to others that "involve power that has structural underpinnings and material consequences" (Rohrer 189). Literacy stories may not always be easy or comfortable to tell, but in providing students the opportunity to reconcile memories, histories, and lived experiences in narrative ways, the possibility of experiential learning is greater. Literacy narratives could mean all the difference for a student like me from the LRGV.

Literacy narratives are not created equally (Lindquist 180). To assume otherwise is propose the "everyday" is a given, by either conflating or erasing differences. I am interested in literacy narrative for its transformative possibilities, of encouraging students see and practice literacy, language, and identity in their everyday lives (Eldred 697; Tinberg 287; DeRosa 2-3). I am also interested in: how people organize experiences and memories "of human happening" in the form of narrative; how we view them as a "set of procedures for life making"; and how to locate them "to make them comprehensible" ("The Narrative Construction" 4; "Life as Narrative" 692; "Self Making" 72); how the dialectical relationships between individual, community, and society influence practice and social structures ("Social Reproduction" 9-12; "Place as Historically" 280-284); how a nexus of practice is connected to our historical bodies, spaces, and local histories that enable forms of social and cultural action that are tied to body-graphical, geo-graphical, and mobile-graphical expressions (Scollon and Scollon 14; Mignolo 460-461; "Towards a Politics of Mobility" 18-20); and, how writing provides the opportunities for social realities to be constructed in space and time, wherein "complex identity negotiations and discursive positions" (Hesford 149) can be recognized and wherein self, place, knowledge, and meaning-making can be told in literacy stories as a transformative process (see Royster 35; Williams 345; Berry 156). I am particularly interested in how these ideas affect our pedagogy for Mexican American students, specifically, the Texas Mexican Americans whose exigencies of preservation, survival, and resiliency heighten their awareness of social and cultural action.

Re-Imagining Literacy Narratives

> ***A reflection***: *It has been 13 years since I "crossed" that Sarita, Texas checkpoint into gringoland and gringodemia. I was conditionally admitted. I did not speak white, write white, or behave white enough. In their eyes, they just had to wait me out. I was destined to fail out. Today, I still have an accent. I am still prieto—the gardener, the wetback. But, I continue to enter white spaces and others never imagined by my family or myself. I still listen to corridos and norteño music. I still say "soy del Valle," I still carry the Valley with me because I am Valley no matter the distance. They continue to know little about my community and I continue to ensure we do not remain on the cusp of invisibility.*

In this section, I conclude with some final thoughts on re-imagining literacy narratives. First, I clarify my intentions and expectations for students in assigning literacy narratives. I consider models of sponsorship as well and one possible take to

compliment the assigning of a literacy narrative. Then, I offer some reflection on an IRB approved study that has motivated me to continue to assign the literacy narrative in my courses.

On Intentions and Expectations

I do not think of the literacy narrative as a "baby assignment." Because literacy narratives provide the space for students to situate the body as text—as located, read, accessed, and translated—it has implications well beyond the immediacy of a first assignment. In a lower division course that focuses on language and literacy, I typically begin with a discussion of lived experiences and then continue by reading a condensed version of my literacy narrative. I take this approach for multiple reasons; there is a degree of impact upon students when a person of color reads his critical interpretations of language, literacy, and rhetoric as bound to identity and region. I do not assign readings for the first week or so of the semester as students flesh out what I am asking of them. Essentially, I do not ask students to situate their language and literacy experiences under the principle of contact zones. While useful, contact zones simplify fixing rules and features in space and time. No. I am interested in the idea of friction (as a principle and analytic), not as a synonym for resistance, but as a consequence of encounters and interactions (Tsing 6) that leads to rhetorical re-invention and strategic choices.

My expectations are not for a narration of truth or presentation of authentic self, but for an exploration and critical interpretation of performativity of "selves," shaped by and shaping meaning. Alastair Pennycook writes, "The locality of language practices is not then a stage back-cloth against which language is used but is a space that is imagined and created. The landscape is not a canvas or a context but an integrative and invented environment" (141). In every environment, students can and do challenge its fixity, and when provided the opportunity, engage in re-invention. This re-invention makes possible, I'd argue, the making of the composition classroom as a place that fosters community building. It is also the locality of embodiments and performativity that I believe sheds insight into how Western values and systems can be destabilized. This approach makes possible more nuanced ways to think about making and practicing literacy and language as social and cultural action. As compositionists and rhetoricians we know language is not fixed and that language moves and changes according to rhetorical contexts, situations, and desired outcomes. But, just like "the everyday," the "body" is not a given in this movement. Yet, we indeed compose from our bodies. We need to foster an environment that enables

students to acknowledge this embodiment and possibility for its performativity onto pages. We need to provide spaces of composing that can help actualize it.

My pedagogical approach of listening and caring has so often worked around my grandmother's phrases, "¿entiendes?" "para que te acuerdas," and "para que sepas y aprendes." These are my models of sponsorship that help me talk about literacy narratives. Entiendes is both a declarative and an inquiry-based phrase. On the one hand, the entiendes is used to make sure that one understands what is being communicated; on the other hand, entiendes is used in a way that provides the opportunity to ask questions. Memory and participation are at the center of my pedagogical approaches. Whether students are writing about their families, community, and/or individual language and literacy experiences, "para que te acuerdas" involves more than just recalling and reflecting. At stake is the opportunity to transform the nexus of practice towards one's own ends. I believe that listening—para que sepas y aprendes—is a form of social and cultural action. I follow this listening up with "andale" moments. Andale has several meanings—go, way to go, or you got it—and I use it to convey encouragement and possibility in listening as to know and learn.

Literacy narratives offer students the opportunity to come to terms with the realities of our "everyday" lived experiences. I have and continue to question what it meant to be conditionally admitted into higher education, even as a soon-to-be faculty member at The University of Utah. Yet, I am using this opportunity to compose from my body, offering the possibility of social and cultural action through writing and rhetoric. I still do not speak white, write white, or behave white enough. Gringoland and gringodemia had and continues to have a way of reminding me of what I "lack." Then and now, I have had a critical awareness that cannot be wholly defined or described by theory because "this" is a politic of the flesh. As educators, we cannot dismiss this possibility and opportunity to work from the stories students embody who can and will narrate it if provided the space. My reflections in the introduction and now are not meant solely to implicate those in gringoland and gringodemia, but to build connections with others in academia in and across differences. That is the power of literacy stories—community and coalitional building.

Praxis: Time-Use Mapping

Literacy narratives are about space and place, but they also need to be about time and mobility and materiality, so this is my intervention. In the discipline, there is this consensus that language is on the move, but what about the body, and, how it moves

in space and time? Specifically, I am interested in the idea that places are "delineated by movement" and are "knots of stories" (Ingold 34; 41), as well as the idea that movement "is rarely just movement" because it "carries with it the burden of meaning" that is irreducible (*On the Move* 4-7). To see this idea into fruition, I describe a time-use mapping exercise. Students would be asked to consider three to four discourse communities in which they participate. The idea, similar to the concept of time-use diaries, is to document and yield a microanalysis of literacy practices as they occur in various forms of exchanges and interactions in space and time (Lundquist et al. 209; 221). I imagine students might produce both digital and hard copy documents. Students are asked to triangulate language and literacy practices: first, by mapping them out with images; second, by tagging the rhetorical context and situation in spaces and times; and third, by considering what rhetorical choices and performativity was necessitated in those spaces and times. Students, thus, would not only think about language on the move, but also consider their socio-cultural and political bodies on the move, carrying and performing meaning. Literacy narratives are stories becoming of social and cultural action—we are descendants of stories—but stories do not stay fixed in one location. Pennycook writes: "focus on movement takes us away from space being only about location, and instead draws attention to a relationship between time and space, to emergence, to a subject in process—performed rather preformed—to becoming" (140). From the cocina that my grandma and I spoke into these pages, I have composed; I am an agent in production of space and time. This type of agency is possible for students if they are provided the opportunity to see their place, knowledge, and meaning-making practices as viable options for strategic negotiations. In this way, we can increase geo-graphical, body-graphical, and material-graphical visibility. This is possible by making space and time, together, a focus of analysis.

Conclusion

I am not inclined to believe that students are not aware of their social material world or that they are in need of consciousness-raising. Also, in the years that I have assigned the literacy narrative, no student has asked for a grade he or she did not earn. Perhaps, this reflects teaching styles, or the students being taught. Nonetheless, both students and I have learned, year after year, of the importance of telling and circulating our literacy stories. I conclude this article by reflecting on a 2015 IRB approved study I conducted in the LRV at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). In 2016, UTRGV's Strategic Analysis and Institutional Reporting (SAIR) office reported it had a headcount enrollment of 27,560 students. Almost 90% of the student

enrollment was Hispanic students and almost 93% of students were from the LRGV—Cameron (27%), Willacy (.5%), Hidalgo (61%), and Star (3.2%). I observed two first-year composition courses, conducted interviews, collected surveys, and held two group sessions. The students I worked with taught me that students are makers of place, shapers of subjectivities, and engineers of negotiated linguistic and literate practices. Below, I share some highlights from my research for the purpose of showing the possibilities of working from student's lived experiences with languages and literacies.

> *Scene 1*: On my first day of classroom observations, the following played out:
>
> [At one table]: ¿*Como se escribe…?*
>
> *Be*| *a*| *de*| *erre*| *e*| *a.* [Naming the letters in Spanish, another student at the table spells out the character name]
>
> *Thank you.*
>
> *De nada.*
>
> [At the middle of the room]: *Mándame, tenemos que hacer everything, mam*?
>
> [At another table]: *Badrea era*…[The student pauses and asks aloud] *Como se dice*?
>
> [Group members respond] *of the majority.*
>
> [The student says to herself and others] *Como que no—la mayoria.* [Processing in English and Spanish, the student writes in the notebook a sentence in English with side notes in Spanish]

In this bilingual scene, students' languages move with facility and assurance. Such students engaged in code switching scenes with phatic conversational fillers (pos, pues, etc.). But, notice, in this scene, the processes of linguistic partnering. It is much more than "pos" or "pues." At the center of this scene are student's decisions to construct discourse, to create meaning in ways they desire, and to represent intentionally that meaning by layering Spanish with English.

Scene 2: In talking with a student, Andrea, I asked her why she chose to write a sentence in English and add side notes in Spanish. Andrea explains:

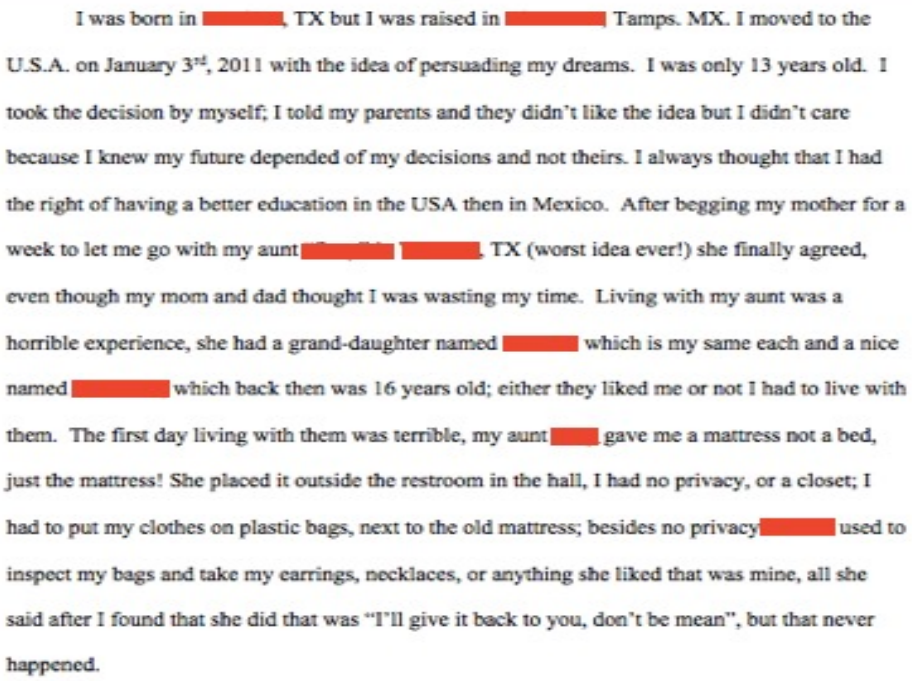
> When I think about things, I do it unconsciously in Spanish, because that is my first language…Sometimes I have to remind myself that I also need to think in English. But, still, I write side notes in Spanish, because some things just do not translate in English. If I write something in Spanish, it helps me remember what I was thinking about at the time more clearly.

Assimilation is not Andrea's primary goal. Students like Andrea share similarities with non-traditional and ESL students, but they do "fit neither the traditional ESL nor non-traditional student definition" (Newman 44). Here, Andrea is reconstructing note taking, and essentially the classroom, through bilingual negotiations. Andrea is also spatially and temporally aware. She describes:

> At my grandparent's house, we all speak Spanish due to my grandma only understanding that language. My cousins and I speak to each other both in English and Spanish and sometimes even Spanglish. My friends vary, some speak only English, others speak only Spanish, but most of them speak both languages and very well.

Andrea, like the other students I interviewed, knew when and where they used Spanish and English. In our interviews and group sessions, students talked about the movement of language across physical and metaphorical linguistic crossings, the role sponsors of literacies played, and the importance of being bilingual in the LRGV. There was not one student was unaware of these aspects of language and literacies.

Scene 3: In conversations with another student, Abrienda, I recognized clearly that she had an understanding of her politic of flesh. She displayed this understanding in her first writing assignment for the class she was enrolled in.



I was born in [redacted], TX but I was raised in [redacted] Tamps. MX. I moved to the U.S.A. on January 3rd, 2011 with the idea of persuading my dreams. I was only 13 years old. I took the decision by myself; I told my parents and they didn't like the idea but I didn't care because I knew my future depended of my decisions and not theirs. I always thought that I had the right of having a better education in the USA then in Mexico. After begging my mother for a week to let me go with my aunt [redacted] TX (worst idea ever!) she finally agreed, even though my mom and dad thought I was wasting my time. Living with my aunt was a horrible experience, she had a grand-daughter named [redacted] which is my same each and a nice named [redacted] which back then was 16 years old; either they liked me or not I had to live with them. The first day living with them was terrible, my aunt [redacted] gave me a mattress not a bed, just the mattress! She placed it outside the restroom in the hall, I had no privacy, or a closet; I had to put my clothes on plastic bags, next to the old mattress; besides no privacy [redacted] used to inspect my bags and take my earrings, necklaces, or anything she liked that was mine, all she said after I found that she did that was "I'll give it back to you, don't be mean", but that never happened.

Figure 2: A Sample of Abrienda's Writing

Abrienda states in her interview, "No quero parar…everyone has their own expectations for me, but I have my own too." This statement mirrors the language in her assignment. Abrienda moved back to the U.S. because she wanted to pursue her dreams of an education in the U.S. This choice was against her parent's wishes. Abrienda would struggle from this point onward. Abrienda's essay demonstrates clearly she is writing from her bodily experiences and ultimately using her experiences to make herself heard and visible.

There was at least one thematic thread that connected students like Abrienda in the study. For all, there was no real expectation for them to either pursue or succeed higher education. Each student internalized this expectation. Thus, they remain on the cusp of invisibility. Yet, they will continue to pursue higher education out of a desire to achieve more than what their parents did with the intention of giving back to their family's and community. While Abrienda's essay does not initially mention language or literacy, the construction of self-making and world-making is evidenced with the experiences she chooses to present. Imagine the possibilities if Abrienda was provided the opportunity to explore herself in relation to literacy and language.

I walked the halls of UTRGV every morning for a semester. Every corner I walked, I heard students in dialogue, using Spanish, or Spanish and English, but never solely in English. This bilingualism says something about the LRGV and the capacity of students to make place out of their knowledge and meaning-making practices in institutional spaces. The students I worked with are aware of their social and material environment, of how contingent and situational their ethos and meaning-making practices are, and how they were creating new trajectories. I believe the students in the halls are as well. The literacy narratives I have collected differ; they matter; and they open up opportunities and possibilities. Many of the interviews and group sessions with students were focused on being heard and seen. The students in the hallways everyday were making themselves heard and seen. The idea of "on the cusp of invisibility" emerged from these conversations with students who shared their stories of being silenced or made to feel invisible by "white people" or not having experienced critical conversations of Mexican Americans in the LRGV within classrooms. As educators, we are implicated in this way, to develop pedagogies and curricula that do not silence or make students feel invisible.

For students like me whose languages, literacies, and access are denied, literacy narratives matter. What is scalable in literacy narratives is human practice that is in polylog with and intertextualized in histories, memories, and stories. Literacy narratives ask students to wrestle with ideas of being and knowing and doing and becoming, of translating and shuffling between selves, through language and literacy

differences. I learned and experienced this transformation with my grandma in her cocina and on our walks. Her stories situated me within histories and memories and today I participate in meaning-and-memory-making practices that keep those words of my grandma—"entiendes," "para que sepas y aprendes," and "no te dejes"—alive and a viable strategy for agency and social and cultural action. Literacy narratives require students to interpret and communicate those experiences within an appropriate genre and with a strategic stance, and to develop a form and style of narrative that is suitable for potential audiences. What the rhetoric of literacy narratives occasions is listening, well and deeply, para que sepas y aprendes.

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About the Author

Romeo Garcia is a Ph.D. candidate at Syracuse University. He is a native of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. His research interests include: cultural rhetorics and literacies, mobility studies, and qualitative and quantitative research methods and methodologies. Romeo recently accepted a position in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies at The University of Utah.

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Your Voice is Your Weapon! Empowering Youth Through Community-Based Writing Workshops

Robin D. Johnson, Ed.D.
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi

Kimberly S. Reinhardt, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi

Sarah Rafael Garcia, M.F.A.
Founder of Barrio Writers

ABSTRACT

The Barrio Writers (BW) program bridges community and classroom by empowering teens through creative writing, higher education, and cultural arts workshops, embedded in rich urban communities. The resulting counternarratives, which dispel normative narratives associated with underserved, underrepresented urban youth, celebrate the Barrio Writers program theme, "Your Voice is Your Weapon!" The study reveals the experiences of underserved, underrepresented youth as they challenged the hierarchical, normative social identity connected with them. Themes associated with their experiences included the development of voice, the cultivation of their social identity, and the celebration of cultural pride. Implications focus on the use of this model to serve disempowered youth.

Keywords: counternarratives, culturally disadvantaged youth, experiential learning, diversity

> Imagine if you got published at fifteen. What would you have gotten out of the experience in the long run? I would have learned to believe in myself before I could fathom the idea of applying to a university, before I could believe I am capable of creating change in society, before I acknowledged my fear to attempt higher education—I thought being Mexican-American meant I would never be able to afford it or be as successful as a white person. As a writer and educator of color, I still struggle with such stereotype threats and have met many youth who feel the same.
>
> - Sarah Rafael Garcia, Founder of Barrio Writers

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Barrio Writers (BW) is a non-profit reading and writing, out-of-school program founded by Sarah Rafael Garcia in Santa Ana, California in 2009. By offering college-like writing workshops to students in underserved urban communities, Garcia (2016) writes that the program aims to create a bridge between community and classroom, empowering teens through creative writing, higher education, and cultural arts. During BW, student participants engage in workshops to build skills in reading, grammar, creative writing, critical thinking and freedom of expression through cultural arts. The resulting counternarratives, which dispel the normative, hierarchical narratives associated with underserved, underrepresented urban youth, celebrate the Barrio Writers theme highlighted in Garcia's work, "Your Voice is Your Weapon!" (p. 3). The workshop includes celebrated authors and community advocates, who serve as role models in our urban neighborhoods and support youth aspirations.

Barrio Writers uses one's cultural and ethnic influences not to stereotype the learner, but to empower disenfranchised students by asking them to explore the connection between classroom learning and their own communities. The BW program thrives through its community collaboration. The students who participate in the workshop are drawn from schools in the local community; they engage in diverse activities that present alternative forms of expression and experiences to build their social identity through local cultural arts and community resources situated in the surrounding urban community. The culminating activity is a live reading, in which Barrio Writers student participants present their counternarratives, through their writings, to the community, parents, and other stakeholders. This culminating event includes a roses-and-thorns segment, where the students articulate the best and the worst part of their Barrio Writers experience. BW student participants' final texts are included in an anthology, published yearly, titled *Barrio Writers*. One of the primary goals of the anthology is to spotlight the student participants' counternarratives, which represent the diverse backgrounds of teenagers and validates their experiences (Garcia, 2016). The anthology provides a window into the lives of the BW student participants that can help those involved in community engaged pedagogy strengthen their learning goals and outcomes for programs they initiate between schools and community partnerships.

This study examined how the empowerment of youths' voices in a Barrio Writers program workshop affected the expression of their voice as a weapon revealing social justice issues meaningful to the students.

The following research questions were studied:

- What are the experiences of underserved, underrepresented youth participating in the Barrio Writers workshop?

- How is the social identity developed in the Barrio Writers community reflective of the empowerment of expression of voice in participants' writing?
- How do the cultural texts presented in the Barrio Writers workshop inspire the development of counternarratives that address the marginalization of underserved, underrepresented youth?

Emihovich (2005) states that we can "no longer afford to live with the comforting illusion that we act upon the world in socially just ways simply by inscribing and cataloguing the many cases in which justice is absent, or that we give 'voice' to others by writing in our voice about their lives" (p. 306). Through developing and sharing narratives that counter the deficit perspective that underserved, underrepresented urban youth face, the BW student participants access cultural and aspirational capital defined here as the forms of knowledge that embody the power to enable social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986).

Deficit Perspective, Social Capital, and Experiential Learning

The traditional portrayal in the hierarchical normative narrative that youth from an underserved, underrepresented community face is rooted in a deficit perspective. This perspective asserts that students enter school without the cultural knowledge and skills necessary to be successful students and that their parents are not involved or concerned with their learners' academic performance or aspirations (Yosso, 2005). Yet, these students bring a vast fund of knowledge with them as they enter school (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), which informs their education experience, and through developing their voices, students can gain valuable capital that counters this deficit perspective. Countering a deficit approach is crucial because youth deserve to be exposed to the resources and knowledge necessary to access and navigate the world beyond which they live.

The empowerment of underserved, underrepresented urban youth is broadly connected to the development of their social capital. This social capital must extend beyond the *familia* to include other non-family adult agents who can serve as "institutional agents" (Mwangi, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). An institutional agent, defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011), maintains "one or more hierarchical positions within a society or an institution...position of status and of authority and managing and accessing highly valued resources, exercising key forms or power and mobilizing his or her reputation in a purposive action" (p. 1075). Access to such agents, like teachers, counselors, and university faculty, expands a student's social capital by

providing knowledge and understanding as well as exposure to resources previously beyond that student's cultural domain. The institutional agents "have a range and level of involvement in students' lives that can help open or close doors to college options and pathways" (Mwangi, 2015).

An important factor contributing to the development of what Yosso (2005) terms as aspirational capital is the development of a social identity that is not only critically conscious (Freire, 2000), but also views oneself as a college student (Mwangi, 2015). This aspirational capital persists when institutional agents engage in the purposeful action toward the empowerment of the youth. The capital fosters interactions which create a lasting relationship with students that offers opportunities to be challenged by new cultural experiences.

This identity is further developed within the experiential learning that the institutional agents engage in with the youth. Kolb (1983) theorized that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In fact, the primary component of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is student experience (Ewing, Clark, & Threeton, 2014). For this reason, ELT complements John Dewey's work in schools and civil society and is situated in Constructivism (Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Threeton, Walter, Clark & Ewing, 2011). Dewey believed that students learned through an experiential education where they could interact with the curriculum, known as learning by doing (Dewey, 1916). In Constructivism, knowledge is built upon the student's past experiences, existing knowledge, and mental organization through the reflection of the student's interaction with others and active participation in environments and activities ("Learning Theories and Student Engagement," 2014). Learning through experience ensures opportunity for knowledge to transfer across many conditions and circumstances to promote lifelong learning (Kolb, 1983). Additionally, the skills mastered through ELT are necessary components of workforce competencies needed to participate and compete in the ever-changing job market as well as become productive community members (Threeton, Walter, Clark & Ewing, 2011). Examples of competencies include leadership, decision-making, cooperation, presenting, creating, adapting, and organizing (Barton, 2012; Spence & McDonald, 2015). The valuable skills and knowledge formed within the Barrio Writers program, where experiential learning is the centerpiece, allow the student participants to further define their social identity through the transformative practices developed as a community of learners.

Connection of Community and Cultural Resources

A key component of the Barrio Writers program is to hold the week-long activities within the community from which the students are members. By having a location close to where BW student participants live and go to school, organizers anticipate they can learn from leaders in their community, be exposed to the resources available to them, and feel comfortable attending both intellectual and cultural programs scheduled there throughout the year. Although there are chapters across California and Texas, for the chapter in South Texas, the Antonio E. Garcia Arts and Education Center served as the workshop's venue. Established in 1993, the Garcia Center is committed to serving and celebrating families in an urban South Texas community. Through the center's programming, local families receive a vital contribution to the education and health provided to a community that is acutely susceptible to health risks and low educational attainment ("About Us," n.d.). Situating the Barrio Writers workshop at the Garcia Center enriches the already vibrant programs that include cultural celebrations, art installations, tutoring, health and wellness classes, literacy enrichment, counseling and parenting classes, and other after school programming. Since the Garcia Center's programs have historically targeted elementary age students and their parents, conducting the Barrio Writers workshop and live reading there could lead to future programs and workshops being implemented for older youth and their parents.

Barrio Writers Workshop

The Barrio Writers (BW) pedagogy, established by Garcia (2016), "integrates reading, writing, critical thinking, and freedom of expression while cultivating diversity, community building and presentation skills" (p. 1). The workshop is open to all youth, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural background, between the ages of 13 to 21 years. Situating the workshop in underserved communities helps ensure the youth are representative of the culturally rich urban landscape. Barrio Writers consists of a five-day, college-like workshop, culminating in a live reading on Saturday. Garcia writes, "Although the Barrio Writers pedagogy solely integrates readings written by writers of color, the level of impact these cultural texts make rely significantly in the delivery of the curriculum" (p. 1).

As an educational model developed by Garcia (2016), the Barrio Writers program "teaches the importance of writing counternarratives that include cultural pride" (p.3). Barrio Writers encourages youth to use their own words and voices: Your

voice is your weapon! One of the goals of the Barrio Writers program is "to build a community through reciprocity by empowering each other" (p. 3). Aligned with the teaching methods of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) and bell hooks' "decolonization of ways of knowing" (hooks, 2003), the Barrio Writers program guides youth toward freedom of expression that is not governed by the strict rules found in the context of most academic settings. Garcia (2016) writes of the connection between the Barrio Writers pedagogy and its overlap with the work of sociologist Claude M. Steele in challenging stereotype threats. BW relates to what educator Marc Lamont Hill defines as Hip-Hop pedagogy by empowering youth to express themselves through their own rhetoric, which promotes knowledge production outside of formal schooling contexts (Steele, 2011; Hill, 2009).

While the pedagogy follows a workshop format that is common across all the chapters, the writing advisors of the South Texas Barrio Writers chapter, who delivered the workshop, determined the content in Table 1. The themes and activities drawn from the cultural texts are a collection of writings that are not representative of a school curriculum but represent counternarratives intended to inspire the participants of the Barrio Writers workshop to explore their own voices. To create a community of participants, the Barrio Writers program seeks to deconstruct stereotype threats and explore how to change society's view of teens through readings of authors who have fought to share their experiences.

The writing advisors and the guest author, Diana Lopez, presented these texts to the student participants. With these texts as a foundation, writing activities and free writing offered a rich knowledge base for the students to develop their identity and connect with others who, like themselves, struggle in a world that views them from a deficit perspective.

Table 1: Cultural Texts and Resources Used for Barrio Writer's Workshop, 2016

Theme	Cultural Text	Author	Writing Activity
Deconstructing Oppression	"My Mother's English" *Booked* "Because the Animal Has Always Been Human To Me"	Amy Tan Kwame Alexander Malcolm Friend	Free Writing: Throw Up On Paper!
Cultivating Diversity	*The House on Mango Street*	Sandra Cisneros	Prewriting: Blueprinting
Using All Language in Writing	excerpt from Evita Video: Selena - Mini Biography Video Video: Hamilton - A Founding Father Takes to the Stage	Evita Selena Hamilton	Free write about the power of language
Relating to Youth: Perspective & Representation	*On*	Bob Kaufman	Thoughts, Feelings, Memories
Culture & Identity/Art-Writing	*To Live in the Borderlands*	Gloria Anzaldua	Free writing on identity
Infusing Culture & Identity into Writing	"Put Attention" "How I put Myself Through School"	Lori Ann Guerrero	Shell Narrative Group Activity
Opportunity: Surviving or Thriving?	*Nothing Up My Sleeve*	Diana Lopez	Revision: The Adverb is Not Your Friend

Methodology

The design for this ethnographic study seeks to understand the range of experiences of underserved youth participating in a culturally responsive reading and writing workshop in South Texas. During the week-long summer Barrio Writers workshop, the research team served as institutional agents who observed and facilitated the writing workshops. The research team also collected field notes to capture the nuances of the activities and recorded various group as well as one-to-one dialogues. The BW workshop resulted in numerous student-authored pieces of writing, which we examined along with student survey data. This research seeks to understand the participants' perceptions of self, development of social identity, and expression of voice.

Participants

The convenience sample, which utilizes a readily available population, was drawn from the youth who volunteered to engage in the workshop, and while there were no exclusion criteria, participation was determined by parental consent and student assent to participate. All students and their parents consented to participation in the research related to the Barrio Writers workshop. The students were recruited by the research team through information sessions held at the local high school and middle school close to the Garcia Center.

The participants were between the ages of 13-17. Eleven of the participants (N=13) indicated their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino/Chicano; of the other two, one chose not to identify himself and the other identified as white. There were nine female and four male participants. Pseudonyms are used for all participants in this study. The convenience sample was suited for this study as the researchers sought to understand the group characteristics and behaviors through the cultural beliefs, practices and social behavior that were evident throughout the workshop.

Data Collection

The collection of data was embedded as part of the structure of the Barrio Writers workshop. Each of the participants completed a pre- and post-workshop survey that was part of the Barrio Writers curriculum, which established their view of writing and the experiences they have had in school settings as writers. Throughout the workshop, the writing advisors recorded the students as they shared their writing and participated

in Cafe Hours, which was a time at the end of each day's workshop when the participants met one-to-one with the writing advisors. Each participant was required to attend at least one Cafe Hour. In addition, the writing advisors, interacted with students in writing through the daily journals that were a part of the syllabus. Student journals were regularly collected and photocopied during the writing workshop. The Barrio Writers workshop's culminating event included the production of a polished piece of writing by the participants, which was presented at public reading as the final interaction for the workshop. This final piece was submitted for publication in the *Barrio Writers Anthology*. As a follow-up to the workshop, each participant was asked, via email, to share a final reflection on their personal roses-and-thorns experience in the Barrio Writers workshop. Reflections on roses-and-thorns were a regular engagement throughout the workshop that allowed participants to reflect and connect with their own feelings of empowerment, community, and sometimes emotional confusion through the transformative workshop.

Data Analysis

We began our analysis with a research meeting to discuss the observed experience of the week-long workshop. During this meeting, we sought to draw connections between the interactions with the participants, both in conversation and in writings, while noting the impact observed on their social identity, development of a counternarrative voice, and the connection to college knowledge for this underserved population. Triangulation of our analysis and member check was conducted with the director of the Garcia Center since she was not part of the research team, yet present during the workshop. She shared her observations of interactions and the live reading. While identifying patterns in the Barrio Writers student participants' works, the research team connected the individual student's responses from the pre- and post-survey with field notes and the final writing products selected by the youth for publication.

Findings

In contrast to what the selected youth in this BW article stated about their perception of others outside their community, the student participants' final writing reflected hope, pride, and a desire to be bigger than the stereotype of their lived experience. During the BW workshop, cultural texts were infused with cultural arts to broaden the student participants' experience and connect them to not only the institutional agents,

but also the community and the university.

Experiences of Barrio Writers

The experiences across the week supported and challenged the student participants, helping them grow and develop new relationships with others outside their cultural group who might serve as role models. Their recognition of themselves as agents of change and their voices as weapons provoked new feelings and perceptions. Jenessa shared, "I was so worried about the reading because my family has never seen that side of me and it was both relieving and embarrassing afterwards." This statement was reflective of many of the student participants, ten of whom indicated on the survey that they had "very little experience" speaking in public.

The BW workshop offered exposure to key forms of power that are held by the writing advisors who delivered the workshop. Student participants found such an influence profound. One student participant shared this exposure as a highlight of the workshop stating, "Being able to speak with so many talented writers was definitely my rose. ... I wish there were more programs like Barrio Writers because in this world art isn't always taken as seriously as science." The student participants realized, by the end of the workshop, the shift in their social identities toward something bigger, "as the youth can change the community just through paper and pen." This experiential learning workshop fostered the growth of a more critical consciousness and fueled the desire to write narratives that reflected their true self instead of the stereotype that was imposed on them.

Social Identity and Finding a Voice

The cultivation of social identity was an intended outcome of the South Texas BW workshop and served as a central theme for the analysis of the Barrio Writers experience. For many of the participants, this workshop was the first time during which they felt empowered to share thoughts and emotions that were not predetermined by the cultural norms of school and society. The BW workshop began on the first day with an exploration led by Sarah Rafael Garcia, asking student participants to discuss who they felt they were expected to be as teens in today's society. In figure 1, the words they used to describe themselves were overwhelmingly negative including, "misunderstood," "trouble" and "immature." On the last day, students were introduced to the workshop's overarching theme, #yourvoiceisyourweapon, wherein they were encouraged to use as a way to tag their

ideas and feelings about the workshop on social media. With the writing advisor's guidance, participants revisited stereotype threats (i.e. gangs, not smart, criminals) from day one by redefining terms associated with Barrio Writers. The outcomes consistently include positive terms (i.e. community, leaders, poets).

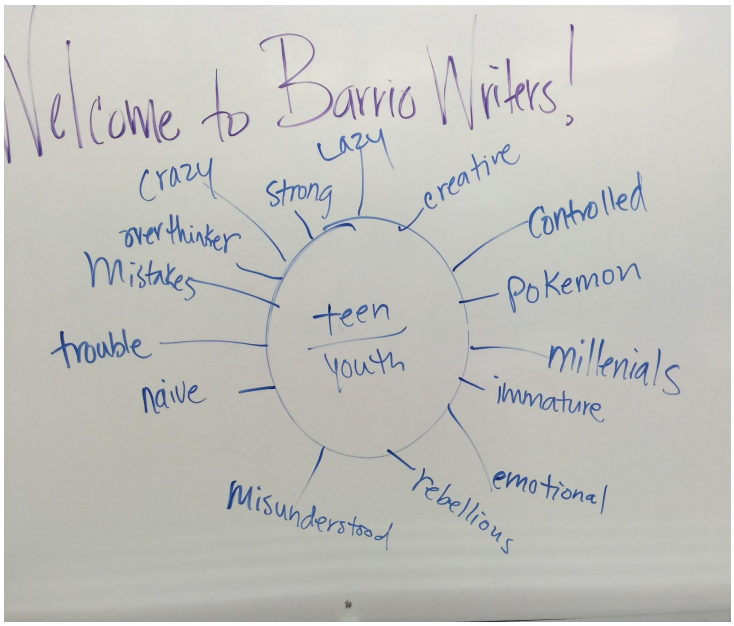

Figure 1: Barrio Writers Impression of Self

On the first day of the workshop, the Barrio Writers were challenged to deconstruct the oppression they face in their daily lives and to instead celebrate and embrace their own diversity. In order to start the growth toward owning their own voice, the participants needed to come face-to-face with how they have been affected by the discrimination that they may not yet recognize consciously. One participant shared,

> I think my favorite piece we read would have to be "My Mother's English". It was our first piece but it really set the tone of the rest of the week. I never experienced that situation but it was something my mother experienced, something I saw my friends experience. The feeling of color and culture being a barrier from the rest society, something I experience now in college. The piece tore open that anxiety minorities often feel in places apart from our communities and it was important to know we are not alone in that.

This recognition of barriers placed on the student participants by society was also evident in the poem, *Past Diversity*, by Ariella, a teen who describes herself as being "viewed as Odd." Her writing focused on her experiences with cultural, familial, and economic diversity, yet asserts from the first verse, that as a minority, she has not succumbed to the prescription of "pain, sorrow and hard times" that are ascribed to youth from her background. As a foster child who was bounced between her own Latino family and that of her middle-class white foster parents, Ariella maintained a defiant attitude in her writing of her diversity. She identified herself through a deficit lens, but she claimed her diversity as part of her identity, as the fabric that made her the strong person she has become.

Past Diversity

A minority is viewed to be
the suppressed people who've
been through pain, sorrow, hard times.
Not Me.

A mother who was single
with her second child
with still no marriage.

A father who attempted
Murder of his unborn child
and beat his newly pregnant girlfriend
who Still wants me dead.

Foster parents who me and my younger brother
visit monthly or as often as we can
for they were my legal parents for
only a short time before
I was allowed to return to my
caring mother at home

Raised in a "bad" neighborhood,
that can be called the slums.
raised on Food Stamps, CHIP, and Medicare
worried about how late my mother would be
from her work as a "Favor" to our landlord
who happens to own this apartment complex

Living with Tejanos, African-Americans,
Mexicans, the under-class, for most of
the month and then a Caucasian Family
that's middle upper-class.

I Know Diversity.
past diversity.

Through the discussion of discovering who they were as writers, and where they fit in today's society, the students began to identify as a part of the Barrio Writers community. They learned to recognize the value of their individual voice as well as the collective voices Barrio Writers provided.

Counternarratives That Celebrate Cultural Pride

A key to the development of the counternarratives was the presentation of the works of authors of various ethnicities and backgrounds who used the power of their voices to bring attention to the common experience of being part of an underrepresented population. BW student participants read the texts, "Put Attention" and "How I Put Myself Through School," written by Laurie Ann Guerrero, the 2016 Poet Laureate for the state of Texas, to connect to the theme of *Infusing Culture and Identity into Writing*. As a community, they produced poems based on this theme during the group activity on the third day of the BW workshop. In this untitled piece, three of the youth collaborated to develop a poem that spoke against their perceptions of self, which they had shared during the first day of the workshop. The students characterized themselves as smart, creative, motivated, and wise. This characterization was significant because they began to voice the positivity they felt about themselves instead of the negative characterizations of society they voiced the first day.

Untitled

I am who I wanna be
An artist, a musician, a photographer,
A designer, a writer, a preacher,
A jeweler, a carpenter, a businessman,
A hippie, a futurist and I can call
myself a futurist
I am who I wanna be.

I am who I wanna be
I'm shy and I don't talk a lot to people
But my writings say everything for me that
You need to know, when you really got to know
Me I'm goofy, I love too much, I never focus
On one thing and I can never stay still
I am who I wanna be.

I am who I wanna be
Sharp and pointy, my only protection
Curly and different, no explanation
It's hard to be open, but I'm
Recognizable, just a little, here
I am who I wanna be

I am who I wanna be
I can tell you the Pythagorean theorem before
I remember my age I haven't done a
Ton of self-exploration except for
Morals maybe my mind is always
Preoccupied with school or the next
Extracurricular but I can't complain
Cause I am who I wanna be.

The valedictorian of her high school, Jenessa, wrote a poem to address her place in this world. In her poem, *Pennies,* she addresses her struggle not only with finding a place in society, but also with gender issues within her own community and finding self-worth. In the line, "so here's a penny for your thoughts, to think and think/ one by one" it is as though she is trying to buy a fresh perspective, asking the world "to think and think."

Pennies

The world turns with no rhythm or rhyme
And some people just don't have the time
To give and take what once was mine
It's these days that remind me that I have no change to give away
Because this change isn't dollars and cents I found astray.

It's the revolution and reunion of people who suffer to this day,
But my pockets lie empty because I have no change to say.
So I'm stuck sucking at the tit of a mother who was only taught to love her sons.
Taught to be submissive from very young
But look, I found a penny
It's simply one of many.
Not a nickel, not a dime,
It's a change in due time.
Nothing near the trillions we need but better than none.
So here's a penny for your thoughts, to think and think
One by one.
They say the penny costs more to make than to take
So it's worth nothing to someone who's never heard of a slum.
So the levee breaks and it breaks
And they take and they take
And what are we left with?
We're left with none.
Why were we born a daughter?
And not a son?
Why were we born for footnotes?
While they were born for a front page read?
Why is our skin tinted a muddy brown?
And not the shining porcelain that only hate seems to breed?
Now I can't take all the world's problems and turn them into a rhyme,
People are dying while I just take my time
Black boys are getting beaten for "looking like a suspect"
Women are getting stabbed for not showing enough "respect"
People are killed for loving in a different aspect.
Jon Stewart once said that, "Evil is relatively rare but ignorance is an epidemic."
Here we have all the right wings
That think everything they say is the right thing.
BOOM. CRASH. BANG.
That's the sound a chandelier makes when gravity is too heavy to take.
BOOM. CRASH. BANG.
Is the sound of a simple car ride turning into a ride to their own wake.

Boom, crash, *bang*.
Is the sound it takes to see the light in a young boy's eyes slip away.
People who are trying to make a change are being mocked and ridiculed for thinking a different way
And don't tell me I'm wrong
Now don't think I'm mean,
I just trying to live the American dream.
You know, the one where only the rich & white can succeed.
Check my history book if you don't believe,
Things were hard to wrap my head around, even for me.
Hate, genocide, greed.
Now don't think the world's gone to shit,
Even I have to admit,
Even though ignorance and hate reign to this day,
Look at the change they're giving away.
Not dollars and dimes, but mere sterling's from ancient times.
They're outdated and old,
Not to sound cold.
But maybe it's time to switch to a different currency,
One used more currently.
Not one that forbids knowledge of our natural pulses
Or one that forbids shorts because of male impulses.
Believe whatever you believe but as long my actions don't hurt anyone or me,
Please allow me my space to breathe and be free.
Do we let freedom ring?
Or is the caged bird the only allowed to tweet?
When we live off pennies, are we allowed to speak?
So the message to you is to save up your pennies turn them into dimes
Crescendo up to time where you give the world it's rhythm and rhyme
Turn the copper into gold,
Wrap it into coils where they tried to wear down your soul
Sit on the fortune of change you have to give to the world,
Give It to the starving, homeless, and sick, make the message stick.
Your change may be small but it's not nothing at all
And when people laugh and judge your efforts.
You say, it may be a penny but it's simply one of many.

The culminating event, a live public reading, allowed the students to share with their community the work they developed during the week and ultimately submitted to the anthology for publication. One of the participants, who indicated he is only a little comfortable sharing his writing with others, felt the sense of community by being in something "much bigger" than himself. He continued by saying, "We as youth can change the community through paper and pen...it would have been nice to see many more faces" as a part of the Barrio Writers workshop. In his responses about creating change through writing, he expressed that teamwork and patience are part of what it takes to "shape the image of we want the world around us" to see. After participation in the workshop, this young man said, "the power of youth is incredible" and through the development of youth programs, he feels he can impact his community moving forward. Yet another participant shared, "I really enjoyed how the workshop was able to take a community of kids from different crowds of people and bring them to all to be one group I can honestly say we came as strangers and left as family." Although these are celebrations of a positive experience, they are also counternarratives to what the student participants experience in their academic settings on a daily basis, especially with their writing and sharing.

One student participant wrote the following poem in response to the final free writing activity of the BW workshop. The prompt asked the student participants to think about what their older self, ten years from now, would say to them today. This student wrote that she wanted to remind herself that she was "strong and not weak like many see her because she is young and Latina. She could do anything and be anything she wanted to be."

The Time Ahead

Prom, check.
Graduation, check.
College, check.
Doctorate, check.
Career, check.

Remember the time when you told mom,
"I don't want to go to stupid prom."
That was for me.

Remember the time you told dad,
"I graduated for you."
That was for me.

> Remember the time you finished college and told grandma and grandpa,
> "I came this far for you."
> That was for me.
>
> Remember receiving your doctorate degree and saying,
> "I finished this degree for my kids."
> That was for me.
>
> Remember when you got your dream job?
> That was for me.
>
> Remember when you said being successful in 10 years was for me?
> That was for you.

These feelings of empowerment were part of the discussions that took place each day between student participants during the BW workshop.

In reflection upon the whole experience, one participant shared that building a community with others is how change can happen, "being a part of something much bigger than I am. To know that we as the youth can change the community just through paper and pen." His voice and those of his peers can make a difference in changing the way society views youth. His voice is his weapon!

Many of the students shared on the first day that they attended this writing workshop because they did not feel as if their words were valued in the traditional school setting and they wanted a way to write more and share more. By the last day, through the Barrio Writers workshop experience, they realized that their words did have power and could affect change both in their school environment, their neighborhoods, their community, and beyond.

Discussion

The BW workshop helped to inspire the development of counternarratives, which addressed the marginalization of underserved, underrepresented youth by providing a platform to explore, challenge, and articulate their voice. Through the counternarratives showcased in their writing, student participants challenged stereotypes and created writing that celebrated their cultural pride. The youth participating in the BW workshop in South Texas represented a historically marginalized population. The research questions investigated sought to understand the

counternarratives created by a group of underserved, underrepresented youth. Participation in this BW workshop enabled the students to develop counternarratives that expressed a cultural identity and articulated personal experiences, which served to challenge the attribution of an individual's achievement to cultural factors alone, without regard to individual characteristics. The transformative experience for the students was rooted in the cultural texts that inspired the writings of the students. As a community, Garcia (2016) reiterates that BW "bridges the gap between the youth, their cultural pride, and higher education opportunities" (p. 5). She goes on to state that "through collaboration, the Barrio Writers program cultivates diversity in and out of the classroom, raises role models, and offers a new voice in literature" (p. 5).

The participants in the South Texas chapter cultivated their social identity through the BW community. Their reading of cultural texts, exploration of cultural role models, and reflective writing served to empower the expression of their voice as a weapon while developing their aspirational capital. In collaboration with the teaching and writing community, the BW experience inspired a diverse group of selected South Texas youth to move beyond the workshop, embrace their social identity, and challenge normative narratives. Through the power of voice, participants expressed a deeper sense of community pride, perseverance, and recognized the endless possibilities for themselves and later generations.

Implications

The collective experience of the cultural community of the BW may inform other educators and the larger community about the experiences of youth and impact the choices educators when cultural texts are included in curricula, text that reflect and help develop identity and/or offer new knowledge for diverse students. The development of a community-based, experiential writing workshop that empowers disempowered youth serves as a good model for addressing the importance of spotlighting culture and community in cosmopolitan classroom settings.

Application of the BW model and used in this study is valuable to practitioners who work with students from historically marginalized and oppressed communities. The findings may be utilized to identify practices that help connect informal, out-of-school experiences to more formal, traditional school settings. The reach of this model remains small, due to resources and to the stereotype threat that such a program presents. Future development of the curriculum used by writing advisors in the South Texas chapter might expand beyond the culturally bound group to include other marginalized communities such as students with disabilities. The model, and the

resulting published counternarratives, speaks to a generation of students who do not feel they have a voice in society today. The BW program model offers a collective "weapon" in a time when the challenges underserved youth face are greater than ever. This model offers initiatives and ways to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Conclusion

The transformation taking place in the Barrio Writers workshops across the country is counter-intuitive to traditional educational experiences in formal schooling. Barrio Writers is a platform where educators, students, parents and community collectively create innovative educational experiences, which bridge into the community of learners. The student-authored counternarratives reflected the live of urban community members and the nuances so often associated with that way of life, which are largely under-utilized in the traditional educational experience. Students infused their understanding, their struggles, and their issues into their writing. What resulted was a quantum leap of progress in not only their personal writing skills, but also in their self-conceptualization of the world around them and the social issues surrounding their everyday lives.

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About the Authors

Robin D. Johnson is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. Her research interests include transliteracy, transformative practice in writing instruction, and cultivating mentor relationships in teaching. Dr. Johnson is the Program Coordinator for the TAMUCC chapter of Barrio Writers, the Coordinator of School-University Partnerships, and a faculty co-advisor for the TAMUCC Student Reading Council. She is also President of the Texas Association for Literacy Education, co-editor of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers Yearbook, and a diamond level Abydos Literacy facilitator. Her publications include the teacher practitioner book titled *Time to Write*.

Kimberly S. Reinhardt is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. Her research focuses on school-university partnerships, fostering culturally competent mentoring of teacher candidates, and the development of inquiry through reflective practice in teacher preparation. She is a Clinical Fellow with the Association of Teacher Educators and has presented her research at major conferences, including Association of Teacher Educators, American Educational Research Association, and National Association of Professional Development Schools. Dr. Reinhardt teaches field-based courses on planning, teaching, assessment, and technology, and graduate courses in classroom management, secondary teaching methods, and educational foundations.

Sarah Rafael García is a writer and community educator. Since publishing *Las Niñas* in 2008, she founded Barrio Writers. In 2010 Senator Lou Correa honored García with the "Women Making a Difference" award and in 2011 she was awarded for "Outstanding Contributions to Education" by the Orange County Department of Education in California. In 2014 *Barrio Writers* was a finalist for the "Best Educational Young Adult Book" by the International Latino Book Awards and Stephen F. Austin State University Press published the annual anthology thereafter. In 2015, García obtained a M.F.A. in Creative Writing with a cognate in Media Studies

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Constructed Spaces and Transitory Decor: Georhetorical Practices as Experiential Learning in Rhetoric and Composition

Chelsey Patterson, Ph.D.
Pikes Peak Community College

When seen through the lens of geography, the writing classroom, often perceived by students as an intimidating, rules-driven environment, can become a place where students exert their own power as writers and learners. The classroom is emblematic of the interstitial place of the community college, which serves as an unstable location between the university and the workforce. Although community colleges are often ambiguous sites, there is a powerful incentive for active engagement, particularly when students view the learning institution as a larger argument that provides opportunities for their own intellectual interventions. Through experiential learning, students take ownership of their surroundings and they understand how rhetoric can make them more located and more connected to their intellectual and professional pursuits. Once students take control of their institutional spaces, they gain discursive power of that space, a power that can translate back to the writing classroom.

The application of georhetorical practices provides students with abundant opportunities to explore their rhetorical situation in the space where writing occurs. Through explorations of the habitual spaces and places that students reside, including the classroom, students gain a wider understanding of how their surroundings shape their identities and how their discursive authority forms both institutional spaces and their interactions within the larger culture. When students engage in georhetorical practices, they can locate themselves as community members, learners, and writers. Through an analysis of their habitats, they learn that they can exert their authority within the classroom through active participation with their peers. The rhetorical structure of the classroom can certainly be deconstructed and demolished, revealing the potential for experiential learning opportunities beyond the artificiality and temporality of the classroom.

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In this essay, I explore the importance of the space of the developmental writing classroom, specifically as it exists within the larger framework of the community college. I argue that the academically-situated site of composition must be taken into account as a potential for active, experiential learning. When beginning students take control over the physical space where writing traditionally occurs, students can then translate this control to the activity of composition, specifically within collaborative writing exercises, such as peer review. I use an example of georhetorical observations of the classroom to expose students to the constructed nature of authority in the classroom and urge students to embrace their power as emerging writers as they respond to peer work. When students exert control over their writing location, this sense of empowerment can help foster self-confidence in their writing.

I situate georhetorical interventions within my own experiences teaching developmental writing within composition and rhetoric. Currently, I teach Composition and Rhetoric at a community college in the state of Colorado. The college is a dynamic open-admissions institution that fosters a unique learning environment for over 20,000 students. The college exists within the diverse and ideologically conflicted environment of Colorado, an area that houses multiple military installations, including the United States Air Force Academy, while also supporting controversial and progressive legislative acts that legalize recreational marijuana and physician-assisted suicide. The community college consists of several satellite campuses and offers a variety of certificate programs as well as Associates degrees in fields such as Humanities, Nursing, and Emergency Medical Technology. The main campus is located near a military base, which draws many active and retired members. The college excels in its commitment to service men and women through support systems, initiatives, and increased retention rates. I will focus my pedagogical application within this specific site, exploring the complexities of students' self-perception in the composition and rhetoric classroom.

(In)Active Learning: The Peer Review Process

Peer Review is easily one of the most essential collaborative classroom activities for first-year composition students. Advocates for this form of collaborative writing, such as Kenneth A. Bruffee, Peter Elbow, and Donald Murray have famously emphasized the importance of peer review as an important way to decentralize authority in the classroom and promote the knowledge and skills of the student collective. However, as Charlotte Brammer and Mary Rees note, this decentralization of authority that was

cutting-edge over 20 years ago has become as commonplace and routine as the "chalk and talk" method of lecture-based teaching (71). Brammer and Rees argue that student complaints about peer review result from composition instructors' lack of preparation, and lack of clear instruction. Too often, instructors rely on insufficient preparation methods, such as handouts and lectures without first building a rapport and a shared sense of community. Students need to develop trust and confidence amongst themselves before peer review can become a successful and meaningful endeavor. In Brammar and Rees' study, 160 out of 328 student respondents expressed negative impressions of the peer review process, chiefly claiming that peer review days were often pointless due to a perceived lack of trust and confidence in both the ability to provide and receive feedback. When students view peer review as a waste of class time and do not trust each other's authority as critical writers, peer review will become a routine exercise in the composition classroom, devoid of genuine student interaction and learning.

As writing instructors, we encourage the collaborative effort of peer review as a hands-on way for students to learn from one another as emerging writers, scholars, and critical thinkers. Instead of active engagement, however, we often find that some students rush through one another's writing, with a superficial focus on grammar or MLA concerns, and then quickly pen brief encouraging remarks, preferring instead to wait passively for the instructor's feedback. Their engagement sometimes seems performative, a practiced ritual. As Brammer and Rees illustrate, some students are not actively engaged in this kind of assignment because they tend to lack confidence in their authority as readers and writers, feeling erroneously that they do not have critical feedback that is worthy of offering to their classmates. In order to build self-confidence, I argue that students can gain authority in the writing classroom through a focus on the space of the writing classroom itself. Through a mastery of the space where writing occurs, students can feel more emboldened and empowered, trusting their intellectual ability to provide effective feedback for their peers.

Gheorhetorical Methodologies: Locality

Students can become more actively engaged with a critical approach to experiential learning through georhetorical practices, a guiding pedagogy that focuses on the importance of space in identity formation. Considerations of space influence how and what students learn and how they apply such knowledge to their local environments. According to composition and rhetorical theorists Christopher J. Keller and Christian R. Weisser, the term "space" is ambiguous, open-ended, dependent upon context, and

enmeshed within the term "place" so that "places no doubt have histories and meanings, yet we instead contend that space is not prior to place, not a preexisting condition of it. Rather, space is the outcome or product of place" (4). Likewise, spatial theorists such as Sidney I. Dobrin extend the instability of space, claiming that its uncertainty lies within its potential, its endless possibilities as it awaits occupation, as it waits to be written and produced (17-18). Dobrin's definition of space as a material site of awaiting opportunities inscribed by the historical institution of place is critical to considerations of the space of the classroom. Emerging writers are often already "written" by their personal histories and experiences that they have in relation to the writing classroom. They often inscribe the classroom with their own negative past experiences with writing and their past failures. When they physically occupy the classroom, they do not always reflect critically on how the room itself shapes their expertise as writers.

Through critical, georhetorical examinations of the banal surroundings of the classroom, students gain an understanding of how space and materially-manufactured objects extend influence over how knowledge and discourse are constructed. Furthermore, civic engagement as an extension of the classroom and writing for a "real" audience should move beyond arbitrarily-assigned community service projects to fully embrace environments that students actively inhabit in complex and meaningful ways. When students understand how space, place, and the objects within that space influence their learning behaviors, they recognize their transformative place in the larger institution. Through such learning practices, students gain confidence as writers and rhetoricians as they situate themselves within the college. John Ackerman defines georhetorical methodologies as spatial practices of social geography, or literatures of place that can help students view themselves as members of a community with spatial authority. Ackerman argues that social geography is inherently rhetorical in nature and views it as a methodology of civic action and authority. Georhetorical examinations of a student's physical and ideological location that extend beyond disciplinary dispositions can promote reconsiderations of both language and lexicon. Specifically, Ackerman suggests that locality should be taught as a form of rhetorical agency that is situated within text and place and provides a bridge between the authority of the learning institution and the intimate authority that students possess in regards to the locations in which they reside:

> I propose that if rhetorical authority is to have a material, residential capacity, then we may as well begin with social geography in natural and design spaces, suggesting that body, space, and text fruitfully occur as learnable phenomena

> in that curricular order. […] It will be the return to body, space, and text that makes the practice of writing rhetorical. We are used to thinking that the rhetorical situation is comprised of audience, constraint, and exigence, which conspire in a logocentric universe, but with a georhetorical method and a sociogeographic motive the exigence may productively emerge from the synapse of an embodied, material, and historical location. (124)

Ackerman suggests that rhetorical authority should begin through an analysis of space. By exploring the design of locations, we can better understand concepts of audience, purpose, and constraint as they coincide with the history and embodied subjectivity of the individuals who reside within that area. This focus on space as a methodology of exploring argument can provide developmental writing students with a real-world example of how rhetoric functions within the writing classroom. Students can analyze how the traditional layout of the classroom supports the idea that the instructor is the sole source of authority in the classroom and that they are merely passive consumers of that power. Students can also apply their personal history to the layout of the classroom, perhaps recognizing how their past experiences in the writing classroom, which might have been unpleasant, are perpetuated. When students locate themselves physically within such spaces and places, they can analyze how their identity is intertwined with their personal histories. Students learn that a location is never stable or demarcated easily. For example, in *Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education,* Mike Rose argues that a college's architecture is symbolic: "The design of buildings, the arrangement of offices and classrooms, the flow of traffic, the ease of access, the presence of common spaces—all these have a significant effect on what students do and how they feel about it. And all these features convey a host of messages about the identity and status of the campus and the nature of the educational experience it offers" (147). The symbolism of space is crucial when we consider the space of the classroom and its role in identity formation. This advocacy for the role of spatial practices as a necessary and essential component of writing instruction encourages students to view composition as an inherently social, cultural, and communal experience. They understand their identities both in terms of how they situate themselves as traditional classroom-centered learners, and as authoritative meaning makers with experience within the local spaces and places where they reside.

Community College Students as Outsiders

I suggest that attention to the space of the writing classroom can specifically help community college students who might consider themselves outsiders to the larger academic community. Ackerman suggests that georhetorical practices in composition and rhetoric classes should be targeted towards university students in particular as they struggle to locate themselves on campus, within a specific discipline, and the pragmaticism of the workforce (112). Although university students are admittedly in a financial, intellectual, and social transitional state, particularly first-year students, I argue that the students at community colleges, especially students who are placed in developmental writing classes, are a more apt audience for georhetorical practices because of their interstitial identities they straddle between the two-year college and the four-year institution.

The public's perception of the community college has long been denigrating. Marlene Griffith suggests that the public's misconception about community college students is based upon ignorance about the mission of the college. Citing Nancy LaPaglia's study of the perception of community college students as they are portrayed through contemporary literature, individuals who attend this type of institution are characterized as "mediocre," the choice to attend such a college a "swan dive into academic obscurity" (271). This perception of the student population exists largely because of the public's lack of knowledge about the inner workings of the community college and the life experiences of its students. Griffith argues that it is easy to belittle these students because they are largely invisible: "Our students are not visible as real people with complex lives. They are stock characters in our contemporary political and social morality play: losers and scapegoats" (271). This denigration of the community college student is often felt by that very same population, particularly when they are largely enrolled in developmental courses. According to a 2015 study, 68% of community college students are required to take at least one developmental course in order to meet graduation guidelines. Students who are enrolled in these classes often feel discouraged and disappointed, leading to a decrease in retention rates. This lack of self-confidence in terms of college readiness is so pervasive that some colleges are implementing programs to increase student self-confidence through initiatives such as service learning and peer mentoring programs, which foster student engagement and assuredness (Mangan).

In the first week of every semester, I facilitate an open dialogue amongst my students and encourage them to share their perceptions of community college. I am always astounded by the diverse range of responses that students share with the class

as they touch upon their apprehensions, hopes, and goals. Although most of my students are aware of the misconceptions surrounding community college, I find that student perceptions vary amongst demographics. For example, those students who typically are 25 or older tend to have a more positive view of community college, citing benefits and personal empowerment: "I really like that the college provides evening and weekend classes, since I work full-time," "I am saving *so* much money here," "I'm proud to be able to tell my children that I am working towards a college degree," and "This college has made it easier for me to transition out of the military." Conversely, I find that young adults are more likely to admit feelings of self-doubt about their status within the college, stating: "I'm here because I slacked off in high school. I guess I deserve to be here," "I heard that having a community college on your transcript looks bad," "My friends are all attending a university, but I'm not. I feel like I'm missing out," and "I heard that a lot of students drop out here." One student even commented on the physical environment of the two-year college, reflecting, "I thought that this place would be really ghetto." This statement reflects how location and aesthetic design elements can influence a student's expectations about their education. This particular student was referring to a specific satellite campus and its proximity to a large homeless population, which lead him to believe that the school was not attracting the "best kind of students from the area." Additionally, one rather creative student referred to the cinderblock design of the campus as "prison chic," reflecting her perception of the institutional nature of the campus design, with its focus on practicality and affordability, rather than style. Perhaps one of the most poignant statements from a developmental writing student stated, "I am not smart enough to get into a real college. I have to take remedial classes here and I am already struggling. This makes me feel even worse." Opening up this kind of dialogue with students is crucial because it reveals some of the inner turmoil that beginning community college students encounter as they compare themselves to their friends at universities or confront the stereotypes associated with community college. Through this kind of exchange, students realize that they are not alone in their doubts, fears, and even resentments. It is often the starting point for building rapport and connection. In addition, when younger students engage in the dialogues of non-traditional students who are returning from the workforce, they are also able to hear viewpoints that provide them with encouragement and support. When a 60-year old student told the younger students that they should not listen to "naysayers," that they should all feel privileged to have the ability to attend college, a shy 18-year-old student, fresh from high school, stated with absolute conviction, "Yeah. Let's prove the haters wrong."

Such a precarious position as outsiders tends to dislocate community college students, who feel academically and *physically* alienated from larger intellectual communities such as universities. They sometimes feel socially disconnected from their place of learning, since they do not often form coherent bonds with their classmates. Since students at two-year facilities sometimes transfer to other colleges before completing their associate's degree, this transition may influence the likelihood to seek long-term relationships with other students and within the college as a whole. Furthermore, students at universities have the opportunity to join a variety of social organizations such as fraternities and sororities and reside in campus housing, which strengthens relationships amongst beginning students. The diverse student population of two-year colleges can also create a barrier to social connections. Experience and age are often powerful factors in forming social bonds.

Although community colleges are identified in name and ideology as inclusive learning places open to the public, many such colleges are not placed within one specific locale, but are situated across satellite campuses. Individuals who attend these dispersed schools are *physically* isolated from their place of learning since they are not rooted within a stable site that connects them to all of the members of that particular learning institution. Georhetorical practices emphasize the creation of meaningful discourse communities within students' lived realities. Simultaneously, these practices also encourage students to view themselves within their localities, which can greatly benefit this population. Students who are traditionally isolated intellectually, socially, and physically from their larger communities can learn how not only to establish themselves amongst academic locales, but also the non-institutional places and spaces that shape them as learners outside of the classroom. Georhetorical practice, with its emphasis on active learning and community engagement, benefits the vibrant environment of the community college in particular by encouraging students to orient themselves geographically and academically, which adds authority to their position as writers and learners.

Experiential Learning as Rhetorical Practice

Experiential learning practices, such as a peer analysis of the space of the writing classroom, provides writing instructors with valuable methodologies to help them engage students in the community college and create stronger bonds amongst themselves. David A. Kolb's influential text, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, explores how "hands-on" learning can enhance traditional forms of education and promote critical inquiry and self-development amongst

individuals, arguing that this model "stresses the role of formal education in lifelong learning and the development of individuals to their full potential as citizens, family members, and human beings" (4). Kolb's introduction to the philosophy of experiential learning is crucial because it emphasizes the application of institutionalized learning procedures to practical scenarios in the personal, social, and cultural evolution of the individual citizen. Kolb's evaluation of actualized learning practices draws attention to the contemporary model of education within academia and corporations that privilege insular forms of knowledge that are only relevant to a narrowly defined occupation of place, space, and ideology. Colin Beard and John P. Wilson argue that learning should transgress the narrow confines of traditional spaces so that applied experience is valued:

> Experience, in its many guises, pervades all forms of learning; however, its value is frequently not recognized or is even disregarded. Active engagement is one of the basic tenets of experiential learning: experiential learning undoubtedly involves the 'whole person', through thoughts, feelings and physical activity. (5)

Beard and Wilson extend Kolb's doctrine of active learning by (indirectly) implicating institutions and their disavowal of educational practices outside of the immediate learning environment. The acquisition of academic or real-world skills must be put into practice and involves the integration of an individual's corporeality—through physical and emotional affectations. Through a georhetorical analysis of the classroom, students can transfer their sense of active engagement within the space of the classroom to their homes, workplaces, and larger society, recognizing their authority as active members in each of these areas.

Mapping the Classroom

At the beginning of the semester, I encourage students to explore the space of the writing classroom in order for them to become more comfortable in the space where they will be producing most of their writing. I begin by introducing them to contemporary modes of cartography, now termed "counter-maps," or "counter-hegemonic maps," which allow disenfranchised and underrepresented communities to reframe local history, culture, and environmental geographies in order to reclaim land and memory. These community projects emphasize the participatory power of groups whose cultural knowledge assert their authority over regional areas and shape

government policy. For example, at the 2011 Push International Performing Arts Festival, Jamie Hilder presented his experiences impersonating a Downtown Ambassador in Vancouver. Instead of providing tourists with rote history tours and removing transient individuals from sites of tourism, he provides alternate, competing histories of Vancouver's historical sites which conflict with the "official" political, social, and cultural history of the city. For example, Hilder offers tourists insight into the social and political conflicts in Vancouver's tourist industry, pointing out the city's efforts to banish the homeless. He also reasserts and validates the missing histories and struggles of indigenous populations in the area (Johnston 7). I use these examples of counter-maps to encourage students to apply their own histories and experiences to the writing classroom. By reinhabiting this space and taking control of it, they can resist the popular narrative that developmental writing students are less intelligent and do not possess good writing skills. By taking control of the space, we can offer traditionally disenfranchised students with the opportunity to rewrite these stories in their own voices.

After familiarizing students with counter-mapping, I encourage them to apply their knowledge of space and place by charting the spaces that they inhabit within their classroom, beyond its "transitory décor" (Knabb 49). Through a hands-on georhetorical analysis, students gain a greater understanding of how the institution exerts an ideological and physical force upon their learning and in turn, how they can demystify that force. To promote experiential learning that leads to an active application of rhetorical analysis, I ask pairs of students to explore the classroom space, making general observations about the room. They simply explore the space in the room, often encountering objects that they did not notice before, particularly because of their propensity to assign themselves their own seating arrangements, which limits their view of the classroom. I begin with an unstructured approach because I do not want to ask any leading questions that might make them focus on one particular aspect of the room; rather I prefer that students make their own initial analysis and conclusions.

After students take note of the classroom space, I then ask them in small groups to critically engage with their encounters. Through initial critique of the persuasive techniques of the classroom, students learn the constructive nature of their locale and the ideological and physical constraints that city planners exert over us. Through an analysis of the classroom, students see through the artificial nature of the learning site by actively collaborating and sharing insight. In this case, experiential learning is practiced as students physically explore their learning environment with one

another and attempt to deconstruct their shared community space, exerting their own control over the area.

I extend the small group discussion by providing students with writing prompts that ask them to consider the physical site of writing and learning in more detail. The questions that I pose are meant to encourage them to view the classroom as a physically and ideologically constructed space. Students explore the classroom's design elements and furniture, for example, calling attention to the rhetorical force of the space and its influence on learning. I ask them to consider the amount of space in the room, their mobility within the space, the location of the instructor's designated space, the arrangement of desks and tables, and the construction of such objects. Based on their observations, I then ask them to analyze critically these aspects of space and construct an analysis about the overall argument of the room: What are we being asked to believe? How are we supposed to behave? How are we supposed to learn? Who is in charge of disseminating knowledge?

Based upon this rhetorical analysis, students offer insightful commentary about the larger argument of the classroom, pointing out that the aligned desks face towards the instructor, implying that the sole authority of knowledge should come from her. They focus on the lack of windows, surmising that perhaps they are not meant to be distracted by the beauty of nature, that they should be entirely focused on lecture material. During a particular session of this assignment, a student pointed out that the hard plastic chairs were purposefully uncomfortable, reflecting his own discomfort upon entering the writing classroom, a space that he attributed to personal doubts, fears, and failure. By metaphorically breaking down the walls of the classroom, students gain authority and take back the institutional power of the classroom. They understand the constructed authority of space and exert their own control over the anxieties that they might harbor within the space of the writing classroom. They understand that learning is truly collaborative in nature and requires the participation of others. These constraints cannot hold them back because they are mere illusions, just funhouse mirrors. The space is theirs, the writing is theirs; they own it.

I encourage them to apply this new ownership to the peer review process, to exert their real sense of authority and feel more confident in their ability to provide critique of their peers' writing. They learn to value their feedback as credible and worth sharing. For example, before the first peer review, I provide students with discussion questions that they share with their writing partner: What is the purpose of this essay? What are the guidelines? These initial prompts encourage students to think of themselves as the experts. They are knowledgeable about the writing assignment, they have completed the first draft, and therefore they are capable of incorporating that expertise into their

feedback. Since students have reclaimed the space of writing, they can use this emerging confidence to provide effective feedback during peer review, a common composition practice that can initiate students' fears about their own intellectual competencies. Although asking students to share their understanding of the writing assignment might seem simplistic, I have discovered that developmental writing students tend to feel more comfortable about their ability to provide and receive meaningful feedback.

A georhetorical exploration of the writing classroom is an open embrace of experiential learning, fostering active student engagement that requires genuine collaboration amongst students in a way that offers complexity to standard forms of group participation within the writing classroom. Geoffrey Sirc, in *English Composition as a Happening,* laments the constructed, institutionally-defined methods of learning within the composition classroom and calls for a return to creativity, desire, spontaneity, and genuine collaborative action within the academic spaces where writing occurs. Drawing upon the work of the 1960s counterculture educational theorist and civil rights activist Jerry Farber, Sirc provides a historical narrative of students' alienation and distrust of the classroom, which ultimately leads to disaffection, stasis, and boredom. The material and spatial layout of the classroom is a covert form of persuasion that both teacher and student are inherently aware:

> Consider how most classrooms are set up. Everyone is turned toward the teacher and away from classmates. You can't see the faces of those in front of you. Frequently, seats are bolted to the floor or fastened together in rigid rows. This classroom, like the grading system, isolates students from one another and makes them passive receptacles. (Farber, as quoted in Sirc)

Sirc continues to cite Farber, whose association with the bleak layout of the contemporary classroom reminds students of prison, the industrial-military complex, and mortuaries. Beginning with such an analysis of the space of the classroom and its design that complicates and discourages student collaboration, learners explore both the ideological and material conditions of the classroom that isolate students from the teacher and each other, as well as, I argue, the kinds of learning that are available in such an environment. In emphasizing the argument for a return to the dynamic, spontaneous, and participatory models of learning promoted by avant-garde movements from the 1950s through the 60s, Sirc dismisses current models of classroom collaboration that are manufactured and transparently institutional in nature:

> Classroom collaborative work done according to Bruffee and Weiner, with its conventional task-orientation, is too safe, too already-done—snapshots from a package-tour vacation ("Are we having fun yet?") that's already been taken a hundred times before, now being offered one more time. It's more ritual than lived situation; it can only be acted out, with some students better rehearsed than others. (197,198)

Sirc's perception of group work, a common and repetitive learning method within the composition and rhetoric classroom, does not promote active, genuine participation, but simply becomes an expected routine that students easily learn to maneuver. Group work becomes a mechanical mode of learning. For example, during group work, I notice students tend to congregate within the same set of peers, pick out a spot in the same classroom space, and choose the same leader to speak for the group. The other group members have come to expect that the instructor will be pacified with the responses of the designated team leader, who will provide a representative model for the rest of the students. When instructors passively provide students with a discussion or writing prompt based on an assigned reading (usually from a rigidly-enforced and institutionally mandated reader), students quickly learn the role assigned to them, no different than a classroom reading or writing routine. Genuine collaboration may be stifled within the ideological and physical space of the classroom.

The composition and rhetoric classroom needs to take an experiential view of learning in which students are a real part of their communities as members of particular locales. Genuine community engagement does not directly take place within the artificial constraints of the classroom, in rigid seating arrangements, or prescribed learning methods and writing assignments. Individuals learn to negotiate meaning within their lived experience, within their neighborhoods and recreational hangouts. Active learning and interaction do not take place in a designated space and a single person does not preside over education. Community involvement, by which I mean meaning-making in lived spaces, does not necessarily mean social activism, but substantial involvement with family, friends, neighbors, culture, and environment. We do not learn through textbooks or teachers, behind desks or stuffed in uninspiring rooms designed by higher education. The first step to connecting our students to their larger community is through a material exploration of their school, through physically mapping the rhetoric of their locale.

Mapping the classroom is akin to mapping one's discursive ideology, prompting an evaluation of local authority over lived geography. Rhetorical investigations, particularly those that take place outside of educational institutions,

provides our writing students with a critical agency over their environment and therefore their cognitive learning. Sirc, in his analysis of the stasis of the writing classroom, asserts: "I prefer writing as a road map to strange, new places over writing that simply charts again the same, well-worn ground" (197). Sirc situates writing within the metaphor of roads, maps, places, charts, and ground to exemplify the geographical nature of writing as it traverses spaces and places in diverse, meaningful, and unexpected ways. Georhetorical practices can indeed promote such ideas about transformation in order to discover how discourse practices are negotiated in their physical environment.

The study of the space of the classroom is a crucial starting point for demystifying the negative associations of the writing space, since classrooms traditionally identify distinct spaces of meaning-making and authority. Through an investigation of the banal space of the writing classroom, students view their habitats in new ways and discover how planners designate how they traverse the landscape and even influence ideological constructions. Awareness of these limitations provides for fuller understandings of how rhetoric functions within lived spaces and raises learner's confidence in discursive authority, which they can then bring to the classroom.

Georhetorical interventions within the developmental writing classroom concentrate on the individual's ability to situate herself in her ideological, material, cultural, and spatial locale. Offering assignments that are geographically oriented and thus, I argue, experiential in nature, provide students the chance to explore their local residencies and gain confidence in their ability to establish themselves as authoritative discourse experts. Students learn to apply their experience as meaning-makers within academic discourse settings. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, students can utilize a practical, hands-on experience with rhetoric as it functions within the world around them, beginning with the very space of the classroom, the first institutional setting in which students are confronted. I do not propose that an exploration of the space of the classroom is a quick "fix" to the problem of self-confidence and authority within the developmental writing classroom, but it does offer the possibility for students to trust their own writing abilities by reclaiming the space where writing occurs.

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About the Author

Chelsey Patterson is an English instructor at Pikes Peak Community College. Her research focuses on the material rhetoric of the deceased body and its role in nineteenth century America. Her publications include "The Double-Faced Woman and the Tattooed Mestiza: The Rhetoric of the Sideshow in the Writing of Gloria Anzaldúa," published in *El Mundo Zurdo 2: Selected Works from the 2010 Meeting of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa* and "Postmortem Racism and Contested Ways of Seeing: Death and Photography in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," published from the proceedings of the 2012 Death and Dying Symposium.

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