



OPEN WORDS: ACCESS AND ENGLISH STUDIES

Volume 13, Number 1 (December 2021)

Special Issue on Teaching Writing Now: Diversity, Inclusion,
and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom



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*.

Available on the web at wac.colostate.edu/openwords.



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Introduction from the Editors

As we emerge from almost two years of COVID interruptions, we are pleased to present a special issue of *Open Words*, which features the keynote addresses, panel presentations, and roundtable discussions from a Spring 2021 virtual symposium, Teaching Writing Now: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom, hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English. This symposium, conducted over the span of a month, offered valuable conversations for grappling with issues of social justice. These issues necessarily intersect with concerns of access and proved timely, thought-provoking, energizing, and most importantly merited wider circulation.

We are grateful that Claire Carly-Miles accepted our invitation and took the lead in communicating with the co-editors of *Open Words*. Claire, along with co-editors Lori Arnold and Matthew McKinney, produced this special issue. It is their vision, expertise, insights, tenacious patience, and terrific efforts that helped bring this peer reviewed scholarship to fruition. We thank Claire, Lori, and Matt for co-editing this special issue and for making this important work available.

Upon receipt of journal content, Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa singlehandedly produced the typeset proofs and prepared the manuscript, after which he input the line edits and readied the issue for publication. This is a time-consuming, laborious process, and we are grateful for Isaac's keen eye, attention to detail, and collaboration with the guest editors for this special issue.

We hope this special issue will spark many important conversations.

Y. Isaac Hinojosa, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Sue Hum, The University of Texas at San Antonio
Kristina Gutierrez, Lone Star College-Kingwood



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Introduction: Revising Our Practices Mindfully and Embodying Anti-Racist Pedagogy

Valerie Balester, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

This issue of *Open Words*, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Lori Arnold, and Matthew McKinney, invites you to experience, after the fact, the 2021 “Teaching Writing Now: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom—A Virtual Symposium,” which was co-sponsored by the Texas A&M University Department of English, the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities, and the University Writing Center (also the site of the university’s writing-in-the disciplines program). The symposium was first conceived by the Department of English Diversity Committee, chaired by David McWhirter, which was tasked with evaluating the department’s support for first-generation students. The committee found somewhat

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to their surprise that they were teaching literally thousands of first-generation students each year in their core writing courses, which include first-year composition, an introduction to writing about literature, and an introduction to technical writing. Many of those students were also from underrepresented populations. The committee also found that 25% of English majors were first-generation. With this in mind, the final committee report (issued in 2019) recommended hiring a tenure-line Director of Writing Programs to guide program development with the understanding that “a focus on the needs and challenges faced by first-generation students should be a priority for our writing programs, in terms of both curriculum development and instructor preparation.” The symposium was conceived as a way to move toward those two recommendations.

In February of 2020, with the backing and guidance of Department Head Maura Ives, McWhirter convened a planning committee, to which I was invited as a professor of rhetoric and as the University Writing Center Executive Director. Also on the committee were three English faculty members with interest and expertise in writing, including Michael Collins, Sara DiCaglio, and Claire Carly-Miles, and rhetoric graduate student Lori Arnold. Like everyone else, we had to plan around Covid, which significantly delayed us, but in late January of 2021, we kicked off the event online with a panel entitled “Teaching Writing at the Border.”

From the committee’s first meeting, I knew the University Writing Center had to be involved. I am painfully aware that writing centers are implicated just as much as any other campus entity in blocking access and perpetuating linguistic and social injustice, even as we attempt on a daily basis to cultivate diversity, equity, and inclusion. Despite years of trying to improve our climate and practice to be more socially just, the Texas A&M University Writing Center has struggled to build awareness and to find solutions to the challenging problem of helping students navigate the demands of academics in English and still preserve a sense of identity and agency. We confront linguistic shame and prejudice in the everyday writing and public speaking practices that students bring to us. We have high staff turnover in that we rely on peer consultants, and we find ourselves in a constant mode of educating them. We also provide support for instructors of writing- and speaking-intensive courses on campus, which include faculty from all disciplines, many who have never even considered how academic language plays a role in promoting social injustice. We saw the symposium as at least a step forward in finding solutions and creating greater awareness around these issues. We invited faculty participation in both keynotes, and we made sure Vershawn Ashanti Young presented an action-oriented workshop for faculty, graduate

students, and writing center consultants on “Using Trilingualism in Writing Center Spaces and Consultations.”

This symposium was not conceived of as a panacea but as an essential and a necessary step toward fuller social justice in a world that privileges whiteness and white language. As we take this step toward social justice, we must be in it for the long haul and change how we move, act, and think daily. The symposium not only brought both the Department of English and the University Writing Center to a better understanding of the issues but also made us consider how to accept and embody an anti-racist mindset that will, I say with confidence and with hope, lead to revising our practices. Our opening keynote by Asao Inoue, “Not Grading Writing as Teaching Writing Now: Considerations of Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom,” hit us hard with an argument revealing to us the true weight of a commitment to anti-racist teaching. When I invited Dr. Inoue to give this keynote, I thought he might offer concrete solutions—I believe I even asked for that. So, in the true tradition of “signifying,” he undermined my request by explaining why purely concrete and definitive solutions are impossible. To quote him from the keynote, “Anti-racist work isn’t just intellectual or structural work; it’s also emotional and bodily work that we might pay careful attention to in order to do it better and more self-consciously.” He goes on to describe the need to slow down mindfully, to pause before we inflict damage, before we commit the microaggression, to reflect as we work, as we read, as we converse, and to discover where we need to dig deeper and go further. Even as he disabused me of the notion that practical solutions would do the trick, if only I could lay my hands on them, he reinforced my instinct to orient the writing center and writing classes towards rhetorical agility and teaching the habits of mature composers rather than toward enforcing conformity to one particular variety and register of language. It was a change of orientation he offered, not a change of any given practice.

The first step for many of us, one still foreign to many academics, in English and in most disciplines, is to wake up to the fact that, as Inoue reminds us, the racially white dominant discourse “harm[s] some students and privilege[es] others.” This realization causes us to realign the purpose of assessment, away from holding performance up to a single white standard. Instead, we need to measure students’ ability to work and function as writers, and as communicators, their ability to fit the words to the context. We measure, too, their efforts. We reward them for learning to act as writers, at least in part, and not for producing perfect artifacts that demonstrate their performance of white academic writing.

Then there's the step we must take that requires we embrace conflict, when we openly admit that the system is racist, and we interrogate terms like *success*. (Whose success? What does it look like?) Likewise, one of our presenters, Jennifer Sano-Franchini ("Programmatic Efforts to Redress Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing") challenges us in writing programs to shed our pearl-clutching ignorance of systemic racism in the academy and in our classrooms and programs. BIPOC intellectuals and activists have laid the groundwork to help us see with more honest eyes, the death of George Floyd brought it home more viscerally to many, as Sano-Franchini emphasizes:

Gone are the days when administrators could very easily deny, silence, and shroud over racism in our organizations and programs and our enactments or complicity in white supremacy—or so some of us hope. Instead, administrators are called to take action when we are found to employ self-proclaimed white supremacists and faculty who enact racism in various ways.

Applying this call to action to technical and professional communication, Sano-Franchini takes a deep dive into so-called neutral language markers like "clarity" and "appropriateness," often used to advance Eurocentric language values subtly.

There is room here to pause and, as Inoue suggests, ruminate. If I learned anything from this symposium, I learned that we cannot find practical fixes divorced from a local context and from a desire to implement an anti-racist mindset. Striving toward diversity, equity, and inclusion is ongoing and requires struggle, conflict, and dedication. There are no easy fixes to serving the underrepresented and first-generation students coming to us in good faith for an education. We can't just fix them (are they broken?), bring them up to standard (whose standard?), make them "successful" in the image of the predominantly white academy. This is not about remediation or acculturation. It's about social justice, and we have to enact anti-racist practices in our curriculum planning, in our classrooms, in our writing centers, and in our assessments.

In the Texas A&M University Writing Center, we are trying to model ways to engage with students who use the services that allow us to have meaningful conversations about their language choices—those they make, those they avoid, and those they could make. Encouraging students to do this work is risky. In the context of a predominately white southern university with a reputation for conservative values, teaching our consultants and our student clients to consider that academic norms are undergirded by white supremacist/Eurocentric language values invites conflict and

resistance. It's not enough to diversify our staff, although we have consistently worked at this important step. It's more about "un-educating" them, disillusioning them of a false narrative about language that's been hammered into them and that they have been rewarded for believing. Our student consultants often come to us loving what they learned about the English language and wedded to the concept of one stable standard, one correct variety of English they mastered to earn high marks in their writing, an English they do not recognize as white, which gives them confidence in becoming peer educators.

We are even more challenged working with faculty from across the disciplines. I recently received an email that was copied to me from our Provost's Office—a supportive email from the Associate Provost, but one in which a retired faculty member accused me of "not teaching grammar" and asking for me to be fired. What does it really mean, then, to teach grammar? What grammar are we talking about? I admit I don't teach it simply as a set of static rules one must master and practice without fail. In the writing center we teach grammar, as much as possible, in a political, social, and historical context, and as a series of rhetorical choices. That professor and I are clearly talking past each other, or, as Inoue puts it, we are "people who seem to be discussing the same topic, even agreeing generally about their purposes or goals, but really, they ain't. They're talking about different things, and it always leads to reinforcing white supremacy." As far as Inoue is concerned, I must go deeper and call out the racism here, not be safe. He goes on to say:

That's the game. Especially in schools, universities want teachers talking about breaking racist systems by not talking about race or racism, or maybe talking about a lot of other salient depressions all together, lumped in. So, instead, they talk about inclusion and valuing other ways with language, more generally. They talk about closing the achievement gaps. They talk about helping underprepared students, or disadvantaged ones, making special classes, all code words for students of color and deficit.

And, as expressed in the symposium by my colleague, Texas A&M's Michael Collins, faculty also are under great pressure to consider what leeway they can give students before they actually impede their progress in a white world. How much fearlessness, how much art, can the student writer bring to essays responding to a typical academic prompt? It's a great question. More important, Collins warns us of the dangers of exoticizing BIPOC writers. One of my answers to that question, however, is that we teach rhetorical and linguistic fluency, or, as Vershawn Ashanti Young espouses, code

meshing. We teach why and how languages and language varieties are stigmatized, how users have been punished or shamed, how language prejudice is a form of violence and racism. There is no need to pressure students into using one form of language. There is a need to teach them to use language with awareness and art. There is also a need to teach our English teachers, kindergarten through college, some basic linguistics.

The panels in which Collins participated—“Teaching Writing across the English Department Curriculum” and “Workshopping a Social Justice Pedagogy”—both reveal the thoughtful ways the Texas A&M English faculty and graduate students are considering and confronting equity and social justice in writing classrooms, while also illuminating what hinders them. Most of the panelists are not currently teaching first-year composition, which may reflect the department’s lack of a tenured Writing Program Director able to encourage our newest doctoral students to share their expertise. There was one presentation by a first-year composition instructor, whose background in writing centers gives her confidence in her own expertise: Gwendolyn Inocencio explains how she guides students by providing low-stakes practice, reflection, and targeted action informed by extensive feedback. Her article’s focus is on fostering student voices in college writing.

In our more advanced classes, or in classes where the focus is writing about literature, work on moving away from a static view of language and attention to diversity, equity, and social justice is visible. For example, Marian Eide, a highly experienced professor in the department, describes her turn to a pedagogy that foregrounds metacognition in a way that fosters student exploration of their half-formed thoughts. Students claim ownership over assignments, rather than being held to tired academic genres. Regina Mills, Marcela Fuentes, Hyunjung Kim, Janet Cho, and C. Anneke Snyder all explore busting out of the academic essay genre in ways that better engage their students as rhetorically fluid writers exploring language diversity and developing rhetorical fluency. Landon Sadler and Allison Estrada-Carpenter discuss how to create a safe classroom where students can take risks and fully engage, while Edudzi Sallah describes the real danger when we neglect being accessible to a diverse student body. Matthew McKinney subverts traditional theories of style in an advanced rhetoric course by inviting undergraduate students to “draw on their own understanding of how they identify with being American or with American culture” and thus opening up many avenues by which they can examine rhetorical style not as many may conceive it, through a Strunk and White lens of “how you should write” or through edicts like “be clear and concise” and “never use the passive voice.” Rather

they examine style through a sociopolitical, historical lens, demystifying the notion many hold about there being one best way to write.

In the Texas A&M Department of English, recent hires and searches in rhetoric have stressed the need to address diversity and, as the reports of the departmental Diversity Committee put it, to “begin developing initiatives aimed at creating a positive campaign around first-gen identity and accomplishment,” recognizing that these initiatives should not stigmatize first-generation students, and that they are of benefit to all students (McWhirter et al., 2019, p. 7). They include programs that improve advising and access to instructors, mentoring, and reducing course costs by, for example, creating open-access resources. Perhaps most relevant to the symposium, however, is the commitment to provide pedagogical education regarding the needs of first-gen students:

We recommend offering an annual presentation/workshop about such resources to all instructors, which would include tips for recognizing and assisting struggling first-generation students. A unit on working with first-generation students, preferably developed by a tenure-line Director of Writing Programs, should be included as a required part of . . . training and the graduate pedagogy course. (McWhirter et al., 2019, p. 5)

This is a call that can be read in different ways, again reiterating how Inoue asks us to reflect and check if we are on the same page. What do we mean here? Do we mean how to teach basic writers, perhaps making assumptions about who first-generation students are? And, if so, does that mean teaching them to conform to standard, academic English? It worries me that the first-generation label, widely adopted at our institution, plays into an institutional whitewash or ignorance about race or about linguistic shame and prejudice. Calling racism out brings conflict we administrators wish to avoid and even are pressured to avoid.

Our symposium panelists did not shy away from naming the problem as white supremacist language practices as well as systemic racism. “Teaching Writing at the Border” brought together Laura Gonzales from the University of Florida (“Ni de Over Here, Ni de Allá: Bilingual Professional Language Practices on the Mexico/US Borderland”); Victor J. Del Hierro, also from the University of Florida, with roots in Texas and with an English MA from Texas A&M University (“Culturally Sustaining Border Pedagogy”); and Randall W. Monty and Marlene Galván from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (“You’re Not Listening, or I’m Not Saying It Right: Reflecting on Borderland as Method”). While these scholars affirm the dignity and value of all language varieties, they also bring attention to the practices that have

stigmatized and demonized bilingual languages, pressures coming from both standardized Spanish and English, and educational practices that seek to eradicate, often through both literal and figurative violence, difference. They raise the question of what it means to claim that an institution is “Hispanic serving” and the often missionary zeal to acculturate that attends this label. The borderland resists easy solutions such as the neoliberal impulse to flatten out differences and avoid conflict, an impulse that stems from a desire to maintain dominant power and impose dominant ideology. Most pertinent to us as educators, this impulse results in an effort to police and patrol language. How, these scholars ask, do we reimagine borderland education in a way that affirms rather than denies the language practices, ideologies, and cultures of the border?

Likewise, the panel on “Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Communication” challenges us in departments of English to take a closer, harder look at our more advanced writing courses and to rethink what kind of English we really want to teach. The panel brought together Sue Hum from the University of Texas at San Antonio (“Mentoring Visual Ambassadors to Advocate for Social Justice: Knowledge-Telling and Knowledge-Construction”); Natasha N. Jones from Michigan State University (“Citation Practices: Shifting Paradigms”); and Jennifer Sano-Franchini from Virginia Tech University (“Programmatic Efforts to Address Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing”). The long-held idea that technical and professional communication can and should be neutral is just another way to enforce white language practices, another form of what Jones, focusing on the role of citation, identifies as silencing. All three presenters suggest ways to introduce anti-racist practices into our writing classes and programs, and all three acknowledge that this is hard, local work with no easy fixes. Hum and Jones also ask us to question whose voices we hear, whose forms of knowledge-making are valued and amplified, and whose are ignored, disregarded, disrespected.

We ended the symposium by interviewing Vershawn Ashanti Young about social justice as it related to language in a session titled “Teaching Writing after George Floyd.” The interview was conducted partly by me but mostly by Florence Davies, the Assistant Director of the University Writing Center. Ironically, I am a cisgender heterosexual white female but also a first-generation college student, while Davies, the daughter of a math professor, is a Black woman and a first-generation American of Sierra Leonean parents. For me, there’s irony in knowing our institution’s recent efforts to support first-generation students would support me while not supporting my colleague of color.

In the interview, the talk touched on who's responsible for doing anti-racist work and how this work cannot come down to pat formulas and simple fixes. Young, like Sano-Franchini, responded to the then-current climate of white "astonishment" at what Blacks have suffered:

It's hard to believe that white people do not have some palpable recognition of the plight, the ongoing situation, and the discourse that has not discontinued but has continued in various periods since the enslavement and reconstruction and segregation and post segregation, and it's just hard to believe it just seems difficult. So, part of my work in those conversations has been not just trying to help my friends and colleagues understand better, but trying to prod them to do the work that they should be doing anyway on an everyday basis to align their minds and souls and hearts to the plight of other peoples.

Davies points out how this anti-racist work, especially work about literacy and education, is pushed onto people of color who, called to testify and to argue, can be exhausted, drained. As Young explains, anti-racist work is labeled as "edgy" and often seen as risky, something I also heard when I worked in the late 1980s and early 1990s on African American English. I was warned that I was sticking my neck out and asking for criticism by working on African American rhetoric and language. It wasn't just that I was white, but even more that in composition circles (not in linguistics), asserting value beyond Standard English was controversial. Thus, it means everything to me that Young has continued this conversation so bravely and so boldly and in ways more nuanced than I could have managed.

Young also makes the point that educators tend to be blind to the connections between the fates of George Floyd and Sandra Bland, and the white supremacist ideology deployed in their classrooms. As Davies says, Sandra Bland was not able to "just have a bad day." Her reaction to a bad day was read as defiance, non-compliance—if only she'd complied with Waller County law enforcement, she'd have been safe. But she talked back. She protested. And that's how they could justify arresting her and all the terrible consequences that followed. Young wants us to think about this: Black people can't be Black in public places.

This brings us to question our pedagogy—do we ask our students to adopt what he calls "other people's English"? Do we insist they code switch? Or do we allow them to code mesh and to use their own sense of language and style to create rhetorically effective and appropriate writing? Rather than create barriers, he reminds

Balester

us, we ought to create opportunities and let students bring to the task any resources at their disposal. This, I believe, is what writing centers and writing classrooms need to learn. Don't be afraid of African American English or Black English. Let others be and let yourself listen so you can hear even when you are challenged—that's what resonates with Young. Don't perpetuate linguistic myths about what is "appropriate" or "authentic." A good dose of basic linguistics and a history of world Englishes that does not focus solely on England should be added to education for teachers of literacy. A realistic view of language is more important than spending time on how to teach the rules of grammar or the correct citation style. I trust this volume will demonstrate the point.

Reference

McWhirter, D. et al. (2019) English Department Diversity Committee report. 1-7.

About the Author

Valerie Balester, Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Studies, is a professor of English and the Executive Director of the University Writing Center and the Academic Success Center at Texas A&M University. Balester contributed "How Writing Rubrics Fail: Toward a Multicultural Model" (2017) to *Race and Writing Assessment* (Eds. Asao B. Inoue and Mya Poe) and co-authored "Assessing the Information Literacy Skills of First-Generation College Students" (2021) with Sarah LeMire, Zhihong Xu, LeRoy Dorsey, and Douglas Hahn (*College & Research Libraries* 82.5. 730-54).

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Not Grading Writing as Teaching Writing Now: Considerations of Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom

Asao B. Inoue, Ph.D.

Arizona State University

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Delivered Thursday, February 4, 2022, from 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm.

Thank you all for coming today. And thank you to my friend, Valerie Balester, for inviting me to give this talk today and the workshop tomorrow. I'm honored and humbled to engage with you all today.

Because I live in Tempe, Arizona, and I work at Arizona State University, it's important that I acknowledge the indigenous peoples who resided on the land that gives me so much, not the least of which is the opportunity to do this work for you today.

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Inoue

Arizona State University's four campuses are located in the Salt River Valley on ancestral territories of Indigenous peoples, including the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) Indian Communities, whose care and keeping of these lands allow my colleagues and me to live and work in the area. I am grateful for the Pima and Maricopa. Historically, we, the colonizers of this area, have treated them poorly and are not worthy of their land. This land commitment acts as a mindful way to contemplate future actions my colleagues and I can take. I hope it offers you a way to do similar mindful work and make commitments in your own places.

I want to invite each of you to do some interactive listening during this talk. I'm going to pause a few times in my talk to give you an opportunity to feel, notice, and reflect in writing. So have something handy to write with. I'll do this several times, and I find it an important antiracist practice, even if we do not intend to share our writing. We are always already engaged in either racist or antiracist work, racist or antiracist orientations, racist or antiracist grading in our classrooms. We can notice this, and the emotional, intellectual, and practical challenges the system and our conditions present to us. Antiracist work isn't just intellectual or structural work, it's also emotional and bodily work that we might pay careful attention to in order to do it better and more self-consciously.

To do it better means we must understand our emotions and feelings when they happen as separate but interconnected to our ideas and intellectual responses to language and our conditions. This is being compassionate to ourselves and others. This is how we start to find structural changes that amount to antiracist changes in our places.

Part of my orientation to antiracist work is that we all must consciously cultivate a mindful set of behaviors, ones that get us to pause and notice how we feel, what we think, and where those feelings and thoughts come from. So my first practical bit of advice to you today: Pause often in your work and teaching, pause in your reading of student writing. Ruminates on your *feelings* as much as on your *thoughts*. This pausing can be antiracist work.

In my experience, antiracist teachers and activists are mindful of their feelings and thoughts *as they happen*, not just after the fact or after the damage is done. This helps us intervene or disrupt when we notice ourselves participating in racism or white supremacy, which we will do daily. It also helps us compassionately notice our rocks and hard places. To give you practice, I'll prompt you to pause, feel, notice, and reflect in writing during the rest of this talk. Be ready and be brave.

The rest of this talk will center on this: What does it mean to form an antiracist orientation to teaching and grading writing? Now, please notice that I'm not centering

this talk on HOW to be an antiracist teacher, or even how to grade writing in antiracist ways. As we move on, you'll see why I cannot do this explicitly. What I'll land on is that what antiracist teaching and grading amount to is a particular kind of orientation to the world, your disciplines, your classrooms, your syllabi and assignments, your feedback, your own judgments, and the work you do with students. This orientation will lead to other structural changes in your classrooms and grading practices. It's the only way I know how to offer something about grading now in our white supremacist world. So my second bit of advice: Cultivate an *antiracist orientation* to everything, including your grading practices.

Now, let's get a few things out of the way. An antiracist writing assessment ecology must not only be able to recognize the dominant discourse as racially white but keep it from harming some students and privileging others. To do this, the ecology has to have ways to examine itself or the languaging that makes it up. It must turn judgment itself both away from students, as in not grading or ranking them or their writing against a single standard, and toward them, as in making judgments of language more about their own dispositions to read, value, and write, often in racialized ways. In short, the purposes of assessment change quite dramatically because they are oriented toward antiracist ends. They move away from measuring to ranking or making some decision about a student's abilities to move on, and toward other purposes, ones more mutually defined by both student and teacher, ones that are oriented against racist systems, especially the systems that circulate white standards of languaging in classrooms.

Now, conventional grading ecologies operate from exclusion and scarcity through the deployment of singular standards. Bell curves illustrate this tendency perfectly. Rounding up, a standard distribution, or bell curve, dictates that about 2% of all rankings or scores will rest in the highest category, or the "A" category in grading curves, which is three standard deviations from the mean, or the perfect middle score. Meanwhile, about 14% of all scores or rankings will rest in the category just below that (the "B" category), or two standard deviations from the mean. So 16% of all scores in a classroom will get all the As, Bs, and high Cs distributed, or about 4-5 students in a class of 25.

The rest will get something lower, with the majority (68% or 17 students) resting within one standard deviation from the mean on either side--these are the categories of grades between 85% and 65% (low Bs, Cs, and high Ds). So as you can see, measuring everyone against a single standard creates conditions in which only a few students are allowed to achieve in the ways demanded or expected in the academy (As and Bs). Who do you think has the best chance to get those highest grades?

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Try this experiment: Ask any group of readers to read a stack of student writings and put them into five piles from best to worst. See what happens. The distributions will tend to be on this curve, no matter what specific criteria or expectations readers have. In fact, don't give them any. Just let them use what they know. Why will this happen? Bell curves are so culturally ingrained in us that most have a hard time reading outside of them. They structure our thinking and judging unconsciously. We tacitly expect them when we are asked to rank.

Thus no one is above the seductive allure of bell curves. It's part of white supremacy culture. It's part of our habits of language and judgment. I don't make this argument against standards and grading in writing assessment ecologies just to call attention to their exclusionary nature. It's also the engine that naturalizes habits of white language in writing classrooms. In classrooms, it seems like we are just talking about good writing, but it's really *white writing*. So work against white language supremacy. Stop grading. Stop using your standards against your students.

And the whole "grades as motivation" argument? It's tired. External motivators, like grades, are no substitution for intrinsic motivation to learn. In fact, many have shown how grades are harmful to all students and their abilities to learn (Kohn, *Punished*; "The Case"; Elbow; Bleich). Getting rid of grades on writing, as many writing teachers know intuitively, allows the ecology to refocus people's purposes for judgments and feedback toward other ends than acquiring grades or following orders, ends that are more critical and antiracist. Gradeless classrooms allow those in them to reorient themselves against the racist structures that make that classroom in the first place.

Most of what informs our classrooms come from white supremacy culture. It is a historical, institutional, and social condition. It is less a value or position one holds. So answering my central question well isn't about changing your heart or mind. White supremacy is not a certain thing that one does or feels. To be an agent of white supremacy, as I am saying we all are because we teach and judge writing today, is not an indictment of us as teachers or people, but an acknowledgement of the racist structures and institutions we are forced at the moment to live in. We can orient ourselves against such systems. More specifically, we might turn to the work of social activists like Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun. Their activist and educational work offer thirteen characteristics common to white supremacy cultures in organizations.

I call your attention to six characteristics that are likely an important part of your teaching and grading in your writing classrooms. They are the ways we've been trained as teachers. They are:

Not Grading Writing as Teaching Writing

1. **Quantity over Quality** -- that is, a focus on quantifiable, measurable outcomes, like grading rubrics and scoring guides used to judge writing, place students and their writing in categories, rank them, and quantify them.
2. **Worship of the Written Word** -- this characteristic leads to a host of mind bugs in our judging of student writing, such as the WYSIATI (What you see is all there is) and the availability heuristics, which take only what is available to the judge-teacher and assumes that is all that is needed to make a decision, such as “how good is this paper in front of me?”
3. **Paternalism** -- in the writing classroom, this is often voiced as rationales by teachers that say, “I know what is best for them.” It’s a modern-day “white man’s burden” mentality. It’s the argument that all colonizers have made in history.
4. **Fear of Open Conflict** -- this characteristic of a classroom usually measures how well discussions go by the absence of conflict and argument, or by how little our students talk back and resist us. It ignores the fact that conflict and dissonance are good for us. It helps us know our gaps, feel our differences, and understand where we might grow.
5. **Objectivity** -- this characteristic is often a silent contradiction, since most of us would ascribe to the idea that there is no objective view that anyone can hold on to anything. And yet, we act as teachers of writing with our rubrics and red pens as if we hold such a view of our students’ languaging by grading that languaging. This is an orientation to judgments that favor being “calm, cool, and collected,” and discount any emotion-filled responses.
6. **Right to Comfort** -- or rather, this is the authority’s (usually the teacher’s) right to comfort, which ignores the fact that discomfort signals learning and growth, even for a teacher who needs it just as much as their students.

Now, Jones and Okun describe the *culture* of white supremacy, but what about white language supremacy?

“White language supremacy” is the *condition* in classrooms, schools, and society where rewards are given *in determined ways* to people who can most easily reach them, because those people have more access to the preferred and *embodied white language*

practices. Part of that access is a *structural assumption* that what is reachable at a given moment for the normative, white, monolingual English user is reachable for all.

Here's a broader version of the same definition: White language supremacy is the condition in schools and classrooms where the products or effects of the classroom's systems and structures (which include our cultural and disciplinary language practices that teachers inherit) -- i.e. the course's standard operating procedures (SOPs) -- produce political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance for white students, faculty, and staff, despite anyone's intentions.

So white language supremacy is a set of conditions that are set up by structures that we have inherited and take for granted, and that are too often considered normal and neutral because they come from the white people and cultures that assume them and their own authority in places like university classrooms.

I realize that for some of you, what I'm saying may sound crazy. White language? It's just English, just language? There's no such thing as race. Language and good, clear communication have no race, so how can we have white language supremacy? It really ain't that hard to understand how the standards and outcomes in colleges and universities, in disciplines and English classrooms, amount to white language supremacy. Who made those standards? Where did those people come from? What places and groups of people have been in charge of such language standards? Who has historically been kept from making such standards, and who benefits most today from them?

Of course, the answer is white, middle- to upper-class, monolingual groups of people. Look at who writes the most popular English language grammar books and style guides. They all are white, mostly male, and often from the East coast. And each book offers the same habits of white language.

The top three style guides sold on Amazon are written by white men from the East coast. But really, there's no competition. Strunk and White's classic style guide has been and still is the most used. It's been around since 1959, but really William Strunk first published versions of it in 1918 and 1920. *The Elements of Style* has more reviews than any other grammar or style guide on Goodreads.com that I can find, way more. As of this last week, it has been reviewed or rated 77,714 times, with an average rating of 4.16 (out of 5). It receives on average an additional hundred ratings each month. Nearly half of all the ratings (46%) give it 5 stars. As a way to compare those ratings, the next closest style guide of English in terms of numbers of ratings is Steven Pinker's *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*. Pinker's book has an average rating of 4.06 by 6,953 readers.

By these measures, Strunk and White's guide is by far the most influential English style guide in the last 100 years. But Pinker, a white, middle-class academic is not that dissimilar to Strunk or White. Pinker is a Harvard cognitive psychologist and linguist, who was born in Montreal, Canada, and received his PhD at Harvard. His father was a lawyer, and his mother was a vice-principal of a high school, while his grandparents owned a small, Montreal necktie factory. These are similar conditions and credentials that Strunk and White have. William Strunk was born in Cincinnati. His father was a teacher and lawyer. Strunk got his Ph.D. at Cornell, then taught there for 46 years, where E. B. White met him as his student. E. B. White was born in Mount Vernon, New York, to upper-class parents. His father was the president of a piano firm, and his mother was the daughter of the famous American painter, William Hart.

The point is, white men like these have created our language habits and standards from their places, the people around them, and the schools they attended. And because, as teachers and educators, we've ignored how these places, people, and their languaging are racialized, we have a difficult time talking about standards of English as white language supremacy.

Today, most racist outcomes in schools are accomplished without reference to race. Our ostensibly neutral language standards tacitly uphold racial inequality by being used as a universal yardstick by which all students are measured. This means that when we say that some instance of language is clear or effective, that we are not thinking or judging in racial terms, that clear and effective language, "good grammar" and expression, are neutral and raceless expectations, what we really mean is that those standards and expectations for language *should not* be racial. We confuse what *is* with what *should be*. It's a wish, not a historical fact. You cannot undo language history with a wish, but we don't have to repeat that history. We can change language structures and how we judge with them by changing our orientations toward them, or rather against them.

Let's PAUSE and WRITE: What are you feeling right now in your body? And what idea or question is most on your mind? Take 30 seconds and write.

White language supremacy does not reference opinions or beliefs about a superior race or skin color, but as I said already, a condition set up historically that reproduces unfair and unequal racial hierarchies through its outcomes. This is why we can have racism without racists, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's important sociological studies show us. We can have good intentions, be good people, demand "clear and logical" writing from students. Yet through our language standards and judgments, we

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end up promoting white language supremacy because those standards and expectations come historically from a white racial formation in the Western world. And when such standards are used to decide grades and opportunities for everyone, they become white language supremacy.

You want to stop white language supremacy in your literacy classrooms? You probably have to stop grading. Stop using your standard as the standard for all to mimic. There's my next bit of advice, but you likely know that already if you know me. So I won't dwell on it today.

Many have talked about the white supremacy condition in society as hegemony. As many of you probably know, the concept is Marxian, and it explains why we all can come to accept white supremacist educational systems without realizing that we've been enlisted in a language race war fought in such places as our classrooms.

The Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci says that dominant groups gain consent through hegemony or through the ongoing process of cultural and rhetorical conflict in society at all levels and places, like schools and popular culture, like language and standards, like AP tests and SATs, writing classrooms and GPAs, or the WPA Outcomes and departmental standards for writing. The result of this struggle is that the oppressed end up consenting to the ideas that make their oppression possible because their conditions demand it. It's the draw of our racist rationales that we tell ourselves and others, like if I don't grade by a standard in my classroom my students won't succeed; I'll be setting them up for failure tomorrow. It's also the attraction of the bootstrap myth, of the anyone-can-do-anything myth that the U.S. is built on. It's everyone's need to survive and maybe thrive.

We tell ourselves that it's just how you succeed today because it's how others succeeded yesterday. This is a white supremacist orientation. It accepts the racist status quo, and when we use it to justify demanding a white standardized English in our classrooms, it's white language supremacy. And this logic links our notions of language and judgment all the way back to our colonial beginnings. We think we're talking about helping students succeed, think critically, but we mean succeed and think like white people, the white people yesterday who succeeded, who were the only ones allowed to succeed.

White language supremacy is the hegemony in society and the academy. It's historical and everywhere. We all participate all the time. It's the standard operating procedure for becoming and acting as an academic and teacher. What else are writing classes but places of institutional colonization?

Another way to hear the hegemony in white language supremacy is in a poem written by me. Listen for the antiracist orientation the poem offers.

Hegemony

is a house built on personal contradictions.
It means that the critically conscious
are critically guilty,
 and seemingly hypocritical.
It means limits and boundaries
that feel like freewill,
but are really
predetermined preferences
that feel like ourselves
and feel good in our bones.
It all works better
when the system doesn't have to point a gun
or order people to do or think things.
It lets people
point guns at themselves,
do and think things
it wants them to do and think.
Hegemony convinces people
that their oppression isn't oppression at all.
It's Sunday afternoon football games,
and going out to eat after church,
or watching the latest action film,
or playing an innocent video game
made of killing and collecting
electronic representations
of real-life people and things
that aren't real, but feel like it.
It's conspicuously choosing
the choices given to you.

Hegemony is a system
that makes you feel bad
and inadequate for what it doesn't provide.

It's like blaming the tennis player for where the baseline is located,

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or that you only get two chances at serving for each point.
Only the hegemonic sets up its rules
in order to benefit those who make rules.
In such places,
a few make rules and systems
to perpetuate the things, conditions, and world they want
to keep and pass on to their kids.
This is all called fairness:
merit,
hard work,
and always-receding delayed gratification,
or should we say, deleted gratification,
gratification never meant to be realized,
only dangled in front of so many,
a rhetorical ponzi scheme,
played by those who only give
the oppressed words,
and try to convince them
that they are not oppressed
but free, free to be poor,
free to do whatever they want.
There is much oppression in the freedom
that only words make.
These are our values
that devalue.

Putting aside
the abstraction of “the middle class,”
what I think is left in the world,
the real, material world,
is our languages,
our stories,
and the common senses
we tell ourselves.
But be careful.
Everything is paradoxical
when you drill down.

A word is hegemony made personal.
And our stories help us
consent to an unfair and racist world
by offering us,
teachers and intellectuals,
a slice of really nice pie.

Sure, the pie can do things,
and it's awfully -- terribly -- beautiful,
but language is paradoxical.
How is access to the middle class,
whether abstract or real,
not also becoming an agent of
white supremacy,
becoming the beautiful agent of racist systems
made syrupy sweet?
Are we not merely offering future opportunities and success
in inopportune and anti-successful systems
in our classrooms?

Hegemony
is a house built on personal contradictions.
It's the sweet taste of almost there.

Once we've bitten into
the delicious and comforting pie,
we can't help but eat it all,
gobbling it down,
and asking for more from the system
and those who made it.
But how exactly are the systems made
that make our hunger for more pieces of pie?

And in our classrooms, we try to help our students,
especially those coming from places
and groups who have not
had a taste of the pie yet,

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get their tastes.
But it's all just the same old pie.
And the result?
Rotten teeth and diabetes.
And it's all our fault,
and their fault,
and the system's fault.
And it's all we can do,
even as we resist.
You gotta live, right?
You gotta pay the bills
and be happy, right?

Hegemony
is a story built on personal contradictions.
It's metonymy and synecdoche.
It's white supremacy made in us all.

Let's PAUSE and WRITE: What are you feeling right now in your body? And what idea or question is most on your mind? Take 30 seconds and write.

As you may have guessed, antiracist orientations to grading and our pedagogies do not equate neatly to a particular pedagogy or practice. We might identify a pedagogy or practice as antiracist in a classroom, but because racism and white supremacy are so much a part of everything -- they are structural -- it's easy for a pedagogy or practice to be co-opted by the hegemonic structures around us. As Grascmi explains, this is how hegemony works. It constantly changes, adapts, and co-opts the forces and agents that work against it. Why fight your enemy head on when you can incorporate them into your army and make them fight for you?

For instance, we want our students of color to be as successful as our white students already are, but we want that success to look the same, sound the same. In fact, the system defines success in that way, or rather in one way. In fact, we only recognize success in one, white way. We want everyone to meet the same white standards of English language, read and appreciate the same white authors and texts, just with a sprinkle of Brown and Black in the curricular dishes -- you know, for flava and spice, for garnish. But not many expect the Black and Brown parts of our courses and curricula to sustain us, feed us, make us stronger. Ain't that a shame. What a loss.

And this is often because our practices get inserted back into the hegemonic white supremacist system without us understanding the meaning of them in our places with those around us, and so the same outcomes circulate. We get a version of the same white supremacy we've always had.

So if we cannot have an inherently antiracist pedagogy or practice, then what can I offer you? I can offer an *antiracist orientation* to your work, language, and the larger schools and societal structures around and in us. We must be *antiracist toward systems*, not so much people. This is why my central question is, "What does it mean to form an antiracist orientation to teaching and grading writing?" It's not "*how* to form one," it's "what does it mean." What it means is that you see, feel, and experience the conditions and systems around you differently, as oppression and liberation, as limits and boundaries and other things.

The how is really up to you. Your how is your laboring in the conditions you find yourselves in, among the people near you. I cannot do this laboring for you, nor can I know the important details of the how in your place with your students. You must inquire and respond to these things constantly. It's hard work because once you figure out something, inevitably things change, and you've got to do something else. And of course, likely, for many, there is a lot of learning about race and racism and whiteness to do.

Orientations are flexible, though, adapting to context, people, and places. They can be crafty and sneaky, trickster-like. An antiracist orientation can adapt to the hegemonic racism built into our schools, curricula, and even our own training and habits of language and judgment. Sometimes, we gotta do brave work to undo ourselves and our training.

Again, let's PAUSE and WRITE: What are you feeling right now in your body? And what idea or question is most on your mind? Take 30 seconds and write.

I suppose you could say that the teacherly orientation I'm calling for is not just an antiracist one but an explicitly racialized and political one, one that is conscious of the importance of the politics of race in the teaching and judging we do. So it's also a racialized and political orientation. It's about politics, power. But be careful. The problem with identifying just politics, avoiding the racial, is that it too easily can appear as if we don't have racist problems in our systems and schools, in our classrooms and assessment practices, in the very disciplines that make us as teachers and educators. It's like we ain't teaching already in fucked up systems with fucked rules. But we do. And so, our orientations should be against those things. This means

we must embrace conflict and not understand it as merely “against” something else. That logic is limiting and, quite frankly, whitely and a characteristic of white supremacy culture.¹ Conflict, not comfort, is how we’ll dismantle white supremacy. Most of us need more conflict in our classrooms and grading practice, not more white comfort. Comfort is how we got here. Antiracist orientations embrace conflict because it’s the way toward change, growth.

Using more facially positive terms, or ones that seem to provoke less ire by others, can also lead us to talk past each other. That is, people who seem to be discussing the same topic, even agreeing generally about their purposes and goals, but really, they ain’t. They are talking about different things, and it always leads to reinforcing white supremacy. That’s the game, especially in schools and universities. One teacher is talking about breaking racist systems by *NOT talking about race or racism*, or maybe talking about a lot of other salient oppressions all together, so instead, they talk about inclusion and valuing other ways with language more generally. They talk about “closing achievement gaps.” They talk about helping “underprepared” students or “disadvantaged” ones, making special classes -- all code words for students of color and deficit.

This kind of language participates in the old Southern strategy of racist discourse.² Talk about race by not talking about it. From this orientation, it would appear the system is okay. It just needs to add some inclusion, a text from a Latin or Black author, a helpful course or tutor. “How would you say that at home with ya momma?” “Now, let’s translate for school.” “Take this course, it will help you succeed and achieve.” “Go to the writing center.” But it’s all just assimilationist discourse that punishes people for being where they are from.

¹ For the term “whitely” and “whiteness,” I draw on Marilyn Frye’s, “White Woman Feminist,” in *Willful Virgin: Essays in Feminism* (The Crossing Press, 1992), accessed at <https://feminist-reprise.org/library/race-and-class/white-woman-feminist/>. Frye draws on several scholars of color to understand the term and set of behaviors: Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing By Radical Women of Color*, (Brooklyn, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1985); John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (NY: Random House, 1983).

² Lee Atwater perfected the “Southern strategy” for political rhetoric. Its goals were to maintain white supremacy by not explicitly talking about race in political discourse. Atwater was the political strategist for Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. See Rick Perlstein, “Exclusive: Lee Atwater’s Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy,” *The Nation* (13 Nov 2012), accessed at <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>.

Meanwhile an antiracist teacher is talking about dismantling curricula because it promotes only a white European set of languages and values and makes it harder for most of the students of color and poor students in their classroom to achieve success. Success is defined, they say, in elite white racial terms, languages, and habits of learning. They push against the grading of their students. They openly criticize department standards for writing. They want to decolonize the reading lists. This teacher tells their students: “The system playin’ ya.” “Ya gettin’ gamed.” “It’s makin’ ya think you ain’t good enough or too stupid to achieve,” while it hides its white, middle-class standards behind the smoke of raceless, universalizing language that just ain’t true.

The first teacher is ignoring the racism in the system by not acknowledging the fundamental white supremacy of it, not calling it out, while the second teacher is addressing it as already politically raced and pushing to dismantle it. They are not talking about the same kinds of goals. They do not have the same orientation. The first orientation is to fix a fundamentally good system, the second is to replace a fundamentally corrupt one. Fixing and replacing ain’t the same orientation.

When we place both teachers into that same system, say a classroom or a faculty meeting, the first seems more positive, more palatable, more agreeable, more helpful, because they are doing diversity and inclusion work as the system has prescribed it. They maintain white language supremacy, not disrupt it. They make white comfort, not conflict with white supremacist systems. They seem to be “preparing” students for a white Supremacist tomorrow. The second teacher just seems like a troublemaker.

But in the end, when history rolls on, the first teacher simply makes more white supremacy, while the second, the antiracist troublemaker-teacher, will be the one who makes things more equitable for all. If the system is racist, you gotta make trouble for it. You make trouble by reorienting yourself against it. You embrace conflict.

This talking past each other is also a white supremacist strategy that avoids the actual conflict, as if conflict is abnormal or bad. Conflict, tension, difference, disagreement are typical and normal in human societies. Conflict and the confronting of difference is how people and systems change, how we all learn new things and grow. You want to be antiracist, but you don’t know how? The systems haven’t seemed difficult or unfair to you? It’s hard to understand all the ways you are privileged? Then you need to change your orientation, to be different, be uncomfortable, so that you can see, feel, and understand things differently. That’s inner conflict, and it can make you better. So why demonize conflict? Why be afraid to disagree? Why be afraid to be a troublemaker in a racist system?

Avoiding antiracist orientations to our disciplines, research, and teaching, or even just avoiding the terms of race and racism in our standards and grading, participates in another problem: *Trying to celebrate or value diversity and inclusion without orienting yourself against the systems that make those very acts necessary today*. It's an avoidance strategy. It's another way to avoid race and racism by focusing on other more palatable and acceptable things.

In his classic book, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, the late sociologist Philip Slater calls this logic the "Toilet Assumption," which he explains is "the notion that unwanted matter, unwanted difficulties, unwanted complexities and obstacles will disappear if they are removed from our immediate field of vision." He's talking about common sense practices in the U.S., and he goes on: "Our approach to social problems is to decrease their visibility: out of sight, out of mind. This is the real foundation of racial segregation, especially in its most extreme case, the Indian 'reservation.'" And to his list, we should probably add the redlining practices of banks, Japanese "internment," and so-called "remedial" English courses for students.

What this removal of problems does, according to Slater, is "decrease, in the mass of the population, the knowledge, skill, resources, and motivation necessary to deal with them."³ And so, to ignore race and racism in our schools and teaching, in the way we define our teacherly orientations, really amounts to eroding our abilities and desire as a community to dismantle white supremacy and racist systems.

Many of you may be thinking that this is all well and good, but you need something practical. Again, let me warn you about that impulse. It participates in white habits of language that often turn into white language supremacy in schools and other places. The impulse for the practical often comes out of a sense of urgency. It's the need for high impact practices now that can be demonstrable in outcomes. It rushes past what those practices mean to those in that place, and the future lessons that that understanding may offer you. It also tends to sacrifice inclusive processes for quicker results.

The impulse for the immediately practical also can work in faulty either-or thinking. It is often placed against the reflective, theoretical, and philosophical. The "how to" of antiracist teaching is artificially placed in opposition to the why's, where's, and who's of antiracist orientations. Cultivating antiracist orientations allows you to

³ Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pg. 15.

attend to the meaning of any practice, sometimes changing it, sometimes scrapping it altogether, but it is always flexible.

Antiracism isn't an Easter egg hunt, where you collect as many pretty, shiny pedagogical eggs as you can. It's about seeing and feeling the egg hunt for what it is, a deception, something to keep your eyes, mind, and feelings off of the system, off of the racist game of Easter egg hunting.

But this impulse also infantilizes you as a teacher. Don't settle for other people's answers. Settle for your own but learn about why and how others do what they do in their places. Anything practical or "how to" that I might offer you today should be heard with a grain of salt. Like everyone else's practices, mine come out of me and my conditions (or lack thereof).

And so, what it means to be an antiracist teacher is to have an antiracist orientation to your work, your planning, your expectations of students, your grading, and your own body in the classroom.

Let's PAUSE and WRITE: What are you feeling right now in your body? And what idea or question is most on your mind? Take 30 seconds and write.

In my own and other literacy teachers' antiracist orientations, I have found at least twelve common elements, some are impulses and urges, some are goals and purposes, while still others are flexible practices or behaviors that may look different in different places. All are important, so I find it difficult to cherry-pick from them, then call myself an antiracist teacher. I've grouped them into four overarching categories for convenience's sake. These categories may help you think about the areas of your teaching life that can be reoriented. Your practices will flow from that new orientation.

I offer them as a way to end my talk and encourage you to engage with me about them and ask questions. I won't describe them all but focus our attention on just four of them.

1. The teacher explicitly **pays attention to the intersectional subjectivities** in the classroom, and the way those subject positions, and people, affect learning and processes of learning, which always starts with the teacher's own identity. This includes embodying a deep interest in students reflecting upon their own intersectional subject positions as political ones that are implicated in literacies, habits of language, ways of learning, and the classroom space. It's calling attention to the structural or social in the individual without forgetting the individual situated in the structural. This orientation urges the teacher to make

explicit the politics of languaging and its judgment, showing students how language and people are valued or devalued in conventional racist systems, such as the school itself. Key questions are: How am I made by the structures, policies, practices, languages, literatures, behaviors, training, people -- the racist discourse -- around me? How do I already situate myself in the racist discourse around me?

2. The teacher **calls attention to the racial politics of language and its judgment**, which includes the politics (or power relations) that regulate or mediate the teacher's own assessments and evaluations of students' languaging. Lessons and activities are historically and politically framed, highlighting the difference in power, authority, and value among different racialized language groups and language habits. In their own assessments and evaluations, the teacher also calls attention to the teacher's own position of power and authority, highlighting where the teacher's language habits and expectations come from, who they have tended to benefit and why. Key questions are: How are my own language and ways of judging language racialized in my history, education, and experience? What do those politics mean for my students who do not share the same racialized habits of language and judgment? How can I call attention to these racial politics of my language and judgments in my classroom and on my students' literacy performances?
3. The teacher **crafts antiracist purposes and goals** for what they do, what students do, and how teaching and learning are accomplished in the classroom. While activities and assignments may have purposes that ask students to engage with dominant, White English language practices, standards, and literature, the goals are never to simply mimic those standards or appreciate the literature as universally good or preferred. The goals are to understand such practices, standards, and literatures as historically and politically created by particular groups of (usually white) people, and to draw out who those practices, standards, and literatures have tended to benefit when circulated or promoted in schools and society. This orientation focuses on goals that center the politics of language and its judgment in ways that talk back to, or counter, the status quo and the systems in place. Key questions are: What antiracist purposes and goals can I create for all my students' work? How can I help students come to flexible practices that offer them knowledge about dominant habits of white language and a critical orientation to those habits? How can I

help them see the ways racist discourse may produce false ideas about themselves and their world or a sense of alienation that may be difficult to realize?

4. The teacher **resists hierarchical logics** as a way to organize the classroom, materials, ideas, assessments, students, and their language performances, while also calling attention to the ways schooling and learning have used such hierarchies to determine value and worth in languages and people. This means the teacher addresses the ways their assessments and grading practices participate in racist and white supremacist hierarchical logics. These logics unfairly categorize language performances and students, usually along tacit racialized lines. The teacher shows and analyzes with students how the world and our ways of explaining things are already made and arranged hierarchically by people. Through these discussions, teacher and students resist such hierarchical making of things, ideas, people, and languages because the practice unnecessarily and unfairly creates racial privilege and oppression. Key questions: How exactly have I organized my classroom, lessons, assignments, readings, and grading in ways that may assume hierarchical logics? How might I call attention to these logics with students and find alternative ways of organizing the class and its materials? How do I grade in ways that use hierarchical logics and systems, and what alternatives can I employ (e.g., ungrading, labor-based grading contracts, etc.)?

These four categories seem a good place to start for those wanting to. In total, these twelve elements of an antiracist orientation to teaching literacy make the most sense to me, and I hope, offer flexible ways to make antiracist classrooms with your students. I know, each one requires more reading, more thinking, more research on your part, and that is where we are at. We must always work at our orientations. That is what people with an antiracist orientation do. They work and work and work because our white supremacist system continues to work around us and in us. Thank you.

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Asao B. Inoue is Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts at Arizona State University. He was the 2019 Chair of CCCC. Inoue has published many articles and chapters on writing assessment and race and racism, as well as two edited collections and two books on writing assessment and race. He has won the CWPA's 2014 Outstanding Scholarship Award, their 2015 Outstanding Book Award, and the NCTE/CCCC Outstanding Book Award in 2014 and 2016. His latest book, *Above the Well: An Antiracist Argument from A Boy of Color* (2021) is available through WAC Clearinghouse and Utah State University Press. In 2021, he initiated the *Asao and Kelly Inoue Antiracist Teaching Endowment* at Oregon State University, which supports antiracist teaching and research.

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Introduction to “Teaching Writing at the Border”

Claire Carly-Miles, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Teaching Writing at the Border

Laura Gonzales, “Ni de Over Here, Ni de Allá: Bilingual Professional Language Practices on the Mexico/US Borderland.”

Victor J. Del Hierro, “Culturally Sustaining Border Pedagogy.”

Marlene Galvan and Randall W. Monty, “You’re Not Listening, or I’m Not Saying it Right: Reflecting on Borderland as Method.”

Delivered Wednesday, January 27, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

The following proceedings initially formed the panel “Teaching Writing at the Border,” which took place on January 27, 2021. The presenting scholars explored then and continue now here in this special Issue of *Open Words* to explore what it

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means to be of, from, and at the US/Mexico border: What are the forces at work in and on learning and teaching at this border (and by implication, other borders)? What hegemonies, conquests, resistances, and rewritings can be identified there? To whom are the silences and effacements there, and how does the teaching of writing play a part in finding pathways to expression and presence?

In “Ni de Over Here, Ni de Allá: Bilingual Professional Writing Practices on the Mexico/US Borderland,” Laura Gonzales, an Assistant Professor of Digital Writing and Cultural Rhetorics in the English Department at the University of Florida, provides two cases examining acts of “linguaging” at the El Paso/Juarez border. Through these examples, Gonzales argues that “as writing programs (broadly defined) continue working to embrace and practice bilingual and multilingual communication, we should look to the fluid linguaging experiences of borderland communities, who consistently teach us that 1) language fluidity and translation is survival, 2) language constantly moves, shifts, adapts, and changes, and 3) language is always connected to race, power, and positionality.”

Also focusing on the El Paso/Juárez border, in “Culturally Sustaining Border Pedagogy,” Dr. Victor del Hierro, Assistant Professor of Digital Rhetoric and Technical Communication in the English Department at the University of Florida too, explores both his own experience as a learner growing up in the area and as a teacher of other learners during his time on faculty at the University of Texas–El Paso. Del Hierro argues for a pedagogy that encourages students to express themselves through their own cultural experiences/materials/contexts. This culturally sustaining pedagogy shifts attention from the conclusions of a white supremacist gaze that disempowers learners to focus attention on an empowered awareness and critique of that gaze, itself.

Finally, in “You're Not Listening, or I'm Not Saying It Right: Reflecting on Borderland as Method,” Marlene Galvan and Randall Monty of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley explore “the thing that many border institutions are doing: appropriating the immediate and advantageous aspects of the proximal border but ignoring *la frontera*.” Galvan and Monty argue for an intentional “pedagogy of attending”—a pedagogy that encourages teachers and students to critique existing power structures and create their own theoretical narratives. They assert that this pedagogy applies both in writing classrooms and in writing centers, and they ask us to consider the implications of this practice for students, instructors, and institutions at the border.

All of these scholars invite us to question what writing has been and what it can be if we learn and teach what borders really are and how they have been

hegemonically constructed. Further, these scholars urge us to consider how self-reflection on/of lived experiences, cultures, and languages can circumvent, cross, or tear down the white-supremacist, capitalist, monolingual border constructs that have, for too long, walled out both learners and teachers.

About the Author

Claire Carly-Miles is an instructional assistant professor in the English Department at Texas A&M University. She is the coordinator of Technical and Professional Writing and the co-coordinator of Introduction to Writing about Literature, and she has worked collaboratively since 2019 to create open educational resource (OER) textbooks for both of these multi-section writing courses. Currently, she continues to participate in the revision of these OER as well as in the writing of a new OER for the department’s Science Fiction and Fantasy certificate (soon-to-be minor).

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Ni de over here, ni de allá: Bilingual Professional Writing Practices on the Mexico/US Borderland¹

Laura Gonzales, Ph.D.
University of Florida

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Teaching Writing at the Border

Delivered Wednesday, January 27, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

Introduction

I want to begin by describing my positionality in and orientation to researching writing, rhetoric, and translation on the Mexico/US borderland, specifically on the border of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico and El Paso, Texas, USA. I had the privilege to work at the University of Texas at El Paso from 2016–2019, where I was fortunate to collaborate with bilingual communities and students in the region, while also completely transforming—through the labor and brilliance of the youth, families,

¹ Portions of this paper are published in Gonzales, Laura. *Designing Multilingual Experiences in Technical Communication*. Utah State University Press, 2022

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students, and professionals I met—my orientation to theorizing language and translation. As a language scholar, I firmly believe that borderland language practices, and specifically the people who innovate and navigate these practices, should inform our theories and applications of writing and research more broadly. My goal is to illustrate how language fluidity on the border should further inform technical and professional communication and rhetoric and writing studies research. At the same time, I recognize that my analyses and descriptions of languaging on the border are made through my experiences as a bilingual immigrant from Bolivia who lived, taught, and built community on the Mexico/US border and who continues to invest what I can in the communities that transformed my life and sustain my work. I do not claim to have lived experience as a borderland language practitioner, and, in fact, one of the things I hope to illustrate is that the embodied experiences of borderland languaging are dynamic, constantly changing, and directly influenced by longstanding white supremacist linguistic ideologies that police who and what is categorized as “bilingual.”

Here, I'll share brief excerpts from several community-driven projects conducted alongside community members and students in the borderland city of El Paso, Texas, a large metropolitan city with a population estimated at over 1.5 million people. With thousands of people who cross between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso to attend school, work, and/or to visit family on a daily or weekly basis, the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso border is the largest bilingual, binational work force in the Western Hemisphere. Through grounded stories and examples, I aim to show what bilingualism means on the border and how borderland language practices can and should shape conversations about bilingual technical and professional writing. As I share these examples, I also draw on research about writing program development at Hispanic Serving Institutions, which was recently published in the journal *Programmatic Perspectives* with my collaborators Kendall Leon and Ann Shivers-McNair (2020).

My ultimate argument is that as writing programs (broadly defined) continue working to embrace and practice bilingual and multilingual communication, we should look to the fluid languaging experiences of borderland communities, who consistently teach us that:

- 1) language fluidity and translation is survival,
- 2) language constantly moves, shifts, adapts, and changes, and
- 3) language is always connected to race, power, and positionality.

Example 1: La Escuelita

To begin, I'd like to introduce you to Alejandra (see Figure 1), a then middle-school student who lived with her family in a housing community in El Paso, and who frequently commuted with her parents to visit family in Ciudad Juárez. Alejandra participated in an after-school program, La Escuelita, which I co-directed alongside my colleagues at UTEP from 2016-2019 (Del Hierro et al., 2019).



Figure 1: *Video of Alejandra Sharing Her Recipe*

In the short Clip captured in Figure 1, Alejandra is making an affinity diagram, a common brainstorming activity in user-experience research. As part of our lessons on culturally sustaining health and nutrition practices, Alejandra is showing us her favorite recipe—a recipe for hard-boiled eggs that she learned from her grandma. To describe how to make her grandma’s egg recipe, Alejandra writes instructions on sticky notes, and then she confidently places the sticky notes on the wall as she describes each step in the recipe. Rather than relying on one single writing system in her recipe, Alejandra uses words in Spanish and English to describe the need to “herbir el agua hasta que este real hot” (or boil water until it’s really hot), to “make sure el huevito gets cooked all the way,” and she also uses images as she draws the egg’s transformation and as she colors arrows to show the progression of steps in this technical tutorial. In short, Alejandra knows exactly how to make this recipe, and she describes each step in detail to her Escuelita family, her audience.

On the surface, Alejandra's technical documentation process, describing the steps of her recipe, echoes the fluid languaging practices that many researchers have documented as prevalent on the Mexico/US border. When describing her recipe, Alejandra is not constrained by the boundaries of standardized English, standardized Spanish, or alphabetic writing systems. Instead, Alejandra moves fluidly across and through these boundaries to convey her ideas. As many scholars in technical communication, rhetoric and composition, and English education argue, bilingual and multilingual communicators like Alejandra communicate outside and through boundaries, not only among alphabetic languages but also among various modalities, tools, and platforms. From discussions of technical communicators as translators who facilitate access across technical tools and documents (Weiss 1997), to the work of scholars like Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva (2003), who push writing scholars to acknowledge the creative communicative practices of "students from the margins" (p. 1), to more recent understandings of writing beyond what Bruce Horner, Cynthia Selfe, and Tim Lockridge (2015) identify as the "Single Language/Single Modality" approach to writing and writing instruction, to groundbreaking work of education scholars like Idalia Nuñez (2019), who shows us how "Madres Mexicanas Hacen La Lucha" by helping their kids language through multimodal approaches, communities of color have historically and contemporarily moved fluidly through boundaries and borders—among standardized languages, digital platforms, and semiotic practices.

Yet, it would be disingenuous of me to simply categorize Alejandra's communicative boundaries as "fluid" or as "moving beyond borders" without also recognizing that linguistic borders, while arbitrary, are strictly policed, and crossing these borders and boundaries, while it may lead to more effective communication, also holds dire consequences, particularly for Mexican, Indigenous, and Chicanx communities who continue experiencing violence at the border.

You see, when Alejandra describes her recipe, she does so confidently, with her hands pressing each sticky note firmly as she describes her process to her audience. What you don't see in this short clip is that in order to get to a point where Alejandra felt comfortable sharing her ideas in this way, participants at La Escuelita had spent years building confianza (Alvarez, 2017), establishing a relationship where we all understood each other, and where youth ranging from pre-K to high school, parents, and University professors could come together to share our thoughts and ideas beyond boundaries. It is easy to talk about crossing borders on a metaphorical level, without recognizing the violence that borderland communities continue to experience in a very real, tangible way. While Alejandra may speak fluidly in Spanish

and English with her Escuelita family, she doesn't necessarily feel comfortable languaging this way in school, where she has to consistently prove that her English is "good enough" or "professional enough" for success in US academics.

A long history of research highlights how anti-immigrant violence and xenophobia has positioned borderland residents, and Chicanx communities specifically, as not being "from" Mexico nor from the US, *ni de aquí, ni de allá*, and therefore not speaking "proper" Spanish nor "proper" English. While Alejandra speaks Spanish and English because she continues to have close relationships with her Spanish-speaking family in Ciudad Juárez, it's important to note that not all borderland communities have the privilege of being able to cross back and forth between Mexico and the US. Furthermore, for many Chicanx community members who were beaten in school for using Spanish, learning and speaking only English was and is upheld as a marker of American assimilation. For many border residents, speaking Spanish is seen as a marker of Mexican identity that has been diminished in the US.

Example 2: The Diabetes Garage

In 2019, in collaboration with the El Paso Diabetes Association and Dr. Jeanie Concha, assistant professor of public health at UTEP, I had the opportunity to conduct focus groups with bilingual Latino men who identify as borderland residents and who live in El Paso. For this project, the research team was trying to develop localized bilingual materials related to diabetes treatment and prevention (see Concha et al.). During a focus group conversation, we asked bilingual Latino men, mostly in their 50s and 60s, to help us translate a brochure about diabetes. In this conversation, the men engaged in dialogue about the use of "formal" Spanish on the brochure. The following are excerpts from the focus group transcripts:

Participant 1: And in the old days they used to say like if you respected, you talk to your older people, like "de usted." And nowadays, they talk, especially people who are bilingual, who got the bilingual thing, they actually use "tu" instead of "usted." It's kind of like old-fashioned, I think.

Participant 2: Well, I mean if you use the "usted," that is the proper, you know, Spanish. But if you use the "tu" [and] um [words like], "checha" instead of "revisa," you know, you're...I think it should be more formal, I mean cause you are not, it is just not the people here in El Paso that you are trying

to reach... it's the people that are actually coming from, you know the Mexican side that are actually already here that are, that were raised with the proper Spanish.

In this particular conversation, focus group participants were discussing the “type” of language that the brochure should include. Although participants were given some background on the project and told that they themselves are a representative target user (bilingual Latino men of varying ages who live in El Paso, Texas) for this brochure and for the broader program, as evidenced in the quoted excerpts, men engaged in a discussion about the use of “formal” versus “informal” terminology, referencing various levels of formality and propriety and their connections to Chicana culture. The discussion between “formal” (i.e., standardized) and “informal” (i.e., fluid/borderland) Spanish was prevalent throughout all of the participatory translation focus groups conducted for this project. For example, participants mentioned that formal Spanish would make the diabetes-related information be taken more seriously or “with respect.” At the same time, however, some participants mentioned that using less formal language, such as using the word “checa” in “checa tus niveles” would make the brochure more accessible to the El Paso audience. As one participant mentioned, “You don’t want to gear this [brochure] to people with Master’s degrees,” but should instead focus on reaching broader audiences.

On the surface, these excerpts illustrate participants’ helpful contributions and the thoroughness of their user feedback; these men were concerned with designing a brochure that would be appealing and usable within their community, as they, too, recognized the need for more diabetes-related interventions and programs in the area. Yet, what these excerpts and the broader conversation also point to are ongoing questions, issues, and consequences related to language fluidity, racial relations, colonialism, and diversity in this borderland region.

During this conversation, participants discussed possible translations of the word “check” in reference to the notion of “checking your blood glucose levels” within diabetes treatment and prevention. At first, the men suggested the word “checa” as a colloquial term frequently used to reference the English term “check” in this borderland region. Although the Castilian-derived translation of “check,” according to the real academia Española on which most “formal” translations are based, may be something like the word “revisa” (closer to the English term, “review”), participants initially suggested the term “checa” as a colloquialism that would appeal to and resonate with local users of the brochure. Participants

mentioned that they use the word “checa” in their homes in reference to “checking” anything ranging from their own car engines to their bank accounts. However, later in the conversation, participants such as participant 2 quoted earlier questioned the suggestion to use the term “checa” in the proposed brochure, wondering if the colloquial term “checa” would be offensive to Spanish speakers who do not speak the “pocho” or informal Spanish found in El Paso. As participant 2 elaborated, “the people who are coming from, you know, the Mexican side” are the individuals who speak “proper Spanish,” and thus those who may be offended or put off by the colloquial term “checa.” Another participant mentioned that the brochure should contain “the proper, proper Spanish,” rather than the Spanish used by “people like me, or my dad” (referring to El Paso residents who speak “pocho” Spanish).

The purpose of this project was to target material specifically for the Chicano men represented in the participatory translation focus groups; however, language relations in this region, and in the US and Mexico more broadly, consistently degrade non-standardized Spanishes in favor of standardized variations rooted in the European Castilian, to the point that border residents themselves may suggest standardized Spanish or standardized English translations, dismissing their own linguistic practices as unprofessional and not credible.

In “Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective,” Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores (2017) “interrogate the historical and contemporary co-naturalization of language and race” to describe what they term “raciolinguistic ideologies” (p. 622). Through this discussion, Rosa and Flores tie the separation of communicative practices into categorical “named” languages (e.g., Spanish, English, French) directly to a broader colonial project. European colonization established binary categorizations between countries, nations, and languages, all as part of the colonial aim to establish and ensure white supremacy (see Milu). Colonization (i.e., colonizers) separated lands into nations, people into racial categories (where white European is superior and all Others are inferior), and languages into static, bounded practices that were either literate/legible or not, all based on a white European standard. For example, as Rosa and Flores continue, “European colonizers described indigenous language practices as animal-like forms of ‘simple communication’ that were incapable of expressing the complex worldviews represented by European languages” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 624). This distinction between “simple” or “animal-like” communication and the “complex” or “sophisticated” language of the European colonizers continued to fuel the dehumanization of racialized subjects through chattel slavery (see Makoni and Pennycook) and exercises extended and deep-rooted influence on what is deemed

“complex” or “sophisticated” versus “lay” or “plain” language today (Jones & Williams, 2017).

Yet, in contemporary professional contexts, non-standardized language is essential to successful technical communication. There are many examples of health campaigns that are geared toward Spanish-speaking men and that all use the term “checa” to remind men to get their annual physicals and keep track of their health. Healthcare practitioners, advertisers, and professional communicators know that in order to convey technical information, technical documentation has to reflect the languaging practices of real people, and as such, this documentation needs to embrace non-standardized language practices. Instead of separating translations into a Spanish side and an English side, contemporary bilingual professional writing practices embrace Spanglishes and borderland fluidity among various Spanishes and Englishes.

Conclusion

As technical and professional communication as a field expands its conceptions of language beyond standardization, it's clear that we need more professional communicators like Alejandra and her borderland community. It's also clear that we need educational spaces that sustain borderland language practices and that foster the type of relationality that allows and encourages communicators to use their languages in their own ways and for their own purposes. Like English, Spanish has a long history of upholding white supremacist linguistic ideologies that privilege white European Spanishes above all others. Thus, establishing bilingual programs will mean nothing to social justice efforts if the Spanish we welcome in that bilingualism aligns with whitewashed standardization.

As language researchers continue studying bilingualism in professional spaces, I hope we can continue to imagine together. Imagine educational journeys for students like Alejandra that allow her languages to shine and that welcome her whole person into writing classrooms. Imagine conversations about bilingualism that centralize, rather than erase, conversations about race and colonialism. Imagine spaces where crossing borders is not a metaphor, but rather an intentional journey supported and embraced in all our communities. Imagine spaces where language diversity can be welcomed without centering whiteness and standardization.

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Ni de over here, ni de allá

About the Author

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Culturally Sustaining Border Pedagogy

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TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Teaching Writing at the Border

Delivered Wednesday, January 27, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

Introduction

This paper is adapted from a presentation of the same title given at the “Teaching Writing Now Symposium” hosted at Texas A&M University in January of 2021. The presentation was an opportunity to speak at one of my alma maters while speaking about a place I call home. Naturally, I took this event as an opportunity to reflect on my experience as both a student and a teacher. Furthermore, this moment of reflection granted me the opportunity to process my experience navigating academia from the moment I applied to graduate programs to the present as a junior faculty member. In this paper, I draw on Django Paris’ concept of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (2012)

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as both a guide for my pedagogy and as a guide for processing my own experience as a student. Later in this paper, I give a full definition of Paris' work; however, one aspect that I wish to highlight as context for how I oriented to this presentation is the emphasis that Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) bring to the opening of their introduction to their edited collection *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*, which is to continue to grapple with the question of "What is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?" (p. 1).

This is the question I immediately turned to when I was asked to participate on a panel about teaching at the border. As someone from the Juarez-El Paso border who attended schools in that region from K-16 and then worked as a faculty member at the University of Texas at El Paso, I wondered: What was the purpose of schooling in the borderlands? What was the experience of schooling in the borderlands? I spoke about my own experience as a student, but what was going to be my experience as a teacher? I opened my presentation at the symposium by giving shout-outs to all my teachers at Texas A&M because Texas A&M represented the most formative years of my career in academia. In my time there, I witnessed the resilience of graduate students and the value of community in the face of structural inequality. And now, being on the faculty side of the experience, I can imagine the level of tension and stress that came with walking into the building of the English department at its most chaotic times. And so, as I did during my presentation, I am excited to express my gratitude in writing for the efforts of my teachers and mentors. Everything I do in my classes is a variation or a riff of something that they did that helped me learn and feel included and pushed me to do better.

With this acknowledgment to my previous teachers, I wish to open this paper because, in service to the question of the purpose of schooling, one of the most important factors in what the purpose is and how it manifested is the impact that teachers have on such a purpose. Stated otherwise, students, for better or worse, will carry with them the experience of our teaching. What we choose to value and foreground in the classroom along with how we approach and present our pedagogies will impact our students far beyond the classroom. Thus, in this essay, I tell stories addressing the difficulties and successes that I have experienced while teaching on the Mexico/USA border. Guided by culturally sustaining pedagogy, I offer these stories as part of a larger discourse on what it means to live and engage with a bi-national settler colonial context, community, and culture.

Teaching on the Border

One of the weirdest parts of being who I am—and of going back to my old stomping grounds—is continually confronting the narratives created about me. Reading scholarship about Mexican American students written in the years I was a student is somewhat surreal. Furthermore, to embody the experience of being a student at the university in my hometown and then to go on to become faculty, felt like a privilege and a dream come true. Yet, to work for and consistently be reminded of how institutions simultaneously undervalue their students while undermining them and their potential wears on a person differently when they see this relationship from both sides. While institutions take every opportunity to display their *unique* student populations, very few think about what these populations need. Understanding this context, I wanted to use the lessons I had learned in order to re-imagine my own classroom, even if I could not re-imagine the whole university. I was excited and motivated to teach at the university in my hometown. To be from the border and teach at the border was a rare opportunity. For me, what has always been missing from the stories and narratives about people on the border is exactly that: Their own stories; their own narratives. Despite the nods to the local community and culture through cultural signifiers like menudo at faculty orientation breakfast or mariachis on campus, these gestures cannot capture the full depth of the student population. Perhaps it's too ambiguous to distill fully. Perhaps the faculty and administration are too white to really notice the nuance.

The long legacy of colonialism and settler colonialism has rendered moot much of the discourse on the border. In a population that is about 80–90% Mexican or Mexican American, there is both a sense of homogeneity and, at the same time, fierce lines drawn between class, citizenship, and linguistic proficiency. On campus, you will find pockets of students: Those who cross the border daily, others who only speak Spanish, some who speak Chicane versions of Spanish, others who carpool from the far side of town, and some who can afford garage parking. And there are students like me, who represent a mix of everything.

Spanish was my first language; I mostly lost it when I entered elementary school. I grew up taking weekend trips to Juarez to visit family. I spent the rest of the week playing American football. One parent had no trouble assimilating; the other still gets nervous speaking English. Of all of these, I assume my students experience some combination. One thing was for certain: there were few opportunities for students to reflect and make sense of their identities. I knew this from the conversations I had as both a student and, later, as a faculty member. With this experience in mind, I was

excited to make space for this kind of reflecting that would hopefully not only help students reflect on but learn to value the rhetorical cultural practices that they practiced and, more importantly, that mattered to them.

Teaching Story One: Introducing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

During my first year at UTEP, I had the opportunity to teach a summer graduate course for students who mainly were K–12 teachers working on a master’s in English and/or working toward their dual-credit certification. Shortly before the course was scheduled to begin, the edited collection *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* edited by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) had just come out, and I decided to theme the course around this text. Paris coined the term in 2012 with his article “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” with the intention to build off of Gloria Ladson Billings’ (1999) concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. I must note that she has a chapter in the edited collection by Paris and Alim. Both concepts aim to reject deficit models of education, and as Paris put it, in his “loving critique,” culturally relevant pedagogy only brought us to tolerance in the same way that multiculturalism only taught us to acknowledge but not how to engage across culture (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Paris (2012) further clarifies that “culturally sustaining pedagogy requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). In their work together, Paris and Alim (2017) go on to say that “culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 1).

Given that the students in my graduate seminar would mostly be K–12 teachers, this felt like the perfect text to frame a course around. For me, the emphasis on the word “sustain” that Paris and Alim placed upon pedagogy was the important distinction. What should we be perpetuating and fostering? To me this question squarely put into conversation the possibilities for connecting the discourses in cultural rhetorics, especially by scholars Cobos, Rios, Sano-Franchini, Sackey, and Haas (2018) who placed a special emphasis on embodied practices. What practices do we want to sustain and what would they foster? The language that Paris, Alim, and Ladson-Billings

brought to their work in education was exactly the type of work I felt was missing from my undergraduate experience and especially from my K–12 experience. Feeling excited for the opportunity in front of me, I submitted my course request, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.”

This request was promptly met with a revise and resubmit. It was explained to me that, according to the criteria for courses to count towards a dual credit certification, none of the courses could have the word “pedagogy” or significantly be about pedagogy. Dual credit certification courses had to be about content strictly. The sentiment I gathered from this logic is that we want teachers to focus on content but not on how to teach this content. This disconnect, I imagine, is what Paris, Alim, Ladson-Billings, and countless educators have been arguing against throughout their careers. The exact emphasis on “sustaining” argues why it matters to fully engage with the pedagogy on how to teach certain content. Nonetheless, knowing that processes at institutions involve semantics more than substance, I changed my course title to “Culturally Sustaining Rhetorics” and went about my business.

The course was overall an interesting experience and one of the most enjoyable experiences I have ever had teaching. We collectively hung on to the words of every chapter. My students of various ages represented an accurate demographic of my hometown of El Paso. In a class of 13 students, most of them were Mexican and Mexican American. There was one Black woman and two white students. Like the local politics in El Paso, despite representing a minority of the classroom’s population, the white students did not hesitate to push back against a few of the chapters. They expressed the *feeling* that the authors were unfairly attacking white people. As far as I can tell, a vast majority of the authors in the edited collection are BIPOC teachers and scholars. One of the most important aspects of the edited collection is that co-editors and authors unapologetically confront white supremacy.

Presumably, for my white students, this was their first time being asked to confront white supremacy. I am willing to assume that this was also the case for the majority of the students in the course. Collectively, based on their feedback, this was the most whiteness had been uncentered in a classroom space. This became evident when the white students levied their accusation against the authors in the edited collection and a few of the Mexican American students came to their defense. I am not quite sure I prepared for this specific conversation, but I knew it was not outside the realm of possibility. The specter of assimilation and the rhetoric of El Paso as a melting pot on the border always left this possibility open. It is the same kind of rhetoric that allows for a white politician assuming the moniker of Beto to rise to national prominence while at the same time making minimal impact on the local

community they claim to represent. And this is the same kind of rhetoric that a university will use to tout its status as a Hispanic Serving Institution while continually hiring white faculty and administrators.

To these students and their accusations, I simply replied, “You have the rest of the class and term to show me where in the book white people are being attacked.” I am still waiting for the evidence. It was an important moment for the class. Collectively, most of the students’ proximity to whiteness allowed them to see any critique of white supremacy and furthermore a centering of non-white culture and people as a threat to the status quo of white supremacy. A threat to what they felt was normal. For me as a teacher, it was a cathartic moment. For me as an El Pasoan, it brought to light a lot of what I feared. But it is an underlying tension of living on the border. Whiteness and white supremacy are constantly reinforced: in our language, in our citizenship status, and in our quest for upward mobility. Whiteness and white supremacy are also upheld when we try to imagine the population of the city, often using the word “diverse” to describe the community, when in fact, El Paso is one of the least diverse places because such an overwhelming majority of the city is Mexican and Mexican American. Conversations like this were important for the class. We had to confront the white gaze we had internalized. Because the students and I were an accurate representation of El Paso’s population, we could no longer pretend like our “diversity” could shield us from upholding that which continually oppressed us and our oppression of others. How could we be oppressed when we represent the majority? Yet, the moment we approached de-centering whiteness, it felt like an attack against white people and anyone that lives in whiteness’ shadow. As we processed this, it felt like the class came together as we all unpacked our relationship with white supremacy and carefully read the critiques each author raised as well as celebrated the brilliant work they were doing with youth and their pedagogical practices.

For me, the payoff would come at the close of the semester with final projects. The final project prompt asked everyone to “find a culturally sustaining rhetoric and write about it.” Drawing on some of the studies we read about, I encouraged students to engage in a wide range of methods, including ethnography, auto-ethnography, and social media analysis, to name a few. After having spent a semester reading about how youth were critically engaging with their language, culture, and community, I assumed the students had spent the semester thinking of examples in their own lives. And so, as I introduced the final projects, I asked my students to name some examples they could think of so I could write them on the board.

I was met with silence.

The type of silence every teacher is familiar with; where it seems like you now live on a deserted island.

Everything we had built up to felt like a failure. As someone who always grades themselves based on the quality of students' work, somewhere along the way I failed to bring everything all the way home for my students. We talked throughout the semester about the culturally sustaining pedagogy of youth but never quite made the leap to what they considered to be sustaining. At the same, I knew there was something deeper happening with my students. I considered the following possibilities: If there were examples of things that were sustaining us individually, then we were not making space for acknowledging them. If there were not examples of practices that sustained us, then we would be in bigger trouble. Either way, all those years of being undervalued and undermined by the institutions around us as well as our collective community consciousness continued to render our voices and our stories mute.

One of the points of emphasis that Paris and Alim (2017) argue for in the framing of their introductory chapter is the question, "What would our pedagogy look like if this gaze (the white gaze) weren't our dominant one?" This is both the root of why I believe students had trouble naming what practices were culturally sustaining and also an important reminder of what is required of us as educators if we are interested in enacting culturally sustaining pedagogy. Something I truly believe is necessary, especially for our undergraduate and graduate students, is the reminder that by shifting this gaze, we are potentially shifting everything. Perhaps my biggest error was asking students to identify what was culturally sustaining through a regular academic research paper. What was I doing to make space for these border students? What shifts did I need to make in my own pedagogy? Despite this initial failure on my part, I do want to credit my students for developing good projects.

Teaching Story Two: A Student-Driven Example of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

All my greatest accomplishments as a teacher are moments when students go above and beyond on their own. As a graduate instructor, if a student turns their final project into a publication, I find few outcomes more gratifying than that one. This story starts in my first semester as faculty and in the first graduate course I ever taught.

The course was "History of Rhetoric": a course nobody in the department wants to teach, a course I happily teach because of the potential for teaching a core course while disrupting how we teach the rhetorical canon. What better space to shift the discourse on rhetoric than to get to reimagine what its history looks like and how we practice it. In her seminal article, "Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges to the History of Rhetoric," Jacqueline Jones Royster (2003) argues that

what we know about the history of rhetoric is limited to what we have allowed ourselves to know. Royster's assertion is that the history of rhetoric exists in such a way because it has been landscaped that way. Furthermore, she pushes us "to re-envision the landscape, to see more, to understand what's visible in more dynamic ways, and to develop new theories" (2003, p. 163). Inspired by Dr. Royster, I decide to scrap the syllabus that was passed on to me from faculty who previously taught the course and build out a new syllabus that expanded the history of rhetoric to include rhetorics of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas, with an emphasis on women in the history of rhetoric.

As far as first-time graduate teaching experiences go, I could not have asked for a better group of students. I imagine this is what my white colleagues across the field have experienced for much of their careers--a classroom that mostly looks like them with some diversity sprinkled in. About halfway through the semester, a colleague passed by me in the hall and said, "I love the Día de los Muertos altar your students made to the women of the history of rhetoric." I replied to my colleague, "What?" in a confused tone. They repeated their statement, and I was still totally unaware of what they were talking about, but I thanked them for letting me know and decided to go visit the altar in question. To my surprise, a group of students from my history of rhetoric course, a group of mostly women, were so inspired by the readings about the ancient women¹ in the history of rhetoric that they decided to enter the university's Día De Los Muertos Altar competition with an altar to those women. To say the least, it was inspiring to see students take this kind of learning into their own hands. The students created this altar as an extension of their learning, as they were inspired to see themselves represented in the curriculum. We were then inspired by this project to create a blog post for the Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative's Blog Series (Soria et al, 2018)

(available at <https://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2018/01/11/altar-to-the-women-of-rhetoric-dia-de-muertos-altars-as-a-material-rhetorical-practice-for-shifting-the-history-of-rhetoric/>).

As I reflected on what this group of students had done, I appreciated the connection they made between a cultural practice that was personally significant and an engagement with historiography. In a history of rhetoric class, students were

¹ The ancient women who inspired the students included Enheduanna, Sappho and Aspasia. For more on any of the women mentioned please read Royster's "Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric" and Glenn's "Sex, Lies and Manuscripts: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric".

practicing how they wanted to engage in both the content of what they were learning as well as a practice that was going to sustain this learning going forward. I had the opportunity to teach this history of rhetoric course again the following year, and I knew a handful of my students from my earlier “Culturally Sustaining Rhetoric” course would enroll. Taking the lessons from both courses, I knew that I wanted to model the final project in my history of rhetoric seminar after the Día De Los Muertos altar that the previous students had created.

This new final project was exactly the shift in gaze that I needed to make. Student presentations and reflections hit all the marks that you want as a rhetoric and writing teacher. It was a multimodal project that challenged students to create and make meaning through multimodal practices. Because they built these altars in their homes, they had to take photographs or make a video of their altars to present them and turn them in. This added that layer of perspective and reflection. This opened up discussion for questions, such as “What does this look like as a cohesive thought?” and “What are the parts that you want to emphasize?”

As someone teaching on the Mexico/USA border, I was interested in listening to students talk about both their understanding and articulation of the significance and meaning of altars. Día De Los Muertos, thanks most recently to Disney, has become commodified. As one of our Mexican National students Moy Renteria discussed in the video from the previous year’s altar, Día De Los Muertos in his experience is more commercial and not something you did personally. This may be due to the fact that Día De Los Muertos traces its roots to various Indigenous ceremonies practiced throughout Mexico and Central America and not as a product of the settler colonial nation state of Mexico. Yet, for Indigenous immigrants, Mexican immigrants in the USA, Mexican Americans, and Chicanxs, Día De Los Muertos maintains a certain level of cultural significance.

In this second iteration of the “History of Rhetoric” course, the students in the class reflected on how difficult it was to create the altars despite their appreciation for them because they had never actually made their own. This supported what Moy Renteria had said about the novelty status that altars had but the engagement with making the altars helped forge this practice as significant. This was a different type of challenge from the one that came in the other course. Students were more inclined to engage despite not being sure about what they were doing. They eventually realized that your altar is your altar, and there is no wrong way to do it. This was a significant shift from when I asked the “Culturally Sustaining Rhetorics” students to come up with some culturally sustaining practices. For the non-Mexican and Mexican American students in the class who did not have a direct personal connection with altar making,

I asked them to introduce what their relationships to altars were, and they had the option to engage or come up with something different. Overall, we were able to shift the gaze and yet not leave anybody behind.

Conclusion

I want to end this essay with that feeling that students gave me when they said that they had never made an altar before. To me it was the same feeling that was making it difficult for them to name what was culturally sustaining in their work. There is something about the conditions that a border creates that silences. Because a place like El Paso is so overwhelmingly Mexican and Mexican American, there is an assumption that the presence of these people—or rather of what the white gaze would consider diversity—are being celebrated. While I will not say the opposite is true, they are neither celebrated *or* not celebrated; there's merely a tolerance. You and your "culture" are allowed to exist, but you're not allowed to engage in it, deconstruct it, or remake it. Your culture cannot serve you because it serves as your representation, and your representation/that idea of representation is dictated by the white gaze.

So often I had conversations with students about how they felt represented on campus. My white students were so quick to point out how much the "local culture" was represented. Yet, my Mexican and Mexican American students could not articulate it. So often students thanked me for assigning readings by *unknown authors* like Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Castillo. There is a significant gap between who is teaching, what they are teaching, how they are teaching, and who they are teaching it to. There is still much more to do, but as an educator, I feel fortunate to live and work with the words of Paris, Alim, Ladson-Billings, and many others, as they and we work to fundamentally reimagine the purpose of education, drawing on culturally sustaining pedagogies to "demand a critical, emancipatory vision of schooling that reframes the object of critique from our [students] to oppressive systems" (Paris & Alim, p. 3).

And so, I leave you with the question we must continue to ask: what are we sustaining in our classrooms and for our students?

Del Hierro

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“You’re not Listening, or I’m not Saying it Right”: Reflecting on Borderland as Methodology

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TEACHING WRITING NOW:

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Teaching Writing at the Border

Delivered Wednesday, January 27, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

Rio Grande Valley Land Acknowledgement

Indigenous land does not conveniently map onto current political projections, and modern-day people whose lands are overlapped by current Mexico/U.S. borderlands are in precarious positions of being nations across nations. We would like to recognize and acknowledge the indigenous people of this land, the Coahuiltecan and Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribes of Texas. Members of the Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe are still fighting to protect and preserve the

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National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas, Eli Jackson Cemetery in San Juan, Texas, and all our threatened and endangered relations in this area from further harm.

Overview

Sonia Saldívar-Hull (2007), in her critical introduction to the second edition of Gloria Anzaldúa's resonant *Borderlands/La Frontera*, observes, "The *Borderlands* genre continually refuses stasis" (p. 3). Ripe with implications for rhetoricians, this framing situates borderlands as at once recognizable enactments of epistemological action *and* as fundamentally contextual and thus resistant to singular characterization. Paradigmatic of place-as-incident, of region-as-method, borderlands are locations where political states, languages, cultures, and people meet and are divided in various kinds of discursive formations. They are boundaries that, according to Mezzadra and Neilson (2015), "overlap, connect, and disconnect in often unpredictable ways, contributing to shaping new forms of domination and exploitation. ... not merely geographical margins or territorial edges," but "complex social institutions... marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing" (pp. 81, 231).

So, what constitutes borderlands in our conception? They are the physical place as it exists in the material world but also on the map, the people but also the non-human occupants, the human-made (or modified) objects and the natural ones, and they are the discursive representations of each of these. Borderlands thinking attunes to all of these things, accounting for a "deep ambivalence" (Rivers, 2015) as well as an "overt acknowledgement of Indigenous materialism" (Clary-Lemon, 2019). Lastly, and of particular interest to writing instructors and writing center administrators, borderlands are proliferations, constructed and reinforced through writing, through policy and practice. Borderlands recognize their own liminality as spaces of transition and memory, at once *kairotic* and *choric*, neither static nor predetermined, constantly written and rewritten.

Proliferation of the Borderlands

An ambient factor complicating the work of teaching writing now, are the conditions of capitalism and the neoliberal academy, which are reproduced, both in terms of time and space, through articulations and proliferations of borders. The neoliberal academy is reproduced across a range of rhetorical acts, such as institutional branding, outsourcing to specialized companies for skilled labor in food service and maintenance, the increased reliance of educational technology including surveillance

“You’re not Listening, or I’m not Saying it Right.”

and assessment software, and the tautological justifications of degrees and programs based on buzzwords like “research priority areas” and “return on investment.” Each of these can likewise be analogized to what we witness in rhetorical constructions of the border: privatization of documentation processes, perpetual surveillance facilitated by state-of-the-art technology, participation in the economy as a condition for granting asylum, and public funds granted to private contractors to construct the border wall.

Like the border metaphor, neoliberalism flattens identity and atomizes individuality, rendering everyone as individual entrepreneurs indebted to no one else outside the heterosexual family unit (unless in financial terms) (Brown, 2015), ending history and constraining possible futures (Olson, 2012). Borders are places through which business transactions occur and are facilitated. Institutional discourse of borders, as a function of the neoliberal academy, does the same. Uncritical readings of border regional discourse, according to Wood (2012), “simply affirm dominant power relationships, especially when we accept national, institutional, and corporate domains as we find them” (p. 290). Necessarily then, writing classes and writing centers function within the constraints of neoliberal discourse, simultaneously reinforcing, promoting, and challenging its logics. This transactional nature is what Camarillo (2019) speaks to when he compares the writing center to “border processing centers,” and what McNamee and Miley (2017) invoke when observing that “centers are intricately wrapped up in institutional status quo” (para 58).

Borderlands and the Neoliberal Academy

Educational institutions play an operative role in these proliferations, often by situating their identities in relation to borders—and borders’ identities in relation to the institutions. The strategic plan for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine reflects this function with one of its stated goals: “Leverage UTRGV's unique geographic location on the border of the United States and Mexico, a place rich with diverse cultural and family traditions, but also one burdened by health disparities.”¹

This example is representative of how institutions of higher education especially—including the universities that employ us and disciplinary organizations we belong to—appropriate the border in support of their own identities. In this case, the border is valuable because it validates the institution’s anticipated educational and economic outcomes. This usage tracks with Rice’s (2012) characterization of regions

¹ The strategic plan language has been updated since this quotation was used.

as “not so much places but ways of strategically describing relationships among places, as well as the world those doing the descriptions wish to cultivate” (p. 206). Although the School of Medicine’s plan acknowledges the needs of the region, and indeed it administers specialized programs to meet those needs, the political contexts that contribute to those needs are skipped over, as are the previous efforts to meet those needs made by the people of the region. Discourses such as these should remind us that, when we hear “borders” invoked by institutions of higher education, we should be prompted to ask, “who is included in this invocation,” “who benefits or is harmed by this invocation,” and above all, “border of what”?

Borderlands as Pedagogy

Anzaldúa (2007) reflects, “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (p. 95), a charge picked up by poets and artists, including Anzaldúa herself, to write and create the Borderland through their work. A borderlands pedagogy extends this affordance and authority to students.

Often, students at our institution write directly about their experiences in the borderland, intentionally responding to their geographic, political, and cultural region. This writing of the borderland occurs indirectly, as well, *by virtue of their being students writing in the borderlands*. Everything they produce will be read not only on its merits and theirs, but as something from the borderland, or as something from a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or as something written by someone who looks and speaks like them (or who is, at least, perceived to). In practice, many students recognize this double consciousness, even if the flattening of the material, corporate conditions of the region can imbue a sense of national belonging through hegemonic participation. Every border region initiates unique challenges for the navigation of physical and discursive space, and student writing can “throw light on the subjectivities that come into being through such conflicts” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2015, p. 516).

A borderland as methodology approach to teaching and tutoring writing is amenable to these potential differences and includes such practices as

- encouraging students and tutors for whom it is appropriate to
- “use Black language and its rhetorical practices to subvert and survive the predominantly White writing center” (Faison, 2018),
- accounting for digital networks and access to technology, especially during the ongoing pandemic (Bell, 2020),
- acting brave by “Trying something new, even if you might fail,” and “Making spaces ‘safe enough’ so that people are comfortable taking

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risks, even if they are still not entirely comfortable” (Martini & Webster, 2017),

- developing writing assignment and activities that are equitable and just (Poe, Inoue, & Elliot, 2018),
- coordinating the networked support of writing classes and the writing center, along with programs like accessibility services, food pantries, and mental health counseling (García de Müller et al, 2020),
- citing and providing professional opportunities, with intention and without apology, for women, Black and indigenous people of color, multilingual speakers, LGBTQI+ folks, disabled folks, and other scholars and tutors from underrepresented and oppressed groups (Clary-Lemon, 2019),
- and enacting and developing pedagogies—and larger educational systems—that are not just inclusive and equitable, but that are explicitly and intentionally anti-capitalist and antiracist.

Borderlands as Methodology

Border regions are rarely afforded their autonomous identifications by national political, media, and academic institutions. Instead, what we get is a sort of geographical enjambment, with each unique region flattened according to a grammar of center and periphery. As a result, the expanse connecting Mexico and the United States is typically referred to as “the border” in national media, with rare distinction afforded to individual regions like the Rio Grande Valley, El Paso del Norte Borderplex, or San Diego-Tijuana (Sparrow, 2001). When individual regions are mentioned, it is often to note that they are defined by poverty, cartel/gang violence, or undocumented border crossings.

Two paradoxes of these representations provide opportunities for rethinking how we teach and research borderlands. First, different border regions are comparable, but considering them as something other than as belonging to a border might prove insightful. Second, when contesting dominant articulations of borders in our search for contextual accuracy, we may inadvertently reinforce hegemony.

In order to more precisely respond to these paradoxes, we’re exploring the idea of borderlands as folds (Rice, 2012), which may allow us to momentarily eschew the connectedness of a network in order to illuminate disparate nodes with similar features that we—or institutions, or the networks themselves—might otherwise not emphasize. This also recalls Anzaldúa (2007), who criticizes readers who appropriate

her convenient metaphors but ignore what she calls “the angrier parts” that are “too threatening and too confrontational” (p. 232). In a sense, the thing that Anzaldúa critiques is the thing that many border institutions do: appropriating the immediate and advantageous aspects of the proximal border but ignoring la frontera.

A Provocation

Next, a brief provocation by way of a distich of images. The first is the old main entrance to Runn Elementary School located in Donna, Texas (Figure 1). As indicated below the name, the school was established in 1904, making it the oldest school in the Mid-Valley area.



Figure 1: Old Main Entrance to Runn Elementary School in Donna, TX

Recent records indicate that over 99% of the students at Runn are Hispanic, about 95% are coded as “economically disadvantaged,” and 70% are coded as “English Learners,” which in this context means that Spanish is the predominant language spoken in the home. It also has the best attendance rate in the district—nearly 96% for the full year (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

If you look outward from that door, you will assume the vantage in the second photo (Figure 2). Taking up most of the view is an agricultural field, most recently farmed for cotton. To the left is a Casa de Cambio, where you can exchange pesos for U.S. or Canadian dollars and back. Along the horizon are segments of the infamous—and incomplete—border wall. You might be able to make out the road, Salinas

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Boulevard, which was rebranded as International Boulevard, in line with the naming convention. To the far right is the Donna–Río Bravo International Bridge and the Donna Texas Port of Entry.



Figure 2: View Outward from Old Main Entrance to Runn Elementary School in Donna, TX

Collectively, these scenes illustrate the contrasting yet intertwined consequences of this borderland region: manual labor, commerce, capital, security, transnational movement, and education.

Developing a Pedagogy of Attending

Thomas King’s (2010) oft-quoted line from the book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* tells readers that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). King references Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong who says, “Through my language I understand that I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths...I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns” (p. 2). Stories, thus, are relational, historical, cultural, and embedded reflections of a community’s lived experiences. Stories enact both theory and method, which allows for (as King reminds us) the epistemological function of narrative.

In the spring 2019 semester, Marlene, along with three of her colleagues, Val Ortiz, Britt Ramirez Carter, and Thomas de la Cruz, all lecturers in UTRGV’s First Year Writing Program, set out to design a new course. This pedagogical shift was energized by Asao Inoue’s 2019 CCCCs address, “How do we language so people stop

killing each other, or what do we do about white language supremacy?,” in which Inoue calls to mind Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk and social justice activist's conception of deep listening as a mindful attending to others (p. 363). This is Inoue:

“Imagine this kind of assessment practice in your classrooms with your students. Assessment might be a problem-posing process that continually attends to questions like: ‘Do I understand you enough? Am I making you suffer? Please help me to read your languaging properly’” (Inoue, 2019, p. 363).

“So I reiterate and reframe Royster’s questions: How are you attending, exactly? What are the markers of your compassionate attending? How is your attending a practice of judgement that your students can notice? How is it a practice that recognizes their existence without overly controlling them?” (Inoue, 2019, p. 364)

UTRGV as a B3 Institute

Inoue’s anti-white-language-supremist call to action forced us to revisit UTRGV’s stated goal to emerge as a “bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate [B3] institution” and as “an authentic Hispanic-serving Institution that builds on regional cultural and linguistic assets...as an integral part of how it transforms the Rio Grande Valley” (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley). However, it is wise to be wary of language choices such as “assets” and “transformation” that implicitly place the border’s value on the capitalistic validation of educational and economic outcomes steeped in neoliberalism.

First Year Writing Course Pilot

The constellating influence of Inoue’s call to action and our institution’s ambition to develop UTRGV’s long-term institutional identity as “bicultural, bilingual, and biliterate” led to the development of a first-year writing course pilot, incorporating in no small way the tenants of cultural rhetorics. As we worked through ways to develop a course using a culturally responsive lens that leveraged language diversity, a cultural rhetorics methodology seemed the best starting point for a new syllabus design. This is cultural rhetorics scholar, Les Hutchinson-Campos, appearing on an episode of Shane Wood’s *Pedagogue* (2020) podcast:

“You’re not Listening, or I’m not Saying it Right.”

So, the way I was taught cultural rhetorics follows four sort of tenets of practice, and that's really a way we view research, but also just knowledge. And so, those four tenets are story, relationality, decolonization, and constellation. There's no sort of ranking, all four of those things work together at all times.

This new course design was piloted in the fall 2019 semester in ten sections of ENGL 1301 Rhetoric & Composition I, the first course in a two-course, first-year writing sequence at UTRGV. This course design functioned as a pilot for an emerging pedagogy we called at the time the Latinx Attending Composition Classroom. The following guiding questions and outcomes emerged from conversations and planning, and are eloquently articulated below by Val Ortiz:

Preliminary Guiding Questions

- Who has the power to language and in what ways? In the classroom? In the community?
- How is knowledge created? In the classroom? In the community?
- How is knowledge shared? In the classroom? In the community?
- How does deep attending and reflection support sustained, productive action? In the classroom? In the community?

Guiding Outcomes

- **Inclusive Communication Skills:** Students will develop the understanding that language and writing are inseparable from cultural identities and develop texts that demonstrate respectful rhetorical choices tailored to varying purposes, audiences, and mediums of writing.
- **Anti-racist Research Methodologies:** Students will critically analyze popular research methodologies, explore alternative and culturally embedded methodologies, and make informed choices about which approaches to research they should employ within specific research situations.
- **Social Awareness and Responsibility:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity and the ways their own cultures are celebrated, recognized, ostracized, or ignored within specific social contexts and the implications for these behaviors.
- **Critical Counter-thinking:** Students encounter, examine, and question concepts surrounding reading, writing, and literacy from the perspectives of various discourse communities and intersectional identities.

With permission from the course designers, we share the first major course project called *(Des)conocimientos*. For students, the sequence begins with a discussion of the project's goals, including the use of narrative and positionality to engage students in their development of theories regarding language and identity. Then, we begin the iterative work of engaging readings (with a focus on BIPOC scholars). Drafting the project is a three-part process, beginning with the exploration and interrogation of identity markers. Students then focus on *their* goals for the project and how the readings connect to their emerging theories. All throughout the process students engage in feedback and revision, working as a community to develop a complete draft. An example of borderland methodology in action, the project seeks to respect students' autonomy while allowing them space to grapple with the complexity of who they are, where they come from, what they want to say, and how they want to say it.

Writing Spaces in/as Borderlands

In the fall 2020 semester, Marlene transitioned into a new role at the University, that of Writing Center Director. Thrust into a familiar liminal space, she found herself thinking anew about institutional, cultural, and linguistic borders of languaging.

As in the writing classroom, within and between approaches to teaching and serving Latinx students, remnants of historically maintained deficit models of learning are present in the Writing Center, as well. Tensions exist between the construction of the neoliberal academy and the lived experiences of the students (and faculty and staff) who reside, who grew up in these border towns.

Next, a set of rhetorically paired quotations, though lengthy, are vivid in the pictures they paint and the opportunities they inspire.

In his pivotal essay, "Unmaking Gringo Centers," Romeo García (2017) writes, "As a site of place, meaning, and knowledge-making, the writing center is about interactions and encounters, co-existing histories and trajectories, and is always in the process of being made" (García, p. 48). García continues,

If we listen, well and deeply, writing centers are not stable or fixed, but the degree to which we offer up this space to be changed and transformed by student writers has yet to be observed. Writing centers have spatial and temporal attributes, and because of this, they are always becoming in the sense that centers are made through the particularities of bodily movements and actions. The degrees to which these actions are attributed to student writers,

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as makers of space and negotiators of macro and micro contexts, have remained to be discussed. (p. 41)

In his essay, “Dismantling Neutrality: Cultivating Antiracist Writing Center Ecologies,” Eric Camarillo (2019) invokes powerful if simultaneously unsettling and heartbreaking imagery when he writes,

Academy, the University, as a different country with its own language, traditions, and culture. The writing center then becomes, essentially, a border processing center. In 2018, I fully intend to invoke all of the political ramifications and disturbing imagery that accompanies discussions of the border, especially here in Texas. The news is filled with horror stories of (brown) children ripped from their parents’ arms, (brown) children in cages, (brown) children abused, (brown) children killed. (para 7)

Camarillo continues,

In what ways do these types of stories impact the way universities, writing centers, and classrooms interact with (brown) students? The old way of thinking of writing centers, as neutral sites full of non-evaluative, non-directive questions and prodding, is no longer appropriate for the modern writing center. In order to answer the question of how writing centers serve minoritized students, particularly at minority serving institutions, writing center administrators must begin thinking of changes that can occur at the system level, at the level of the ecology. (p. 2)

A borderland as methodology approach affords teachers and administrators tasked with teaching and supporting students writing in the borderlands (with all its prospects and realities) the opportunity to directly confront that which is difficult (neoliberal academic agendas), painful (destructive reinforcement of language hegemony), and beautiful (the resilient ways our students exert their voice and agency within these landscapes).

Final Provocation

Given the array of potentials in this moment, it is imperative to ask: what can a writing center be, symbolically and materially? How can a writing center help students and

contribute to the community when it practices the deep attending Inoue advocates, when it allows itself to be changed and transformed, as García writes, by student writers? What can a writing center be, symbolically and materially, when, as Camarillo reminds us, as in the classroom, the languaging used in the borderlands is never neutral? What can a writing center be, symbolically and materially, when a University attends to how knowledge is created and shared in the borderlands, and we are all moved to share in language's possibilities for healing?

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Galván and Monty

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Marlene Galván was born and currently resides in the Texas Borderlands. She is the granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, daughter of Mexican American parents, and mother to one beautiful boy. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Tech University and Writing Center Director at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

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Introduction to “Teaching Writing Across the English Department Curriculum: A Roundtable”

Matthew McKinney, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University

with Roundtable Participants

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

“Teaching Writing Across the English Department Curriculum: A Roundtable”

Marian Eide, “Challenges: The Student’s Voice.”

Regina Marie Mills, “Teaching Writing Now: Creative Close Readings.”

Marcela Fuentes, “Story Shapes.”

Landon Sadler, “Teaching Writing with Care and Closeness”

Matthew McKinney, “Incorporating Diversity and Inclusivity into ENGL 355: Rhetoric of Style.”

Michael Collins, “The Pitfalls of Teaching Poetry Writing.”

Hyunjung Kim, “Literary Translation Project.”

Delivered Thursday, February 11, 2021, from 11:30 am – 1:30 pm.

Our symposium’s roundtable continued exploring the themes of diversity, inclusion, and equity in writing classrooms. Each of the presentations features a composition

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instructor exploring how they have wrestled with these concepts in their general practice and in the context of a particular course they teach. These instructors demonstrate, individually and collectively, that these concepts present unique challenges in different classroom environments, that these challenges must be navigated collaboratively by students, peers, teachers, and colleagues, and that this navigation is an ongoing, evolutionary process.

In her presentation, “Challenges: The Student’s Voice,” **Dr. Marian Eide** shares with us how experiences in senior seminar and non-major courses cultivated her understanding of inclusive pedagogy, specifically in terms of students who prefer to participate silently and how she must find alternate ways of soliciting student feedback. Inclusivity is also a focus in **Dr. Regina Mills’s** “Teaching Writing Now: Creative Close Readings,” where she describes how analyzing and creating choose-your-own adventure games in her gaming literature course promote diverse understandings of narrative construction. Dr. Mills references the work of another presenter, **Dr. Marcela Fuentes**, whose “Story Shapes” presentation details how her students explore diverse forms of narrative construction by applying different structural templates to the same writing prompt.

In “Teaching Writing with Care and Closeness,” **Landon Sadler** applies a feminist pedagogy and feminist ethics of care theory to rhetorical analysis assignments in a first-year writing class, asking students to examine texts proximally and socially close to their own lives on campus. In “Incorporating Diversity and Inclusivity in English 355: Rhetoric of Style,” **Dr. Matt McKinney** discusses how analyzing a variety of textual genres from a diverse array of authors, all of whom have distinct understandings of and relationships with American culture, can expand students’ conceptions of style and identity while drawing on their own experiences of both.

From here, the roundtable closes with two presentations that center on poetry. **Dr. Michael Collins** examines the unique challenges that teaching poetry writing requires as well as the shift in practice that these challenges entail in “The Pitfalls of Teaching Poetry Writing.” Also focusing on poetry pedagogy, **Hyunjung Kim**, in “Literary Translation Project,” details a course project that has students translate poems into another language, a practice that makes them more appreciative of language as a code that has both cultural and social meanings.

Challenges: The Student's Voice

Marian Eide, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University

About thirty years into my teaching career, I am still addressing challenges to my pedagogy and still learning a lot from colleagues and students. About five years ago, two specific challenges came to the forefront of my attention.

The first was the silent student. We are all familiar with this figure. While there are students who contribute freely to class discussion, there are even more who hold back. Some would prefer to remain silent for an entire semester and just listen. This dynamic is as endemic as the deep structures that produce it. The habits of articulation tend to map onto privilege and to a sense of belonging within an institution. Think about the times you have posed questions to the class and seen the same few hands raised each meeting. I am grateful to those students for keeping the flow going, but frankly I am more interested in the students who say nothing.

For me, the embodiment of this silent student was Ashley, an English major in a senior seminar upon whom I called one day with an open-ended question. She replied, "I don't want to waste the class's time with my half-formed thoughts." Her comment got me thinking about the importance of the half-formed thought. I was reminded of a story I heard on the radio many years ago. The author described a dream in which she believed she could solve the problem of global violence: war, genocide, oppression. No matter the problem, she had figured it out. So, she woke herself up long enough to write down the dream, and in the morning, she was very excited to find out how to end all violence on earth. The note next to her bed read: "Never wear coats with snakes in the pockets." Excellent advice, but it might not solve the problems of global conflict. I love this story because it makes me think about how the half-formed thought profits from being articulated. First, as absurd as her insight might seem, it also seems wise not to wear coats with snakes in the pockets. Second, the dream might be read as a metaphor. Third, by articulating her thought, she was able to develop or dismiss it.

Since Ashley expressed the problem of the half-formed thought, I have become a much more metacognitive instructor. I talk to students about the motivations and purposes of participation, about their fear of being "wrong," and about the value of practicing articulation. Thus, I make the educational structure and its aims more visible to students. I not only draw on the pedagogy of the oppressed to structure my teaching (Freire, 2000), but also discuss that pedagogy and Walter

Benjamin's critique of "penny-in-the-slot meaning" with students (1999, p. 208). Salman Rushdie wrote in *The Satanic Verses* (1988): "Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to make it true" (p. 281). Making something true by giving it voice is also my wish for students; they can bring new truths into the classroom by giving their thoughts voice.

The other challenge I faced came from a much less generous place in my pedagogy. As much as I believe in the cognitive value of essay writing, I have gotten really bored with reading over a hundred short essays from students in large-section, non-major courses. I realized that the boredom was actually a screen covering the emotional tax I experienced providing feedback for essay writers. I was grieved when they had not received equitable training before college; I was ambivalent about providing comments when I was carefully threading a path between rocks, between introducing grammar standards and also recognizing the flexibility and range of the English language across regions, populations, and cultures.

Recognizing the limits of my patience and acting on this insight had the excellent consequence of also making my core curriculum offerings more inclusive for a variety of learning modes. Now I assign what I like to grade: projects that give me insight into students' views and experiences. These projects are responsive to the literature I assign but freed from the perceived constraints of the college essay form. Students in my class on cultural memory have been submitting visual plans for memorials to events that have been neglected. Responding to historical fiction, students produce researched podcasts elucidating literary contexts. Mining literature from previous centuries, students present proposals for museum exhibits that would display the material worlds fictional characters would have inhabited. I am finding that my students are doing more and better writing and research for these projects. More importantly, the reflection and creativity that go into planning their projects engages their imaginations and their critical thinking.

Following a tip from two former graduate students, Karen Davis and Thomas Pfannkoch, I have also started to enjoy grading essays more. Karen and Tommy taught me to ask students what feedback they want. At the top of the submission, students indicate what they are struggling with and what they want to achieve. I have found students are better at diagnosing than I had known, and the feedback I provide is now more honest because I am not worried about inflicting hurt unfairly. I am responding to a request rather than criticizing an effort. Grading is less emotionally exhausting. Because I employ contract grading in my courses for English majors, I can teach writing as revision, and make room for students to imagine and fail, and space for them to experiment and get better.

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Teaching Writing Now: Creative Close Readings

Regina Marie Mills, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University

Introduction

What I'm going to talk about is one thing I like to do in most of my classes, and I'm going to offer a representative version here. It is called a "creative close reading," and for me, this approach is the combination or working together of creative writing and literary analysis. For each class I teach it looks different, but I'll focus on my games and literature class. In fact, the storytelling shapes PowerPoint by Dr. Fuentes that also appears in this special issue is the example she gives in my class when we're doing this assignment. Her presentation shows a helpful way of building and scaffolding towards this "creative close reading" project.

In my games-as-literature class, or officially "ENGL 303: Gaming Literature," one of the assignments that students do is a choose-your-own adventure creation and analysis, the idea for which I got from a similar assignment done by Eric Detweiler (Middle Tennessee State University). This assignment has two parts. The first part is to create a choose-your-own adventure (CYOA), similar to the original Choose-Your-Own Adventure series (my favorite of which was called Space Vampire) or the Goosebumps line of choose-your own adventures. There's also, of course, a large and burgeoning choose-your-own adventure community around [Twine](#), which bills itself as an "open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories." There are some very famous Twine games like Depression Quest by Zoë Quinn (2013) as well as Anna Anthropy's creations, like *Queers in Love at the End of the World* (2013) that I show my students as well, as exemplars or models. There is a new book also that I cannot

wait to incorporate into the next iteration of this course entitled *Twining: Critical and Creative Approaches to Hypertext Narratives* (2021). The book is published by Amherst College Press, whose mission is to publish open-access monographs, so I am particularly excited by its accessibility to both students and instructors.

Creating the Game and Changing How Students Approach Analysis

When building up to the choose-your-own-adventure assignment, my students and I frequently play these choose-your-own adventures and talk about literature and what literary choices the game designers made. What I'm trying to do is put students in the role of being a game designer and a creative writer. I find that after students do this assignment (see Fig. 1), their literary analysis essays look a lot better because they're able to put themselves into the position of being like: "Wow, I hadn't realized that when I was writing a story, I was thinking about questions like: How am I going to characterize this person? What actions are they going to take? What are they going to say in order to show that they're an upright person, or that they're someone who's willing to bend the rules if it gets them what they want?"

Some students also really want to make a hard copy, like a material experience. I had one game where the premise was that a cache of letters was discovered that was supposed to have been burned but weren't, so the student had burned the edges off of letters, even making it so some of the writing was difficult or impossible to read. From there, players had to try to figure out from the letters what choices they were going to make. Another student made a detective story where the player is trying to find subtle clues to determine which envelope to open next. She noted that some clues could only be seen with a blacklight or flashlight.

If a student goes the digital route, they might use Twine. If you haven't played a Twine game, the choices are indicated by hyperlinked words or images that basically tell the reader, "Click on this if you want to go to this branch." And they're great because if you download a Twine story file and open it in the Twine program, you can see how the branches look (see Fig. 2), and sometimes students lay out the branches in meaningful ways, perhaps as a circle or figure-eight to represent a lack of choice or a never-ending feedback loop in the narrative.

Teaching Writing Across the English Department Curriculum

Figure 1: Choose-Your-Own-Adventure (CYOA) and Analysis*

| Criteria and Guiding Questions | Professor Comments* |
|---|---------------------|
| CYOA Creation. Did you create a Choose-Your-Own Adventure game? Remember, the story doesn't need to be great but it should allow for an analysis of the 6 components of a game. | |
| Characterization. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they created): What were your goals for characterization? Do you point to specific strategies you use to develop (or not develop) characters in the story? How did you (or did you?) interact with the reader/player as a “character”? | |
| Interactivity and Audience. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they crafted): What audience were you aiming for? Who are the readers/players? How did you try to get them to interact with the story and be invested in it? How did player agency and choice play into the game? | |
| Structure/Organization. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they created): Why did you choose to structure the piece the way you did? What story shape did you use (Dr. Fuentes' slides may be helpful as would Jenkins' piece). Were there choices that you didn't allow for the reader/player? How did you struggle with the “choice” aspect of the CYOA? | |
| Worldbuilding. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they created): What specific strategies did you use to create the world in which the reader/player makes their choices? How "realistic" did you make your world? What is the internal logic of your world? | |
| Representation. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they created): In what ways did this piece engage with “representation”? Did it try to simulate something? Did it try to make you empathize with someone? Did it try to represent experiences or people that are otherwise marginalized or misrepresented? Did it depend on realism, abstractionism, or caricaturism? | |
| Narrative/Storytelling. Does the analysis take into account most or all of the following questions (as appropriate to the CYOA they created): How important was narrative to your story? What kind of story did you want to tell? What topics, themes, and larger questions were you trying to tackle with your CYOA? Did you try to “queer” the narrative? | |

*Please note that since this was provided for students who were using a portfolio grading system, I did not provide a points-breakdown by criteria. This was meant to guide students in both the creation and the analysis of their CYOA projects.

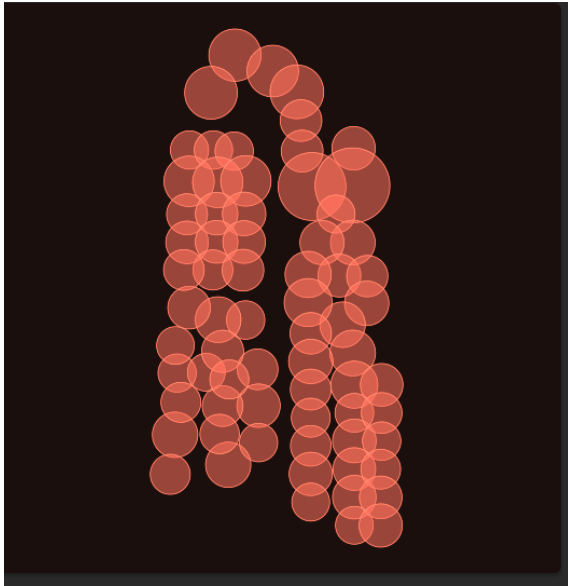


Figure 2: Example of how Twine story branches can look zoomed out

While Twine creators can do a lot more (i.e. hiding choices, allowing past choices to impact future ones, etc.), my students are usually using this as a new tool and go with the basics. I don't give them training in Twine because it's not required that they use it. However, I would say in the pre-pandemic classroom, about 50% did Twine and 50% did hard-copy or some other simple program like PowerPoint. In the pandemic classroom, nearly 80% opted to use Twine.

I've had students talk about these choices after the fact in their final portfolios in class; e.g., "This assignment changed my mindset going into literary analysis essays." I think this assignment is important because close reading games, like analyzing a lot of popular culture, is particularly difficult. People are just like, "Oh well, games, they don't have any meaning, right?" with the idea being that "this medium is too trivial to close read." It's also related to the resistance to analysis in some gaming communities, because analysis reads as politics. The idea that we can and should analyze games rather than just play unquestioningly is itself seen as a political stance (meaning actually "liberal" or "SJW" as it is derogatorily written) to a certain kind of gamer. By creating a game themselves, students realize that they are actually making thoughtful choices when they write, so why wouldn't the people who wrote the games we are studying do the same thing?

Assessing Student Games

Students are invested in making something special, and I get the best projects from this assignment. The best projects of the year are people making choose-your-own adventures, who then provide impressive depth in their analysis it because that's the second part, and it's the part that the grade actually comes from. When it comes to assessment I don't spend a lot of time grading the quality of the choose-your-own adventure. I'm not a creative writing teacher, and that's not really what the assignment is there for. It's an exercise, a way to create a text they are invested in close reading.

Once they've created the choose-your-own adventure (in whatever medium), the central assignment is then to explain to me what literary choices they made. I identify six different literary aspects that I want them to engage with: characterization, representation, world-making, interactivity, structure/organization, and storytelling/thematic choices. Thus, they have to analyze their story in line with these six key concepts that we've been focusing on throughout the semester.

I also craft the rubric to be more focused on what objectives they were hoping to accomplish, instead of "This is what a good choose-your-own adventure would or wouldn't do." We talk about how while every story might have characters, characterization might be more or less developed in certain stories. Or world-making may be more or less important, depending on how familiar the world is to the reader. If it's a world that we all know pretty well, like the present-day United States or the Star Trek universe (if your audience is a Trekkie), the author might not want to spend a lot of time on additional world-building. Thus, I don't tell them that they have to do all the areas with the same depth and intensity, but I do provide a rubric that's more like a set of questions that I'd like the choose-your-own adventure to incorporate and think about.

For example, representation. When I'm saying that, I can mean a number of things: is this game a simulation of an experience? Is it representing marginalized or otherwise underrepresented identities? When we think about narrative structure, how did they choose to structure the story? My colleague, creative writer and scholar Dr. Marcela Fuentes, comes in to talk about narrative structure: What might the shape of the story be? What do you want your choose-your-own adventure to start with? Are we starting from the end and trying to figure out how things got here? Or are we going to have this kind of rock in the pond where we start in the beginning and we're learning about everybody, and then all of a sudden, a big choice has to be made whose effects ripple out to everyone involved? And so, for me, the rubric is more like a set of questions that reflect everything we've learned about structure, characterization,

representation, world-making, interactivity, and narrative that will help guide them in creating the choose-your-own adventure. More importantly, it will help guide them in thinking about what choices they make in crafting their adventures and how they can represent those choices to me in their analyses. For example, students will say, “I tried to characterize this person this way and these are the choices I gave you in order to do so.” I find students put so much more work into it.

Pedagogical Reflections

I really like this assignment because it makes the literary choices of authors feel more real by making students reflect on the choices they made in the process of creative writing. There can be really creative ways of doing this and I just find that this makes them understand so much better when I'm telling them that authors actually have a purpose in what they're trying to do. Some of their stories don't really work well, but since I'm more concerned with them reflecting on their choices, it's less a focus on what is failing and more on what they tried and why it might not have worked so well.

For me as the instructor, I find this assignment really challenges my own ideas of what kind of stories I am looking for, or what I think games as a medium are capable of making. It's also a really fun way of getting to know what the students care about. They'll explore not only fantasy but other genres or topics. I've had choose-your-own adventures centering immigrants trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and sometimes none of the choices players can make are good, right? And some of these games are very clearly personal, very political, and some of them are really fantastical and really just about letting the student do that fanfiction that they've always wanted.

Ultimately, I think it's really worthwhile for us to think about how even in a class like English 303, a foundations-of-English class, a learn-how-to-be-an-English-major class, we can still give these creative assignments that really provide students with the ability to move beyond thinking of the genre of literary analysis in a very narrow way, as only the "traditional" essay. We can still teach them a lot of those skills but with more creative components.

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Story Shapes

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Introduction

I'm going to talk about story shapes. I am primarily a fiction writer, and so I thought I would share a fiction activity, a story writing activity. I usually work with students who sometimes have a hard time understanding the difference between the story they want to tell and what the best form is to tell that particular story. Sometimes, the struggle is between what they want to do and the purposefulness of the writing.

Typically, this shape exercise requires that students have already been given some scaffolding in terms of the “life” aspect of the story” (emotionality, character motivation, narrative threads) and the “artifice” of the story” (the shape or form of that story). They should be aware that both are needed to successfully write a story.

For this exercise, what I do is tell the students, “Okay, we're going to arm ourselves with one line from a published story. Everybody is going to start with this same first line, and everyone is going to start with a prompt.” I love to use the prompt, “A Historical Figure is in Love With You.” So, everyone starts with those two things. Then we talk about story shapes. The students, all having the same first line and prompt, must decide what shape their story will take. Today I will illustrate how one may start with the same elements but still arrive at very different stories.

Story Shape Classifications

It's really important that students see form as a structural craft element. I give students a list of story shapes; it's not an exhaustive list, but it does highlight the most typical narrative forms.

The first shape is the linear, A to B, or reverse A to B story form. In this shape, a group of young people, our characters if you will, travel in a car down the highway. The linear story happens very prosaically, so we enter the story and the narrative follows chronologically from there. This is a simple structure, organized, usually, in terms of time. This form can be told as it happens or retrospectively. Most “coming of age” stories are told chronologically. Some examples include *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003), *Harry Potter* (1997–2007), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

The next shape is a braided narrative, where the storyline alternates between two or more narrative threads, or points in time, or perhaps points of view. To illustrate, I use an image of a young woman from behind, and the focus is on her long red braid. In this case, the braided hair symbolizes the alternating plot, time, or point of view sequences. *Love Medicine*, by Louise Erdrich (1984), is a prime example of a narrative told through various points of view. Perhaps a more contemporary example is the HBO series, *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), which has at least five different narrative arcs and sets of characters. Most soap operas can also be considered braided narratives.

Another narrative shape is what I call “Rock in the Water.” Imagine a large rock plunging into a pool of water. The rock is interrupting that space, and there are concentric rings emanating from that interruption. In terms of fictive forms, a central event or inciting incident happens, and then the narrative reverberates from that event. There are many examples of that form. For example, the Julia Roberts film, *August: Osage County* (2014), where the funeral of the family patriarch brings together the whole family and then some unresolved drama from twenty years ago comes up during these few days.

Related to the “Rock in the Water” is the “Spiral.” The spiral is a point unfurling or developing into something larger. Instead of the inciting event causing everything else in the narrative, the central event is partially obscured. The narrative arc reveals pieces of the event over the course of the story. This form is very popular for the classic police procedural. Someone is murdered, and the entire storyline is based on an attempt to solve the crime.

Another shape is the “Bathtub” or “Frame” story. Picture an old-fashioned, clawfoot bathtub. The tub represents the foreground of the story. It is static, because it is a container of the actual narrative. This type of story takes place entirely in the past or is perhaps a story within a less-realized story. A well-known example of a frame story is the movie, *Titanic* (1997), wherein the foreground plot is simply researchers trying to find a jewel supposedly lost in the famous shipwreck. This on its own is too thin to sustain an actual narrative. The real story takes place entirely in the past. Rose,

now an elderly woman, recounts how she came to possess the jewel, her ill-fated love, and how this experience made her an independent person. Another good example is the cult classic film, *The Princess Bride* (1987). In this case, the frame is not two different time periods but one “realistic” setting—an American suburban home, where a grandfather reads a fairytale book to his sick grandson—and one “fantasy” setting, the story in the book. The action arises completely from the fairytale. Although the “realistic” narrative has moments of interjection, it is not a braided narrative because the thread of the grandfather reading to his grandson does not have developed story elements. These characters simply function as a built-in audience for the adventure-love story of Princess Buttercup and her Wesley.

The opposite of the bathtub or frame story is the “Iceberg.” For this story, imagine an iceberg floating in water. Although some of it rises above the water, most of the iceberg is submerged. The iceberg story has minimal details on the page, with most of the emotional context and even the action of the narrative implied rather than overtly stated. Probably the most famous example of this form is Ernest Hemmingway’s short story “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927). On the surface, the story is simply a conversation between two lovers waiting for a train to Madrid. Although the lovers are not having an argument, there is obvious contention between the two, seen in the man’s irritation and the woman’s attempts to appease him, as they have drinks and look at the landscape. Mid-story, the man says, apropos of nothing apparent on the page, “it’s an awfully simple operation, Jig...Not really an operation at all.” The effect is that the reader realizes this is an ongoing issue, submerged beneath their commonplace talk of the environment and their drinks. The word “operation” is the only specific statement made about the crux of their disagreement. As the story progresses, entirely in dialogue, it becomes clear that the man wants the woman to have an abortion. The woman clearly does not want to have one but is insecure about the man continuing to love her if she does not. Hemmingway conveys the entire conflict of the story and the emotions of the characters without either of them ever saying what the operation is or openly stating their feelings, only via context clues. This is a very challenging form.

Finally, picture a Rubix Cube. This is the “Experimental Form” short story. In Creative Nonfiction, it is called a “Hermit Crab” shape. This is where the writer mimics a different genre of writing to tell a story. Experimental forms may be a story that looks like a dictionary entry, a memo, or even a divorce decree. It still tells a story, but the narrative arc may be connected through atypical elements. For example, Meg Pokrass’s story “Recent Rejection Letters” (2011) takes the form of a series of boilerplate literary magazine rejections: “Dear X, Thank you for allowing us to

consider your story. Unfortunately, this is not for us, but we wish you the best placing your work elsewhere.” The content, however, is really a series of romantic rejections from men this character has gone on dates with. The effect is humorous as well as sad. Also, because the topic of romantic rejection is often covered in conventional ways, the appeal for readers is that the form itself brings a fresh take to this subject via stylistic elements.

Conclusion

Having covered these story shapes, I will now return to the exercise. Remember that the students all have the same first line from a published story and the same writing prompt, “A Historical Figure is in Love with You.” They are then assigned to select a shape, or form, in which to write that story.

My rationale is that selecting shape highlights critical thinking and intentionality. Asking students to place events in a certain order, or intentionally enter a story in a certain way, is asking them to really think about structure as a writing tool. Playing with shape and form helps them become better writers because they're able to see writing as craft, a separate thing from what they want to write, if that makes sense. This is one of my main objectives when I'm teaching fiction. I want them to come away knowing that you can tell the same story five different ways and it will be a different story every time.

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Teaching Writing with Care and Closeness

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Introduction & Theoretical Background

My pedagogy exists at the nexus of activism and research. The literature and scholarship I read are grounded in lived experiences, which I use to “activate” my students, that is, to help them make sense of their experiences and translate their knowledge into actionable change. One theoretical text I draw from is *No Angel in the Classroom* by Berenice Fisher (2001). In *No Angel*, Fisher reflects on classroom anecdotes and feminist scholarship to offer a rigorous and personalized account of feminist pedagogy. Critical to Fisher’s thinking is feminist ethics of care: a moral theory that was first explicitly argued by Carol Gilligan (1982) in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Feminist ethics of care draws from the experiences of women and others who have been conditioned to care. This moral theory values interconnectedness and nurturing, and holds that care is vital to issues of politics, justice, and everyday life.

For Fisher (2001), care and education are intertwined: to care is to educate and vice versa. She writes, “Teaching through a feminist discourse creates a context in which the interplay among experience, feelings, thinking, and action evokes certain needs. . . . As someone committed to a pedagogy revolving around feminist discourse, I cannot avoid asking whether, when, where, or how these needs should be met and what, in this context, is the role of care” (pp. 112–113). Fisher has three principles to demarcate care and help identify this “role of care” in the classroom. These principles are dependency, attention, and protection. Because one student’s needs may differ from another’s and because similar needs may be met differently, Fisher finds no perfect formula for giving care. However, she recognizes that students have diverse needs that affect their learning, needs that often oblige recognition and response from educators.

Practicing Ethics of Care

As a fellow care ethicist and a queer and feminist instructor, I consider Fisher's teachings foundational to my pedagogy. That said, care is a touchy subject for my students and me because discourses of care can easily become paternalistic and/or pigeonholing. For instance, according to the so-called "white man's burden," colonization was justifiable because it was supposedly in the best interest of the colonized; colonizing, in other words, was seen as an act of care. Today, responsibilities of care still fall unequally along lines of race, class, and gender. For example, women of color faculty are unfairly expected to perform unpaid emotional labor for their students and other faculty (Garcia, 2019). However, even though care cannot fix every problem, and it has sometimes created problems, care has proven to be valuable for my pedagogy. I contend that careful and critical uses of care can empower, heal, and unite learners, and I have crafted two major assignments using feminist ethics of care to great success.

Broadly speaking, I use feminist ethics of care to understand that classrooms are communal spaces: that is, classrooms are made up of specific individuals with various concrete needs. Care ethics reminds me of the omnipresence of affect and its potential uses in the classroom along with the responsibilities that I have to my students, myself, and others who have constructed and helped maintain the classroom. Through care ethics, I navigate power imbalances, humanize my students, and become humanized, remembering that we exist in larger networks of care and that care is always already gendered, raced, and classed.

One principle that I have applied from feminist ethics of care to my teaching is closeness. Early care ethicists privileged physically and emotionally close relationships since care tends to be easier to recognize and measure in physically and emotionally close relationships. One example of this is the "identifiable victim effect" (Jenni & Lowenstein, 1997), which states that people are more likely to give help to their neighbors than to strangers. Although this psychological preference for the near and familiar may lead to tribalism, nationalism, and xenophobia, I believe it has some positive applications. For example, one text that I have students rhetorically analyze in my Composition and Rhetoric class is the web page for The 12th Can, a student-run food pantry at my university that serves faculty, staff, and other students. Working in small groups, the students analyze the web page's formatting, diction, syntax, and accompanying pictures to articulate its strategies and gauge The 12th Can's effectiveness at presenting itself as a legitimate and worthwhile cause. The students consider logos, pathos, and ethos to discern how food insecurity—which affected one

in seven Americans in 2020 —is represented close to home (“The Impact of the Corona Virus on Food Insecurity,” 2021). By placing food insecurity and rhetoric in the context of their local community, my students’ preconceptions about their university are challenged, and they are confronted with the question: how should a communal problem be solved?

Similarly, I offer another assignment for my same class that resonates with the emphasis feminist ethics of care places on closeness. In this assignment, students rhetorically analyze the bronze monument of Lawrence Sullivan Ross, a Confederate States Army general, in terms of posture, size, materiality, and color. This rhetorical analysis also focuses on placement: the statue stands in the middle of our campus at Texas A&M University. Students answer a myriad of questions. What does it mean for A&M to center the statue, for it to be placed at the heart of campus? How is the statue standing: gallantly, triumphantly, welcomingly, and to whom? Ultimately, when I bring in texts that are quite close to students, they are generally more engaged due to how the texts more clearly relate to their lives, and there are often personal stakes involved.

Conclusion

Inspired by feminist ethics of care, I hope to see the students make connections among themselves, history, the local community, and society more broadly. These close types of assignments are productive for at least a couple reasons. First, they help students grasp the practicality of humanities and the English major, which is as relevant as ever due to how COVID-19 has forced budget cuts to liberal arts programs (Dennon, 2021). Second, assignments that illuminate closeness can lead students to create changes in their communities. A couple of my students went on to volunteer at The 12th Can, and several of my former students have been involved in efforts to protest the Confederate monument. Moreover, whenever I assign these texts, there are always several students who report that they did not know of The 12th Can or of the history of the Sullivan Ross statue before the activity. These assignments thus allow for a candid and grounded discussion of privilege, accessibility, and historical forgetting. Convincing students to care about what they study can be challenging, but one way I show that I care about them is by assigning texts close to their proximities. At the very least, it has made me feel closer to them, and that matters.

McKinney

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Incorporating Diversity and Inclusivity into ENGL 355: Rhetoric of Style

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Since the second half of the twentieth century, rhetoric and composition has emphasized diversity and inclusivity as important pedagogical values. How well these values are reflected in instructional practice, however, has long been a point of contention. Additionally, the exigence for creating diverse, inclusive curricula has only intensified due to changing student and national demographics, as well as the resurgence of fascism in US sociopolitical discourse. In my presentation, I will discuss my response to that exigence with my pedagogy, focusing in particular on an upper level course taught at Texas A&M: English 355 - Rhetoric of Style. Specifically, I will review how my practice and curriculum for English 355 incorporates themes of US history and cultural identities in our exploration of style.

In order to understand how I have adapted English 355's curriculum towards exploring issues of diversity and inclusion, an understanding of the course's traditional structure is needed. The general design of this course helps students to develop an understanding of stylistic analysis, from the grammatical and syntactical rules of English to larger social contexts. We look at writing from a wide array of genres, from social media to news articles to poetry, just so we can see how these stylistic concepts manifest in these contexts. When instructors assign readings for a typical week, we put them in pairs. This is because contrasting texts makes stylistic analysis easier for students. Lastly, sections of this class are focused on a central theme to provide a sense of cohesion as we navigate all of these different texts and genres. Out of all the traditional design elements of English 355, the theme is where I have made most of my adjustments.

For my section of English 355: Rhetoric of Style, I look at the theme of American culture and different aspects of American identity. I find that this theme pairs nicely with style because it goes along with the emphasis in generic diversity, tying that to different voices and experiences. It allows students to draw on their own understanding of how they identify with being American or with American culture. Further still, it gives me a way of talking about a range of current events while also applying historical context to them. My experiences in teaching other courses has been that current events that might be more contentious otherwise can be supplemented with history. This supplementary context enhances students' abilities to recognize and evaluate recursive patterns in historical and contemporary events, and what makes current events significant.

On the first day of class, my primary pedagogical objective is to set the tone for in-class discussions and prompt students to engage with central course concepts. Some of the opening questions I ask include:

- What traits or values do you ascribe to American culture?
- What are some different ways American culture can be defined?
- Does America only apply to people in the United States or people from North, Central, and South America regardless of country?
- How do you identify with being an American or American culture?
- What are some contradictions in American culture that you notice?

Student observations that typically emerge include the idea that Americans really value being an individual and going against the grain. Past classes have linked

those qualities with a contentious social issue, such as gender conformity, identifying contradictions between these values and how they apply (or don't) to these issues.

As a practical demonstration of my pedagogical approach, I will review the first pair of readings we covered in the Spring 2021 section of my English 355 course. We began with looking at the United States and Haitian Declarations of Independence. This is because the United States and Haiti were the first two colonies to declare independence from a European power. One colony was led by slave owners, the other by enslaved Africans, so they have an interesting legacy together. To analyze these texts, we looked at stylistic concepts called the "arenas" which are basically layers of context. We begin the textual arena, or the context of how the English language is structured, such as grammar and syntax. From there, we progress to the social arena, or the ways the writers are trying to cultivate identities for themselves, how they use those identities to engage with their audiences, and even sometimes the identities they try to cultivate for their audiences. Lastly, we examine the cultural arena, which looks at a text and the writer's connection to historical and larger cultural contexts and collective experiences.

When the students applied these concepts to these pieces, we were also looking at connections between both countries. Even though the two countries are linked geographically and historically, most of the students don't know much about Haiti, so we think about why that might be. We also looked at how each country characterized their oppressors in the document, so we can see the kind of cultural relationship they had and were supposed to have later. We also look at contextual connections between the two countries at the time of the Haitian Revolution. For example, Jefferson obviously wrote our Declaration of Independence, but he was President when Haiti declared their independence, and did not support it.

Another pair of texts we analyzed in the class were Amanda Gorman's poem, "The Hill We Climb," when she spoke at President Joseph Biden's inauguration, and a criminal complaint that the FBI filed against someone who was part of the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol. The latter event was a much more ominous beginning to the course and its themes than I anticipated, but I did my best to incorporate it effectively. For these readings, the main stylistic concept we review comes from Cicero: levels of style. In other words, I ask: what is the purpose of the document, how does the document's style convey that purpose? For low style, the purpose is just to inform or teach; for middle style, it is to entertain or engage; and the purpose high style is to move. Obviously, conceptions of rhetorical situations and textual genres were simpler in Cicero's time, so we also wrestle with questions like, "How do we

unpack these distinctions in the modern age? How has rhetoric evolved since then?" In terms of how we apply themes of diversity and inclusion to these concepts, we look at how writers construct themselves in alignment with American values. I ask: how did the FBI try to embody the sense of unbiased justice that America claims to value? How is Gorman framing our collective experience and national ethos in her poem? We also look at how conventions of language connect with historical context, how these conventions are followed in each text, when these texts deviate from those conventions, and how those deviations illustrate the American character. For example, an FBI criminal report is trying to look as unbiased as possible. It is very difficult to tell who wrote it individually, because the document is representing an organization, whereas Gorman talks about her own experience in this country and her experience speaking at the inauguration of a Black female Vice President. Consequently, she puts herself in the text while simultaneously using the third person to describe herself. This implies that her story is not the only one like hers, and it also deviates from the typical use of first person.

I want to end my presentation with a couple of challenges that arose with my latest section, and that I want to address in the future. The biggest challenge is just keeping it from turning into a history class. When we examine how larger social and cultural contexts shape style, you have to provide that information for students to have a fair chance to analyze texts. For example, last semester we looked at a text by Russell Means, who is a Lakota activist, and I had a student ask me "why he's so angry." That is an enormous question, and it is difficult to unpack those centuries of history in a short time, so I had to briefly address it and then follow up in the next class, while maintaining a focus on style.

The other major challenge is just crafting a really comprehensively diverse reading list. Balancing diversity in genre with diversity in perspective can be really difficult. Beyond doing my own research, it is a question I have also put to my students. Regardless, I change up my reading list every time I teach the course, but I am still working towards further improvement.

Thank you all for your time and thank you again for listening.

The Pitfalls of Teaching Poetry Writing

Michael Collins, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University

So—what are the pitfalls of teaching poetry writing? The first pitfall opens underfoot as one chooses texts for a poetry writing class. I usually assign a “how to” book that explains techniques, forms, and approaches to solving the problems involved in bringing forms and techniques to life. I also assign a “what's out there” book. This is an anthology of contemporary poetry that the students can use as models for their own work or use as examples of styles to resist. But in choosing the “how to” and “what's out there” books, I run up against a problem that I always talk about on the first day. The problem is that of grading poetry—something akin to trying to grade a life form.

This life form status of poetry is one of the reasons why I hesitated to accept a seat on this particular panel. After all, I'm not in the Writing in the Disciplines field, and I have always thought of teaching poetry writing as different from teaching the writing of critical essays. I have always taken it for granted that student essays should be graded with the idea of prodding class members to work hard to write well-structured, persuasive, grammatically unimpeachable arguments.

But then, listening to the presentations so far in this symposium, I've come to realize (with the help of encouragement from Dr. David McWhirter) that I might have something to contribute. The questions that guided me while preparing this presentation are the following: How much should teaching academic essay writing resemble teaching poetry writing? What should the balance be between giving free reign to student creativity and enforcing standard structure, diction, syntax, tone, decorum, citation, and the rest?

In my poetry writing classes, I allow and encourage complete freedom in terms of the students' experiments with structure, diction, syntax, curse words, raw emotion, sudden confessions, blank space, appropriated lines, length, and more. In grading academic essays, on the other hand, I point out errors in syntax, diction, argumentation, paragraph and thesis construction, depth of insight, use and citation of sources, and, sometimes, conformity to an assigned topic. In short, I think of teaching academic essays as teaching a craft—no insult to anyone who thinks otherwise—while teaching poetry is teaching an art, and teaching an art is like teaching somebody how to make a tiger.

On the slide I am showing now, I have the image of the tiger painted by William Blake to illustrate his great poem “The Tyger.” I do this as a way of elaborating on the aforementioned differences between critical essays and poetry. It is important to remember here that Blake was dismissed at the time of his death as “an unfortunate lunatic” by one writer (Hunt, 1809, as cited in Homes, 2015). Even the opium-addicted poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1818) confessed, “I am in the very mire of commonplace common sense compared to Mr. Blake” (as cited in Holmes, 2015).

So, I would say that in teaching poetry, I try to get people to escape the mire of common sense, while in teaching essay writing I try to teach them how to put common sense in the form of standard sentence structure and rules of argument to work to make convincing claims about their subjects. The difference is the one between Blake’s “The Tyger,” which goes way beyond common sense, and the essay about Blake that includes the Coleridge quotation—an essay that makes marvelous use of common sense.

I can explain this a little more precisely—and touch on the surprising political implications of these aesthetic and pragmatic issues—by explaining the lesson contained in my decision to choose a book I regularly use in the poetry class. This book is Rita Dove’s *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2011)—the “what’s out there” book. In her introduction, Rita Dove explains that, as she chose poets for the anthology, she asked herself, “Is this a voice that will be remembered?” (2011, p. xxix).

She goes on to emphasize her break with traditional ideas of what a voice worth hearing or worth remembering might be, and she contrasts her approach with that of previous anthologists. In the early 20th century, she explains, “four men emerged as monoliths: Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound....these...poets were all Caucasian males, but so was then, by design, membership in the cultural elite; female and nonwhite poets had little choice but to emulate or, if temperamentally suited, argue with the rulers of mainstream perception” (Dove, 2011b, p. xxiii).

One of the things I find striking about this is the fact that, by editing the Penguin anthology, Dove herself became a kind of ruler, or possible ruler at least, of mainstream perception. This is especially striking when one considers the background she brought to her suzerainty: Dove was tapped to edit the anthology in the first place because she has a very exalted reputation as a poet. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987, becoming the first African American to do so in 37 years, and she served as U.S. Poet Laureate from 1993 to 1995. She was the tip of the spear in the entry of African American poets into the American poetry mainstream. I could give a whole lecture

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about the evolving relationship between Black poetry and the mainstream. But for present purposes, I want to discuss the relationship between Dove and a mainstream doyen, the famous poetry critic Helen Vendler.

In 1997, the New York Times described Vendler as

arguably the most powerful poetry critic in America. For two generations, she and Yale professor Harold Bloom...have to some extent decreed which poets will enter the pantheon. Beyond her influential views, she is a member of the Pulitzer board, has been a nominator for the MacArthur Foundation “genius” awards and is a member of the grant panel for the Guggenheim Foundation. During the early years, she helped select poets to be reviewed by The New York Times Book Review....[S]he has given her favorites celebrity and jobs....Outside the charmed circle of her proteges, however, Ms. Vendler is so feared that many refuse to speak publicly about her....So who is on the Vendler wavelength? Rita Dove, whose lean verse is embedded with complex forms, is one. (Smith, 1997, p. B7)

And so, my point is that she, Vendler, helped Rita Dove gain the prominence that led to Dove’s editorship of the Penguin anthology. But in the end there was a consequential and much remarked-upon break between them caused by that very anthology, and so I’ll briefly discuss this break, and its implications for teaching writing.

In her review of Dove’s anthology, Vendler (2011) wrote:

Multicultural inclusiveness prevails: some 175 poets are represented. No century in the evolution of poetry in English ever had 175 poets worth reading, so why are we being asked to sample so many poets of so little lasting value? Anthologists may now be extending a too general welcome. Selectivity has been condemned as “elitism”...People who wouldn’t be able to take on the long-term commitment of a novel find longed-for release in writing a poem...[Dove] decides (except in certain obligatory moments) for the more “accessible” portions of modern lyric...But a poem can communicate while it is still imperfectly understood (said Coleridge), and Dove trusts her readers less than she might...Perhaps Dove is envisaging an audience that would be put off by a complex text...The school anthologies of the past, knowing their young pupils’ limits, offered many “accessible” poems...But it was assumed that adult readers of poetry could progress...to works attaining varieties of

diction, overlapping intellectual structures, and complex moral reference. (n.p.)

Dove (2011a) angrily responded:

I supposed Ms. Vendler would rather I declare a Top Ten, or perhaps just five, as she herself did in a recent study...Assuredly, many acclaimed poets are no match for Shakespeare—probably not a one...[But my anthology] is a gathering of poems its editor finds outstanding for a variety of reasons, and by no means all of them in adherence to my own aesthetic taste buds...Vendler—no slouch when it comes to lumping poets together by race—makes quick work of...Gwendolyn Brooks, dismissing my description of Brooks’ “richly innovative” early poems as “hyperbole,” perhaps because I dared to compare those poems to “the best male poets of any race”...[Vendler further complains that] (“From [Dove's] choices no selection principle emerges.”)

There is enough going on in this exchange to merit its own essay (and a number of essays have been written about the Dove-Vendler cage match). But for present purposes what counts is the way the exchange highlights the difficulty of judging a poem. In other words, I ask: what is an “A” poem? What is a “C” poem? What poems should be in an anthology? Which poems should be excluded? What aesthetic principles must you use? These hard-to-answer questions are among the reasons why I’m uncomfortable with giving grades to poems, although I feel I have to because of the academic system we’re in.

But who knows? Maybe in the future, I’ll consider using a grading contract in the poetry class. But I still have to process the idea of whether I should use grading contracts in a class where people write essays. So, I’m hoping some of the Writing in the Disciplines people here can enlighten me about that.

A final quick point: One of Vendler’s criticisms of Dove is that Dove is a poet and not an essayist and, as a consequence, Dove’s introduction to the anthology is weak. And, of course, Dove once again responded sharply and took Vendler down. I guess the questions it all raises are: What are the minimum essay writing standards that must be taught, and how much flexibility and room for poetic adventures should be accommodated by those minimum standards?

Afterword, August 19, 2021

During the Q&A after my panel, Dr. Valerie Balester asked me an interesting question: Do I believe academic essays are just workmanlike pedestrian things while poetry is a high art?¹ I was very grateful for the question because it gave me a chance to seem not so full of myself. My answer was that the five-minute limit for panel member presentations allowed little room for nuance—little space to ask obvious rhetorical questions like how many poets can write as well as Walter Benjamin? Indeed, there are many great essayists like Benjamin who are just fearless as writers. Jacques Derrida comes to mind. (Some lines—for instance, “I will speak, therefore, of a letter. Of the first letter, if the alphabet and most of the speculations which have entered into it, are to be believed”—arguably helped launch a whole school of poetry).

It is true that, in a class that assigns academic essays, my focus is on telling students, “You have to create something that can communicate your thoughts effectively and pass muster if you need to submit a writing sample when you apply for a job or graduate school.” But there is of course a lot of room for art in essay writing. I have gotten some great, beautiful student essays. Because sometimes, when someone tries to write with great precision, essay writing starts to converge with poetry writing. Focusing with real intensity on the elements of essay writing forces a person to become creative in order, for instance, to convey a complicated reality in 1,000 words or whatever the requirement is. At the limit, language starts to superconduct, just as it does in poetry (Collins, 2006, 935–936).

Finally, I have to say a word about Frantz Fanon, another who doubled as scholar and great writer, because something else I could not explain due to the five-minute limit is why I chose the title “The Pitfalls of Poetry Writing.” The title is an allusion to Fanon’s famous chapter on “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In that chapter (as translated by Constance Farrington), Fanon asserts that the

National bourgeoisie will be greatly helped on its way toward decadence by the Western bourgeoisies, who come to it as tourists avid for the exotic, for big game hunting, and for casinos. The national bourgeoisie organizes centers of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. (Fanon, 153)

¹ These are not her exact words, but this is the gist of her question.

This passage makes me wonder if the Dove-Vendler relationship in particular—and, more generally, the relationship between nonwhite intellectuals and white critics, editors, universities, classrooms, prize committees and the like—isn't a little like the relationship between the national bourgeoisie and the western bourgeoisie: a relationship in which the national bourgeois/poet is judged, even in his, her or their rebellion—even in the assertion of his, her or their editorial taste—by a Western bourgeoisie that wants the nonwhite intellectual to show an independence that caters to the West's desire for exotic pleasures and “big game”—for tigers, if you will.

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Literary Translation Project

Hyunjung Kim
Texas A&M University

Introduction

In this article, I want to share one of the projects that I assign in my literature class focused on writing about literary texts, particularly writing about poetry. It's called a "literary translation project." Basically, I ask my students to choose one of the poems that we read in class and translate it into any language of their preference. The reason why I started integrating translation practice into a literary writing course is because, as a poetry researcher myself, I always think about, or struggle with, a better way to teach how to read and write about poetry. And a few years ago, I was at a conference where we were discussing over a dinner some of the pedagogical concerns that we share in teaching poetry. As always, I was introducing these amazing Korean poets to other scholars present, and I ended up with the huge idea: "Why not integrate translation into poetry teaching?" So that's where this all started, and I'll briefly review the introduction that I give out to my students.

Project Design

First, I let the students know some of the terminology that translators usually use, such as "source text," which is the text that the translator is given to translate into another language, and "target text," which is the translation of the source text. It doesn't really matter whether the students remember these terms, but having these concepts in mind makes the students really feel like they're on an official translation publishing project. More importantly, this knowledge gives them the sense of awareness that they're in between two different languages and cultures, so that they need to keep in mind that they need to take equal consideration of the two languages in the process of producing their own version of the poem.

Next, I tell my students to do some research if needed in the process of translating, and to make use of the dictionary—any dictionary, including Google—as much as possible. This is because understanding a language inevitably entails the need to look into specific cultural and sociopolitical conditions that affected the formation of that language, and thus, I emphasize that the translator is always "in between" and that the positionality of the translator is a crucial thing to consider.

The most important part of this project is the third step. Here, I ask my students to attach a thorough analysis, which I call a “translator's note,” to their final work. This note needs to provide a detailed explanation of the choices that the student, as a translator, made throughout the process of translating. This includes what they considered or the priorities they kept in mind in the process of translating, or even the struggles they encountered. Some of the points that could be addressed in this note are the reason for choosing a certain word over another word, or the change of the order or arrangements of words or lines from the source text, or the reasoning behind why some words or nuances were excluded in the target text, or why they chose not to go with word-for-word translation.

I require students to provide at least seven explanations on different points in their translated work. This is particularly important because I don't know all of the target languages they choose. But more importantly, I require this note because in writing it, students practice how to write about poetry in general, since they learn what to look at in more detail and what needs to be considered further.

Conclusion

Making students become translators gives them the experience of the difficulty and struggles of learning about or accessing another language and culture. But at the same time, it also gives them some sense of agency in that they can produce a new version of the poem in their own sentences and words, and also a written analysis of it through which they learn how to write about literature. Personally, as a translator myself working between two different languages, Korean and English, I always feel like the best way to put myself into a position where I have to be extra attentive and careful in dealing with each word or grammatical element in a literary text is to translate the word into another language. This is because in the process of translating literature, you really become the closest reader you can be.

Thus, using translation not only helps the students to find the right allusions of certain words in the poem (you can obviously always Google it now), it also offers them an opportunity to use a more attentive and broader perspective in looking at the poem. Translating provides them with experience making choices in between the definitions and implications of each word and sentence on both semantic and syntactic levels in order to structure their own sentences in the target language. And more fundamentally, assigning a translation project makes the students linger longer in front of the text than they usually do when they read the assigned text for the class.

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Because we all are familiar with the experience of being exposed to a new poem, the encounter itself can be frustrating for a lot of students. The major issue that I noticed since I started teaching poetry is that many of the students don't spend enough time struggling with a poem, which makes it harder for them to even write about it. But by translating the poem, they are, in a way, forced to contemplate all of the different nuances that come from cultural differences and then figure out the best way to deliver the source text into the target text, which is a huge task. I always try to do this project for the experience of being between two different languages. Finding a way to work in between those two cultures can be a great way to naturally incorporate the issues of diversity and inclusion into a writing course, extending the overall focus and discussion of the class to access and community.

About the Roundtable Participants

Matt McKinney is an Instructional Assistant Professor of English at Texas A&M University, and the Coordinator of the Small Course Initiative for English 210. He has taught a variety of courses at A&M over the last five years, from first-year writing to upper division courses on rhetorical theory. He has also been part of the A&M English Department's initiative to create and edit OERs for English courses, serving as first editor for the technical and professional writing OER. His research interests include pop culture analysis, writing in the disciplines, technical and professional writing, and critical pedagogy.

Marian Eide is Associate Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Texas A&M University. She is the author of *Ethical Joyce* (Cambridge 2002), *After Combat: True War Stories from Iraq and Afghanistan* (Potomac 2018—co-authored with Michael Gibler), and the *Terrible Beauty: The Violent Aesthetic and Twentieth-Century Literature* (University of Virginia Press, 2019), as well as more than a dozen articles on twentieth-century literature and culture. Her research concerns ethics, aesthetics, and violence.

Regina Marie Mills is Assistant Professor of Latinx and U.S. Multi-Ethnic Literature at Texas A&M University in the Department of English. Her work in AfroLatinx literary studies, U.S.-Central American literature, and games studies have appeared in *Latino Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, *Latinx Talk*, and *Black Perspectives*. She has publications forthcoming in *Teaching Games*

and Games Studies in the Literature Classroom (Bloomsbury) and *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*.

Marcela Fuentes is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and Latinx Literature at Texas A&M University. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and was the 2016-2017 James C. McCreight Fellow in Fiction at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. Her work appears in the *Indiana Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, and the *State of Texas ELA Curriculum Grade 7*.

Landon Sadler is a PhD student in the Department of English at Texas A&M University. His academic interests include American literature, queer theory, care ethics, and popular culture studies. His dissertation, "Time Will Tell: Dystopian Cultural Production and Queer Ethics of Care," examines contemporary dystopian works by queer artists and writers and the themes of futurity and care that they express. He believes that literature and pedagogy can be healing and empowering.

Michael Collins is a Professor of English at Texas A & M University. His poem, "**Tight Like This,**" recorded 1928, Chicago, Illinois, was a finalist for the 2020 Best of the Net Anthology.

Hyunjung Kim is a Ph.D. candidate in the English Department at Texas A&M University. Her research centers on poetry and poetics and the intersections of race, disability, aesthetics, gender, and sexuality. She also writes about translation, lesbian cinema, and the work of sound in literature.

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Teaching Writing after George Floyd

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TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Date: 1 March 2021

Balester: All right. Hello, good afternoon, everyone. This is “Teaching Writing After George Floyd,” an interview of Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young with Valerie Balester and Florence Davies, part of the Teaching Writing Now symposium, sponsored by the Department of English, the University Writing Center and the Melburn G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, and I’m Valerie Balester, professor of English and executive director of the University Writing Center, and my co-host is Florence Davies, creative writer and program coordinator at the Writing Center. We’re also

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Teaching Writing after George Floyd

being assisted today by Sarah Coppedge and Jillian Mercer from the English Department.

I'd like to thank the organizing committee for their hard work in putting this symposium together, especially our chair, Dr. David McWhirter, professor of English, and our members Dr. Sarah DiCaglio, Dr. Michael Collins, Dr. Claire Carly-Miles, and Dr. Lori Arnold. And it's such a pleasure to say "Dr. Lori Arnold" because she just finished her dissertation and defended it.

I also want to thank the indigenous people who care for this land where Texas A&M University and College Station are situated. Multiple native nations past and present who are largely dispossessed and removed, Tonkawa, Tawakoni, Hueco, Sana, Wichita, and Coahuiltecan people, were traditional stewards of this land on which we are situated today.

Now, I'm going to have the honor of welcoming Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young, who goes by dr. vay, from the University of Waterloo, Ontario. He is a solo performance artist as well as a Professor of Communication, Race, Gender, Literature, Writing, and Performance at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and he is the author and co-editor of 10 books—10 books; it amazes me—including the recent *This Ain't Yesterday's Literacy: Culture and Education after George Floyd* (2020), which came out in January with Fountainhead Press, and also *Other People's English* (2019), Parlor Press, a great text, by the way, if you're working with grad students or teachers of writing, people who aren't professional linguists. Also the *Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric* (2018) and *Neo-Passing: Performance Identity after Jim Crow* (2018), University of Illinois Press. dr. vay regularly tours his one man show, "Your Average Nigga," titled after his book-length autobiographical study of Black identity of the same name. He's an equity, diversity, and inclusion specialist providing consulting services to schools and organizations. He's the current chair of the College Conference on Composition and Communication, the largest educational organization dedicated to pedagogies of college communication and writing, and not only the largest but the premier organization.

So, in today's conversation, I think we should be remembering George Floyd, and pay particular attention to the ways in which literacy practices can invoke violence, especially against people of color. So, let us consider today how with some advice and help from dr. vay, we can resist this violence. Welcome dr. vay.

vay: Thank you. Thank you so much, Valerie, for that wonderful introduction.

Balester: Now, I am going to ask you the first question myself. So, how have you been since, like, March of 2020? What's going on?

vay: I've been probably just like everybody else, in a crazed state. I usually wear my hair short and since the barber shops are closed; it's growing out. Just getting used to the fro. I have not traveled outside of Canada where I am currently since last March, and anyone who knows me knows that I'm an avid traveler. I would go back home to the states, seeing my family, eating good soul food, which I cannot get anywhere here. So, I've been, you know, dealing with that. I also would like to say first, since that identifiable pandemic started to happen, Covid, you know, the media had been calling anti-Black sentiment around the globe after George Floyd's death, another pandemic, right? And on that front, I have been doing just as bad for two reasons: one, I have been having conversations with my colleagues, most of whom are white, who say that they didn't really have an idea, a fulsome idea about the problems that Black people face, because it isn't their experience. I have been troubled by that sentiment because it seems hard not to know. It's hard to believe that white people do not have some palpable recognition of the plight, the ongoing situation, and the discourse that has not discontinued but has continued in various periods since enslavement and reconstruction and segregation and post segregation, and it's just hard to believe. So, part of my work in those conversations has been not just trying to help my friends and colleagues understand better, but trying to prod them to do the work that they should be doing anyway on an everyday basis to align their minds and souls and hearts to the plight of other peoples.

Balester: Yeah, and maybe it might be difficult sometimes to keep a little patience with that attitude as well, I would imagine. So, I'm going to ask you now the white academic question, just to lay a bit of foundation, especially for our audience who may not have had a chance to read some of the foundational readings that you gave us. So, in sociolinguistics and in literacy studies we often hear of attitudes toward language varieties such as African American English characterized as being "eradicationist," "assimilationist," "accommodationist," and "multilingual." So, could you discuss a bit this concept, and the concepts of code switching as educationalists interpret it in relation to these concepts, and then, while you're at it, maybe briefly explain the way you have created a distinction between code-meshing and code-switching?

vay: Thank you so much for that wonderful question. I am going to share my screen, because the question you asked, I've prepared a couple PowerPoint slides to help me answer the questions of: What is code-meshing? What is code-switching? What is the difference between how linguists use code-switching, and how educators have used code-switching in a slightly different way? And I also have a couple of examples that I want to show.

Okay. So, code-switching, according to linguists, is the alternation, the alternation or combination of languages. That is to say, it's two or more languages, operating in one speech or writing act. They are operating at the same time. That is from a linguistic perspective what code-switching is.

The educators have tended to use code-switching in this way: Use of alternating languages in different settings. So, they've taken the combination or alternation of languages and attached them to different settings. Linguists understand that language is never discrete in any one setting, unless, of course, it's probably a person's L1 or language one, as linguists refer to it, but any time you have another language or another variety there is always the presence of the first language. That's how we understand things like accent. When we can hear a person who perhaps is a native Spanish speaker but using English, and we hear the influence of the Spanish on the English, we'll say "Oh, you have a Spanish accent" or "You have an English accent" or something like that.

So, we hear the influence of that language present in the second setting. Educators, though, in the 1970s and in the 1980s sort of compromised with the more—I would say—radical linguists like William Labov, Geneva Smitherman, Mary Rhodes Hoover, and others who were calling for full acceptance of African American English as a rule-governed language. And so, educators said, "Okay, we'll accept that African American English is a rule-governed language, and we will not disparage African American English users for using it, but they just can't use it in school. So, they can keep their Black English at home and when they come to school, they have to adopt Standard English, which is modeled after white, middle-class Midwestern speech habits. That's how educators have appropriated, or misappropriated, I should say, code-switching. So, an example of code-switching from the linguistic perspective would be the alternation within a single sentence: "I'm not going to school porque no me siento bien [because I don't feel well]."

Young, Balester and Davies

So, you see that there's no period here. It's the combination of two languages within one sentence, "Porque no me siento bien" is "because I don't feel well." Even inter-sentential code switching is still in the same speech act. It's the alternation between two sentences. "I'm not going to school today" English switching to "no me siento bien" in the same speech act. Here's an example:

"Codeswitching"
[\[video audio clip link\]](#)

"People think that just because you are Latina, you have to have a big butt. Pero...a mi me echaron una bruñeria and...I have no butt. It used to be que a self-respecting Latina could get some play pero entonces vino esa J-Lo al mainstream, y lo dano todo. Now, you just expected to be a culona, and that's bad because a lot of buttless mamitas, they are suffering. Neto. I used to have the same complejo también. But, I started this club is the Culaless Latinas of America, and the men they love them. So, all you culaless Latinas: get with it! Porque si tu fundillo es corto, la vida es mas corta! And I say, if every Latina woman has to have a big butt then every Latino man has to have a big pinga."

Davies: I love that so much.

vay: I'm so glad that you laugh because it shows the point, right?

Davies: It's super funny.

vay: It shows the point that there are two languages operating there. And even if you're not a proficient Spanish speaker, you still understand the context and the point. So, to wrap this—my answer to this question—up, my term *code-meshing* reflects that of the linguistic understanding of it. It is the term for metaphorical code-switching used in literacy research for two languages operating as one speech act just like we just saw in that video. And lastly, my idea of code-meshing always views language as a resource and never as a barrier. No language is ever understood to be something that impedes communication or impedes rhetoricity or impedes literacy. It can only enhance it when it's used as a resource. So, all language habits that a person or student has are used as a resource.

Balester: Okay, I want to follow up just a teeny bit on that, before we go to our next question. *Students' Right to Their Own Language* is a position statement put out by the NCTE, the National Council of Teachers of English, way, way back in the 70s. Is that

an example of teachers' kind of renegeing on that commitment to code-meshing, or does that acknowledge code-meshing?

vay: Both. I think that what happened with *Students' Rights to Their Own Language* is that that was a starting place for teachers to try to accommodate, to use one of the terms that you use in your question, to accommodate African American English in particular. The spirit of *Students' Right to Their Own Language* was to be fully accepting of other varieties of English in the classroom. But obviously, teachers were not ready for it, and a white supremacist dominant language ideology still prevails. And so, it was the attitude and ideologies that allow, on one hand, teachers to accept students' rights to their own language and say okay, but then it was the same ideology that said, but we really can't do that in school. And so, I think now, even though *Students Right to Their Own Language* is just as powerful as it was in 1974, when it was first published, we have now developed different discourses of talking about this. So, CCCCs put out a statement last summer on Black linguistic justice and on Black professional and technical communication, and although those fully appeal to students' rights to their own language, they're using a more contemporary discourse in order to advance those gains.

Balester: Thank you. Flo, I'm going to turn it over to you to ask a question now.

Davies: Sure! I guess, since you brought it up in your introduction about how you've been doing, I kind of want to jump to this question, and I'll get back to the question about all the various publications you got going on because I definitely want to hear about that. But you told us that you wanted to title this talk, "Teaching Writing after George Floyd" and I'll admit, I agreed to do this talk with Valerie before I saw the title because Neisha-Anne Green of American University, whose work on code-meshing, you know, was very influential to me, especially as a child of African immigrants, and Neisha-Anne would have yelled at me if I didn't do this talk. But, I guess once you know the topic settled with me, what I struggled with particularly as a Black woman, and you a Black man, is—why anchor it to this moment? I know that you've made it the center of one of your most recent publications that Valerie mentioned, *This Ain't Yesterday's Literacy: Culture and Education after George Floyd*. So, I guess my question is: how do you do it? How do you manage to talk about the pandemic of Black Death and anchor it to composition, literacy, and education, and then find the strength to talk about it with, as we say, mixed company in the midst of the current Covid-19 pandemic we're experiencing, because, personally, I'm not there yet. I'm just like, teach me your ways. I don't know.

vay: So, Flo let me ask you a question. Are you saying that, when you say that you paused for a moment, was the pause out of, sort of like exhaustion, or not readiness to have the conversation is too much trauma? Or was it, or is there a question when you ask about George Floyd. Is there a gender question there? I'm just trying to get at it exactly.

Davies: I guess it comes from a point of exhaustion, and I guess, in a follow-up question that's going to be burned in my brain, I do have a question about gender, but yes, from a point of exhaustion. Just like how you get the stamina, the gas, if you will, to have to talk about these things regularly, not only throughout your work but particularly in this specifically tenuous time that we're all experiencing.

vay: Right. So, look, it has not been easy. But doing this type of work talking about race as it pertains to literacy and education hasn't ever been easy. And I've always sort of been a little bit on the fringe. Let me just go back a little bit so you'll have a historical perspective of why I do this and why I have continued to do this. So, when I was in graduate school at the University of Illinois at Chicago, my friends, my Black colleagues at the time and my cohort wasn't very many. And also my professors were not down with what I wanted to do. I mean they were like, "You know, this is very edgy." Yes, they're like, "This is extremely edgy. You're going to make a lot of people uncomfortable." But look, sometimes we're called to do certain things. I couldn't imagine having done anything else. And I can't imagine spending my academic life doing anything else. I feel like it's one of the privileges to be able to work at predominantly white institutions, at R1 institutions, and to have my research funded to do this work. I think that these institutions need to invest in these kinds of conversations. So that's, that's why I continue to do it. I also have developed by doing these kinds of conversations over the past—well, I finished my PhD in 2004—so almost 20 years. Over the past almost 20 years, I've developed, I think, a way of talking about it and responding to the similar questions that I get that help move the conversation along.

I have been excited to see my writing that's in African American English be published in various journals and using African American rhetorical styles, even as such journals like the *PMLA*, which some people will say you can't write in Black English and get published in the top journal in English Language and Literature. Well, I did. So, it gives me some hope to have these conversations. The other thing is, you know when people

started to pay attention after the murder of George Floyd, I felt personally implicated. George Floyd and I were born in the same year, in 1973. He was born in October; I was born in February. We have a daughter, born in the same year, where he has a daughter born in 2013, and I have a daughter, and my daughter was born in 2013. There are a lot of similarities. I went to law school in Minnesota, and George Floyd spent time in Minneapolis in Minnesota. I felt like this was an opportunity to be able to help people to begin or continue understanding what Black people think about on a daily basis. And what we fear and feel to see those police officers around George Floyd, not coming to his aid after several, after eight minutes, and after several times where he cried out, where one officer callously had his knee on his neck with his hands in his pocket. Those are things that Black people think about when we wake up, when we go to bed, and the things that we, you know, feel, and the things that we fear about engagement with whiteness. Now here's another example. If I just imagine if George Floyd had flailed, while he was on the floor, if he had tried to defend himself rightfully, what would have been the discourse? The discourse would immediately have changed. Even though this man was being killed, murdered. Even if he had tried to wiggle just a little bit. If he had tried to scream, just a little bit, it would have been reframed through his Blackness that he was too angry, too big, too bold, and deserved what he got. So, the fact that people were paying attention and the fact that that eight-minute video captured by a young 17-year-old African American woman by the name of Darniela Frazier went viral, was so important for me to continue to have this conversation and point to an exemplary instance of what's beneath all the things that I have been talking about.

Davies: No, no, I totally hear that from you. For me, you know, like, you know, I was thinking about this since you brought up gender, what if this talk would be “Writing after Sandra Bland,” you know, as most of my protagonists are young, Black women, dealing with mental health struggles. You know, there was just something in particular about the indignity and the aura of mystery surrounding her death, and we are similar and the same age, about six months apart. It's the sense of seeing oneself that's definitely a part of that. But it's also how, like, sis was just having a regular old bad day. And we're not allowed the indignity of having that bad day or being annoyed by wasted time, it seems like, or even with Breonna Taylor, not even being afforded the dignity of putting her head to a pillow. It seems like it was like that for you with George Floyd. You know, it's something that I definitely have had to kind of wrap my head around, having grown up in Waller, Texas, which was where Sandra Bland was murdered. So,

yeah, no, I definitely see that sense of seeing oneself, that kind of pushes you to continue to have the conversation.

vay: Right, and let me say one other thing. Most educators, I want to say, unfortunately don't see the connection between what happened to Sandra Bland and George Floyd and what kind of ideology that they deploy in their classrooms and with their pedagogical strategies. But there is a real connection. So, for example, I had already said that if George Floyd had said, had screamed out or flailed or whatever that his murder would have been seen as justified, right? That is a code-switching phenomenon. There's no difference in saying that a Black person can't behave or talk or use their expressive culture in this environment. What would be the outcome if they did use it? What would be the consequences for their doing so? And people see those harmful consequences as justified. And they are not!

Right? So, that is the connection, the same thing as you pointed out with Sandra Bland. She did not even have the opportunity or was not afforded the right to just have a regular old bad day. Be honest. Her day was not as bad as other people's days, but she just, she couldn't have a bad day because in our, in our society—here's a real problem—in our society, we accept and accede to the fact that we're not living in segregation, so Black people are everywhere, but we have not yet accepted that Black people can be Black in those places. In other words, that they can talk like themselves, wear their hair, their clothes, express their emotions—same emotions that other people will experience and express. We're disallowed from doing it because—and this is a problem—Black people as well have acceded to a code-switching idea, that is, just switch off our Blackness when we're around predominantly white people.

When at work or at school, we play this game. It's called a "racial contract." Charles Mills writes about it in the book of that same name. That contract says, "Okay, I may be of a different race, in this case, Black, but I'm not going to act the race. I'm not going to express the race." That's the social contract, but it is a problem because then we're disallowed from enacting our own humanity.

Balester: I've got to follow up on that, and, so, as a white woman, a lifelong educator, I so much see the blinders that educators put on. And you just pointed to exactly what I wanted to talk about, the way that they might now suddenly be waking up to certain types of injustice, but they are blind to the injustice in their own classes, and I want to especially focus on the violence in literacy education. But, you're making me also

Teaching Writing after George Floyd

remember how rhetorical expression goes far beyond language, far beyond the classroom. I mean, can you just elaborate a little bit more on the idea that you just brought up, but focus, especially, on literacy education?

vay: Well, what I would like to do if it's okay, Valerie, is I want to show another video, if it's going to work, but this video is going to show you how violence against Black bodies and Black language happens in classrooms, regularly.

Balester: Thank you.

vay: Let me set this video up. This video that I'm about to show is from *Study.com*. *Study.com* is a huge educational organization that creates lesson plans in all disciplines, and any teacher K through 12 and any university can purchase these lessons that are pre-scripted and recorded and use them in their classrooms. This is one on literacy, focusing on pronunciation, dialect, and so forth, that is used by *Study.com*. And I want to have a brief conversation with you and Flo at certain points in this video.

“Considering Pronunciation, Articulation, and Dialect in Public Speaking”

[\[video audio clip link\]](#)

“So, you and your friends are sitting around the dining hall talking about your Poly-Psych class. Each of you has a different instructor, but the subject is the same. Your friend, Smithster says, ‘I really liked Professor Bigelow. He tells us all kinds of interesting stuff, and his accent is so cool, British, you know.’ Meanwhile you were like, ‘What, really dude? My professor is so boring. I can hardly understand her. She has an accent thicker than mud and a personality to match.’”

vay: I want to just stop here for a minute, Valerie and Flo, and ask if you'll just converse with me. Do you see a problem in this video? Between how the two professors are described?

Balester: Oh, of course, I mean, first of all there's that the English accent in this is sort of privileged in amazing ways. And second, there's that kind of claim that you can't understand someone with an accent. Flo, what about you?

Flo: Also, it's the “thicker than mud” for me. That is old timey, and it's offensive.

vay: And did you notice, I want to point out two other things. These are things that are what I will call the “absent presence.” There’s an absent presence of race here. The British male professor isn’t identified as white, right, explicitly, but absent presence of whiteness functions there. Here’s why I say that. Because when we talk about non-white British or non-white American identities, we always use an identifier before American: African American, Hispanic American, whatever kind of American you are, but when it’s white we don’t use that, or British. That’s why there’s the absolute presence of race here. The fact that the female professor is unmarked is a stand in for race, right? This professor, with an accent that’s “thicker than mud.” This is a very gendered and racially biased, as well as linguistically biased, lesson so far. Now we see that that’s bad. Let me keep going. So, you can see the violence that we teach students to enact. We actually encourage violence against Black people in classrooms. Watch this.

[video audio] *“Well, it really all comes down to vocal traits. These are characteristics that make up the way a speaker speaks, including the way he pronounces his words, the way he articulates, and even the dialect he uses. It doesn’t seem like any big deal, but how the message comes across is just as important as the message itself. Katie Bobbins, a motivational speaker, should have practiced her pronunciation, when she told the audience, ‘If you want to see the secrets to success, you will have to aks for it.’ Ah, pronunciation makes all the difference. This is how consonants and vowels are formed, and even where syllables are accentuated. Imagine the horror when the speaker mispronounced one very small word. Had the speaker practiced, she would have avoided a terrifying situation.”¹*

vay: Okay, what's the problem there?

Balester: There’s so many. There’s just so many. Ok, I’ll go with a few of them and then I’ll let Flo in. So, the word “articulates,” of course, is really loaded; there’s sort of a sense that there’s a particular kind of articulation there. The characters turned Black in the slides, and suddenly we have a Black speaker, and we have a Black young man saying “So?” And, gosh, there’s just so much—that *aks* is such a stereotypical example

¹ Vay writes about this scene, “That one would go from an image of this Black female pronouncing a word in her dialect to an image of a white man hitting her—supposedly justifiably—in the head, that’s violence. That’s murder. That’s wrong. But the thing that I’m trying to underscore, and it’s a very serious point, is that we don’t realize that our ideologies about language—ideologies that believe that Blacks should not use Black English—immediately lead to violence—immediately” (Young 2020).

of Black English, but notice she only switches to Black English in one word because it's a pronunciation problem; it's not a code-switching problem.

vay: Exactly, it's only one word. Flo, what do you got to say?

Davies: I mean I'm still struck by Luigi about to murk this lady with this axe. But definitely, you know, it's that one slippage, that becomes, if you will, that becomes an issue, but it allows them to think that hitting somebody with an axe, even as a visual metaphor, is okay?

vay: Exactly, even as a visual metaphor. It's unnervingly violent.

Balester: And that it's so catastrophic.

vay: And it's so catastrophic for one disagreement on the usage of one word. Valerie, the thing I want to point out here is that this is not dissimilar. In fact, let me put it another way. It is actually similar to the way in which we engage in discourses in our classroom about other people's English. This is a foundational attitude when we ask students to shift from African American English to standard English, although I must say something else about that in a moment. We ask them to do that, and we use threat as a means to get them to do it. "You're not going to be able to get a job," or "The teacher down the hall is not going to understand you the way that I am," or other sorts of things that are just violent. This horrible and disturbing visual used in an educational video tells others that it is an okay or expected outcome for African American English users to receive fatal blows to the head if they use their language in public, even in a single instance of using a single word. That's why it's a problem.

Balester: Yeah, thank you.

Davies: vay, can you speak to your writing process? I'm going to pivot into what you do so well, obviously. I look at work like "Should Writers Use 'They Own English?'" and I think, "Man, that person's writing process and revision process to balance both of those languages like that, it's very masterful." So, what's that about? Who reads your work; like, how do you get started on the pieces that you write, and how do you, in particular, bring that sense of process to your students? It's something that we talk a lot about at the writing center, constantly, but it's something that we're constantly talking about, always.

vay: So, my writing process is very personal. I don't write anything that I don't feel. I write, I used to jokingly say to my good friends, who are also writers, that I write in my body. And it's true. I don't take a lot of notes, like people who keep pads under their bed or on their desk and things like that. I don't do that, and I've never done that. I do do that when I'm in the midst of actual writing, because I grew up in the era of paper and pen. And so that's so big, helps me to think. It helps me to organize. So even though the computer is right there with Word open, I don't type. As I'm writing, I feel it, it's like a fire in the belly. You know, it's something that I just feel deeply. And then, when I start to type sometimes, I actually close my eyes as I type so that the feeling can come through the words onto the page. I would say, you know, when I'm sitting and writing at some point I'm closing my eyes, so that the feeling comes through. There's a huge pathos in what I write. I think my writing process has a lot to do with the fact that I am a person who loves words, I mean I just love words. I love the way they form in the mouth. I love the effect that they have on others.

I love to hear other people talking and speaking, and I just love the way their words wash over me. So, when I go back to my writing after I've drafted, I always am thinking simultaneously about the organization, how am I going to move from one idea and thought to the next. But in moving, it's not just a logical appeal. I want to appeal to that emotion. I try to include a poetic element when I write. You'll probably notice if you read carefully that there's like rhyming schemes in the midst of my sentences. You'll notice I do like to spice up clichés—I say “funk up,” f-u-n-k up your cliché, as is the Black English usage of funk. I'm like a creative writer too, because, you know, I studied creative nonfiction in graduate school and so that kind of lyricism, I always want it in all of my academic writing. And I also think that it's a part of my African American cultural influence. I want that present. I want African American cultural influence always present in anything I write. Well, let me give you one specific example, in “Should Writers Use They Own English?” I did no revision. I wrote that in four hours and sent it to the publisher, and they didn't require any revision.

I wrote that essay during a fit of anger. I read Stanley Fish's three articles on a Saturday. I remember this like it was yesterday. I was in my office at the University of Iowa campus. And I read *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* every day. And I was reading Stanley Fish's NYT online blog, and I was so infuriated at the argument that he was making: he was disregarding people's languages and putting down the good egalitarian work coming from progressive writing classrooms, and he was taking over, you know, a discussion that people in writing studies and composition of rhetoric have

been having forever. Then, here he comes, this famous literary critic and moving over into this domain and offering his unwanted opinion on something that we had kicked out the door a long time ago. And I think I was afraid that his white male famous literary critic privilege was going to have a deleterious effect on the teaching of writing to minority students. And so, in my infuriation, I sat down at my computer, closed my eyes and wrote what you read in “Should Writers Use They Own English?” When I read it afterward, I was like, oh, this Black English so good right here.

Davies: Stanley Fish does not have that smoke. He does not have that smoke after that.

vay: I was like there’s no way that this argument, like Black people will say, “He got smoked. Stanley Fish got smoked, he got slammed, he got rode all the way out of town” when I wrote that piece. And here’s the first thing, though, because my writing performance itself disagrees with Stanley Fish and shows that what he was saying is false. He said we can’t use these kinds of Englishes in an academic environment. And yet here’s an entire essay written and phonetically rendered in Black English published in an academic journal and widely anthologized.

Balester: Do you know the work of Kermit Campbell, too? He did a book on hip hop that was academic. Now, it wasn’t a published article, but Stanley Fish missed that one.

vay: Exactly, so, that’s my writing process, Flo, and thank you for asking about it. I do consider myself a writer. I think when you look at my academic articles you definitely see the creative element. I’ve always felt that asking people to displace and disregard their subject positions was a problem. I always use personal, illustrative material and examples, and the reason why is because I’m a critic. I’m more than an ethnographer. First and foremost, I’m a critic. And so, I always try to use interactional strategies that bring my reader into the point of reading my writing with me. So, I take them along as if we’re in a room. I’m having a conversation. And when my writing comes out turgid, not very conversational with long sentences and about three commas, I always hear my writing teacher from college who would say to me, “Vershawn, these two sentences want to be adults. Let that long sentence grow up and be a separate sentence.” So, I think about the writing strategies that I’ve learned in academic settings as well.

Davies: Well, you said so much that I like, gravitating towards that sense of feeling in your body, and, you know, arguably I would say you are a creative writer, 100%. I often talk to the students that I, you know, work with on creative writing and there's a sense of reading my writing for rhythm and how that rhythm kind of enacts the things that I swap in the sentences that I change where I'll add a little flavor here as opposed to there and whatnot. But all that I definitely gravitate towards and I think, I guess, I'll ask this question in particular because I see so many students, particularly in composition classes, struggling to find a sense of like, voice, in the writing, particularly in a class that doesn't seem to bring out that voice at all. And I was wondering if you have any advice for students, or even instructors, who are trying to get students to kind of develop not only a sense of voice but a sense of comfort in their own voice, you know? Does that make any sense?

vay: It makes perfect sense. And I was going to be talking about this on Wednesday, too, as well. So, let me give a preview by giving you some examples of things that I'll repeat on Wednesday. One is, first and foremost, what teachers have to stop doing is teaching writing from their own heads and ideologies. They have got to stop doing that. They go in a classroom, and they don't use real world contemporary examples, even in their disciplines, of what the writing looks like and feels like. They just have an idea in their mind, and they're like, "Oh, this isn't going to fly in my discipline" or "Oh, this isn't going to fly the way that you're writing." So, first off, stop with the barriers. No Barriers. Only a tool kit. Let me give you a quick example before I continue. If you start with barriers, it's almost like saying to a person who's coming to build a house and the only thing that's there is the foundation, but you are telling them, "You can't use the T square, you can't use the drill, you can't use the screwdriver, because this house isn't going to require that" or "The way we build this house is without those tools." You've already cut off means which that builder could use. You don't know what that builder's going to do, or how they're going to build it, or what tools they're going to need. Have you ever thought that you weren't going to need a screwdriver when you were doing a home project and that's the very thing you needed? Or maybe you didn't have a flathead screwdriver when you needed one, but there's a butter knife, and you use that—the job gets done just as well with that butter knife as it would with the flathead.

So, stop with the barriers. Here's the second thing. Give your students a task, have a conversation about code meshing, right, two languages, or dialects operating in one speech act, and then ask them to go out and read journals, read journal articles in

various disciplines and find examples of code meshing. I do that all the time with my students, and they always bring back examples in those academic disciplines that are outside of English, in health, in business, in biology. They show me how voice is operating in those disciplines and I'm like, "That's beautiful." Then I ask them to find examples in those academic disciplines of writing that you really like, that looks like it could be yours. It doesn't all have to be that way. But are there some examples there that speak to you? And guess what? They find it. They're doing two things here. They're reading a lot in the disciplines, they're getting (they don't even know it right?) but they're motivated on the code meshing front, but they're still reading in their disciplines. It's not my discipline so I don't really, you know, I can't really acknowledge all of the things that they're learning, but they are definitely learning. And they also are not being trapped by the teacher's perception or ideology. They are actually following the disciplines' examples of writing, right? That really does accept their voice.

Now, I'm going to slow down because there was one thing that I said earlier, and I don't want this point to go away when it comes to African American English. African American English is so compatible with standard English in all ways that linguists, Black linguists, at least Lisa Green, who studies African American English, will say that when African American English is in its high register, when it's in a standard register that it's very difficult to tell where African American English ends and standard English begins. What the linguists are trying to get us to see is that this distinction that we make is really arbitrary and artificial and that Black people's language habits already are compatible with standard English. It's not going to look like all the rules because there's going to be Black English rules followed in standard English writing. That's why Mary Rhodes Hoover calls this Black Standard English, a concept that we have failed to recognize fully, but there is a Black Standard English, which I would say is what most of my writing operates within.

Balester: Yeah, that's a really crucial point, and I think you're right that language prejudice, of course, is huge here, too. The *aks* example, I mean, that just brings up this huge prejudice immediately, and they're not paying attention to all the ways that they fit together and influence each other. Not to mention, you know, there are people who've studied how white students have picked up African American English and adopted it. Of course, there's a long history of that. But, yeah, so the whole idea of the prejudice against the dialect. I'm going to let Flo continue, though. Flo has a lot of questions.

Davies: No, that actually meets my next question. It goes back to the article version of *Your Average Nigga* in 2014. You state there that “race is just as important now as it ever was—even if both Blacks and whites agree in public that it isn't.” You also add that “part of the race problem today, perhaps the biggest part, is due to our complicity with this pretense” (Young, 2004, p. 695). Now in 2021 or specifically in 2020 after George Floyd, and other very public, very visceral Black deaths, where do you think that sense of pretense is now? Like, how can instructors avoid carrying that pretense in their classes?

vay: Well, I am hopeful that that pretense that race doesn't matter is significantly lessened now after 2021. As a matter of fact, I think that it is. One example is, this has not happened before. So, after the protests from last summer, educational organizations delivered statements. They were putting their money where their mouth is on the race issue. Not just 4 C's and not just the National Council of Teachers of English and other humanities-based, but even the National Organization of Math Teachers put out a statement, saying “Race matters. This is how we're going to change our disciplinary perspectives and more in order to account for the history of race and the present status of race relations.” So, I believe that we're not going back to that colorblind ideology. At least not to the same degree as we were before. I just don't think that we can, that that belief before that whites and Blacks agreed to, that race doesn't really matter in public, wasn't part of that racial contract that I mentioned earlier, but I think we've seen that that racial contract has been breached, that it has failed. And so, we really need to stop trying to see people of darker hues as, quote unquote “white people with Black bodies” and acknowledge that people have different cultural views, ways of expressing themselves, that are attached to their racial identity related to their cultural identities.

Balester: Flo, I'm going to interrupt with a question here from the audience because it is relevant to what we were just speaking about. So, this is pertaining to voice. “Is there a way that I as a future educator can encourage the development of my students' voice in their writing, or rather, how could I do so? I've always struggled with this in my own writing.”

vay: I would ask the teacher what does it mean for her to struggle with voice for her own writing? Because I think we've been talking about that, the way in which schools have tried to disembodify everybody's voice from writing that's done in school. And I think the first way that we've done this are the arbitrary rules that we think third

graders need to learn, lies really, like, “Don’t use *I*.” Well, I mean, come on. *I* is just the pronoun. Why is it that we’re not using *I*, because they’re afraid that students are going to slip into solipsism, that it’s just going to be about themselves, but that’s a rhetorical move. That has nothing to do with the grammar thing that you’re asking them not to use *I*. The other thing is, when we tell them don’t begin a sentence with a conjunction. Yeah, that’s ridiculous because we have something called subordinating and independent clauses.

What you’re really trying to do is prevent students from using fragments, but don’t create a rule that is not really a rule that goes against the standard English rules, because you can begin a sentence with *but* and *if*, or prepositions and conjunctions, as long as you’re teaching a full sentence with a subject and a predicate, that you’re asking them to have both of those. It doesn’t need to say, “Don’t use *but* to begin your sentence.” So, the reason why I’m saying that to the teacher’s question is because these are some of the rules that we learned that make us lose our voices. Because the ways in which we speak and write at home, the cultural influence really uses the full scope of language like *buts* and *ands* in sentences and so forth. So, yeah, but so she says that she’s been told that you can’t write like that. Here’s one thing. Don’t repeat those lies to your students. Just don’t. And you have examples of professional writing that show that you don’t have to repeat those lies to your students and try to work yourself out of them in your writing, which is one of the things that I like to do.

Davies: That actually meets my next question quite nicely. Often, we tell, you know, writers, about the importance of audience, and, yes, it is important. I do not want to underrate the importance at all, particularly for developing writers, but I was also struck by what Neisha-Anne said when she was visiting one of our tutor training classes last semester. She said that “Audience is cool and all, but sometimes it’s about purpose.” And I’m struck by what you said about, you know, feeling it in your body, maybe being part of that purpose. That purpose is what gets you through the “ish.” Where does purpose find itself in your work, and how could more instructors shape purpose in their assignments?

vay: So, I do think about audience. But I think about audience in a completely different way. Let me just break this down, because we live, we operate, in a culture and society in which we are always using euphemistic terms to describe things that are just, that can be described in plain terms. When teachers are asking students to imagine audience, they’re asking them to imagine a white male businessperson. And in first

year writing and composition that is really the idea behind audience—a white male administrator or someone who’s operating in a white supremacist patriarchal environment. That is the audience. But that isn’t the audience. That’s the idealized audience that school has created, unfortunately. For me, an audience is what we really should be thinking about when we write. An audience is mostly, most of the times, composed of different people, and even if they look the same, they probably still have different identities—they may have some shared values, they may have different values, come from different approaches. Certainly, you and I have talked about gender here from different perspectives; we’re both Black, but we have different ideas. I’m geared toward George Floyd; you’re geared toward Breonna Taylor and Sandra Bland. So, let me wrap this up and say audiences are diverse. There is never one static audience that thinks exactly the same or that believes exactly the same. And so, when I think about audience, I think about audience in its multiplicity.

What is the likely inclusive range of readers I’m going to reach? In “Should Writers Use They Own English?”, I was writing it against the white person, white Stanley Fish. I knew that African Americans were going to read it and other people of different backgrounds. So, I was writing, thinking about all of them, but at certain points in my writing I would attend to a particular kind of audience, but that audience wouldn’t dominate the writing. So, for example, when I’m thinking of when I made a comment in that essay about attitudes that are destructive to students’ writing, I obviously wasn’t talking about Neisha-Anne Green. You know what I’m saying, although she’s going to read that essay. I wasn’t talking about my white friend, you know, Doug Kern, although he’s going to read that essay. I’m writing to them in ways that they could teach the essay. I’m writing to the other readers in ways in which they need to get with, you know, and get down with the things I’m saying in the essay. I think it’s a problem to think about audience as though it’s static.

Let me give you another example. So, I’m critiquing Stanley Fish, but I’m writing in Black English, which he obviously doesn’t like, but that was part of the reason why I wrote in it. So, to have a standard that says you can’t use that when, in fact, to me, that was the most effective means to attack his argument, is a problem. My purpose was to straight put him on the spot. I used words and phrases in a way that I know that he’s probably not accustomed to in order to challenge him to do work as a reader. When we endow students with agency, we tell them that this is your writing. What kind of work do you want the different kinds of readers to do? Readers do have to do work; they have to look up unfamiliar terms; they have to underline the main ideas; they have

to write summaries in the margin. The same way that we teach students to do when we teach them how to read and dissect complex arguments. That's the kind of thing that I want my audience to be able to do, not just to be able to sit down on a lounge chair, read my paper with ease, and no discomfort, and no work that they have to do. Well, that's not how writers write. Most writers, even creative writers, want readers to do work. They want you to think about things. They want you to linger on sentences. They want it to have an effect. So, yes, we have to start thinking about purpose as well as diversifying the real audience.

Davies: I'm struck by what you said, [. . .] that "new ideas don't always come out clear and understandable the first few times they are expressed." That is so true. It definitely beats that moment right there. Let's see, it's about 3:34, and I know we were hoping to get some questions for the audience. I know I have some more here, but I definitely want to hear from some folks over there. So, if folks have questions in the Q&A, we can.

Balester: Yeah, they do have some.

Davies: Let's see. We have a question here. Someone's asking, "What would be a good anti-racist standard of excellent communication, and how can we inspire our students to try to aspire to achieve that standard, particularly in a way that makes them feel like they're growing and improving? This is a question about maintaining a sense of progress when we're really on board with throwing out a standard white English model of quality language use."

vay: So, the thing that I'm interested in throwing out in the standard white English language model is the "white." I just want to be unequivocally clear—I'm not disparaging white identity. What I am saying is that our standards have tended to accede to ways in which white people most often participate in these kinds of discourses. I had already said earlier that there is a Black standard. So, I am not against developing standards, or even a teaching standard. What I am against is disallowing people from contributing to that standard, disallowing students from writing that incorporates what their culture identifies and what's developed as standard. There is no point in coming to school and sitting in an English class if your writing is not going to grow, if you're not going to become more effective. It is a problem for teachers to think that the distinction between teaching and a progressive way is either teaching us the standards as they have always been or not teaching at all. That is a problem. That

is a false dichotomy. We are still teaching. But what we are shifting to is a model that says, “Okay, here are some sets of standards” and I like to, instead of dealing with grammatical standards, which we'll talk about in just a second, I like to deal with conventional standards, right? Organization, or if you want to use the canon of rhetoric, invention.

Right. Delivery, memory, we can use those different canons or use like, in terms of a thesis statement—talk about thesis, antithesis or whatever, and instead of forcing students to put theses at the top, let them experiment with where the thesis best serves the point of the paper. So, it's opening up what those models look like, not throwing all the models out, and we need more models. We need models and writing like Aja Martinez's model of counterstory, which is so powerful. We need models like code-meshing. We need models that come from Native American rhetorics, and we need them to all be present and available as resources for students as they develop their writing and for us to build on and draw from as well. So, to me, that's how it would look. If I were teaching writing tomorrow, a writing class, I would be teaching African American rhetoric. I would be teaching, first of all, the first chapter or the introduction to my Routledge reader of rhetoric, which talks about the five principles, sorry, six principles of African rhetoric language: style, delivery, suasion, community. And I would be talking about the story. I would talk about Native American rhetoric. And I would say look at these examples, borrow from them, be influenced by them. But, own it, make sure that you have a solid thesis, that you are doing things for your audience. You want your audience to understand what you say and also want to challenge them. So, think about all those. That's a very high order way of approaching writing, but it is the only way that I think does justice in a classroom for growing writers.

Balester: I want to throw in something here, a question about how we train teachers of writing. And it seems to me that the easy way out is to say, here's the rules, let's follow these rules. Can I get any comment about that and about how we should be training them?

vay: Yeah, you know, it's difficult for me to comment on that, and I'll tell you why. Because I went to school to be a teacher. I went through a teacher training program that was so robust, right, we had to take a whole minor in education. We learned long-range lesson planning, short-range lesson planning, how to attach goals and objectives to the daily lesson plan, how to deliver that lesson plan and to meet those goals and

objectives. I don't think that the university writing program structure allows for that kind of in-depth learning how to teach. That's why it's been difficult for me to think about how teachers at the university level can really go in a classroom with only one semester of training. And I find that to be troubling, but I understand that it's what we have. So, I would tend to think that the way in which, and I do like the Iowa model of having smaller cohorts, so there was no writing program administrator. We were all quote unquote "administrators and trainers," and we had a small group of 10 teaching fellows, and they were teaching their classes, and they had a semester long workshop with us, but they stayed with us for two years, and we always had ongoing pedagogical conversations with them about their teaching, as well as in larger groups. And I think that that model was really good, because you can't cram best practices of teaching in one term.

Davies: No, I hear that 100%. That actually led to a lot of my anxiety about being a teacher. We only had, I guess, a semester-long practicum in my MFA program. No shade. You know, some people get less, but I did not feel prepared after that experience to do anything except for make a lesson plan or even like maybe a syllabus, sort of? So yeah, no, I think we do, we struggle there a little bit, and we can kind of beef up our experiences there.

vay: But I will say, though, that if I had to, if I were forced to identify a model that I think should work, it would be the writer workshop model. The writer's workshop model puts a student's draft, you know, their good draft, in the midst of conversation with all their peers. The writers workshop model was not just over to the side. Everybody is talking about this student's writing. And the way of what you go through iterations of the writing and writing workshop. And the creative writing workshop and the attention given to language and its effect and its impact, not just the idea but also the beauty and how that advances the idea, I would fall on that model.

Davies: Certainly, the model I prefer. And in my experiences that model works best when the writer is actually included in those conversations. Their voice is not removed from that conversation, which was my experience in my MFA program. Again, no shade. I have not, but, you know, particularly as, you know, one of the women of color at that time that didn't feel right. But, no, I agree with you. There's a lot to admire from that workshop model, how it's centered in a kind of shared... I don't want to say shared struggle, but I'm going to say shared struggle.

Let's see we have a question from one of our colleagues in the English department who asked, "Why did you choose to conduct most of this dialogue in standard English rather than in the AVE of 'Should Writers Use They Own English?' How do you decide on the proportions of the codes as you mesh them in particular settings? Finally, when you switch, are there limits to how far you invite whites who use your work to follow you, in your use of words or your use of words, I'm guessing, like *nigga*?"

vay: So, I'm not going to put that person on the spot.

Davies: He could take it; he is a poet, and he has his PhD.

vay: But, no, no, no. I'm being facetious because this gives me the opportunity to repeat something that I've already said but to go a little deeper. I am a Black person that grew up in the ghetto. I have no qualms about that. The west side of Chicago in the housing projects. The only white people that were middle class white English speakers that I interacted with were teachers at school. I grew up—I'm making this point so I can answer the question—I grew up in a Black-English-speaking environment, period. Yet I have a bachelor's degree in English education. I have a master's degree in educational administration and performance. I have a PhD in English. All of those things are going to affect my language habits. Right? So that it is a mistake to believe that I'm going to switch, be able to really switch off my PhD in English and my education and speak from the Henry Higgins Pygmalion project. It's not happening. There's been too much influence on my language for me to doff it all off at once and put it all back in another setting. Forget it. But the point that I said earlier was this: linguists like Lisa Green have already identified that when Black speakers are speaking in the high register, it is very difficult to ascertain where Standard English begins and the Black English ends.

In other words, it's a mistake to believe that even though it sounds like I'm talking in standard English I am really operating primarily in a blended version of English, that is culturally influenced from African American English and my education as an English professor. So, there is no dichotomy. Now, I can choose in my writing to go hood, in a way, like "Should Writers Use They Own English?" in a way that I can't really do verbally anymore, right? Like I probably could, but it's going to be, you're still going to hear that influence of school. But my writing allows me to be able to do that in more distinct ways, right, than, I think, my speech habits would allow me to do at this point. But even my writing is influenced by both ways. So, there is no dichotomy, and

that's, it's probably here, fair to say that my code-meshing arguments allowing these to coexist simultaneously is because it's so personal to me. It's what I actually do.

Davies: He does follow up and say that he asked the question because he was educated in an environment dominated by the Stanley Fishes of the world, and his first language was not standard English.

Another question that I have is, "How have your teaching practices shifted in our new online world. A concern higher education social advocates have made, or concern themselves with, is what the effect of the pandemic has been on underrepresented students and other vulnerable populations, a kind of a sense of extending that sense of otherness, if you will. What would you suggest instructors do to mitigate these concerns in their classrooms, especially for instructors who had been feeling the tax of last year?" And I have to say that tax is probably going to continue because I think hybrid learning is pretty much here to stay.

vay: So, let me, I'm going to ask this question: I want to go back to the moment, Flo. Was the last question asked about the use of the "N-word"?

Davies: Yes.

vay: Okay, let me say a word about that because I have actually written several articles about this recently. And I'm doing a webinar on it this Sunday through my webinar group Aptly Outspoken. This is my thoughtful belief, and I say thoughtful because my first book, as Valerie shared, is called *Your Average Nigga*. Within that book there's three chapters devoted to the use of the N-word in various kinds of ways. There's a chapter called "Nigga Gender," there is a revision of my CCC journal article, "Your Average Nigga," in that book. And at the University of Waterloo, where I taught this past summer, right after the George Floyd protests or during them, my university issued a ban on the N-word on campus. Because a white professor had used the word in a classroom, and this was their response. I felt utterly dismissed and discounted because, you know, my research and book deals with the N-word, so if the university has no place for the N-word on campus, then where do I fit? I also come from a cultural background that in various communities use the N-word in six or seven different ways from the racial epithet. We don't use the racial epithet that white people think, but we do use the N-word in six or seven culturally distinct and rich ways. I believe that, like some of my colleagues, like Ta-Nehisi Coates, for example, who has talked about this,

the N-word can be used by Black people, but the N-word is off limits to white people. Period.

Now let me tell you why I say that. When it comes up in a text in writing in a literature class or some other texts, it's fair to say because it gives honor to the author's authorial intent, as well as it is actually reading what's there on the page. Right. So, I think that it can be quoted, and it can be shared, but in discussion. I believe that we should not use the N-word, unless we're from a culture that uses it culturally and respectfully differently than the racial epithet. The reason why I don't say we should skip it in writing or use something else is because it puts the African American or Black—not just African American, but Black—experience under further erasure. Instead of dealing with it, we want to erase it and skip over it and dance merrily forward, whereas actually to deal with it means that we have to do some hard work. I think that when teachers teach literature that has to do with the N-word, they really need to not do that without considering the work by Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*, where not just her article but the talking and testifying linguistic discussion of the four or five different ways that Black people use the N-word. They also need to read Gloria Naylor's essay that she published in 1986 in *The New York Times*—these can be found online—where she talks about that and then John, I'm sorry, Randall Kennedy's article. Randall Kennedy wrote the book *Nigger* in 2004, or around that time, and he has a very good article that can be found online about the history of the N-word (Kennedy, 2003; Kennedy 1999–2000). These need to be taught.

And then we need to have conversations about the N-word, and then we need to proceed with our pedagogy, with teaching the literature and so forth. With that in mind, and we also need to recognize that there are various sensitivities. There are Black people who don't like to hear the word. There are whites who are uncomfortable with the word. As a teacher, even though I come from a background that uses the word, when in discussion I don't use it because of the sensitivities. But in the literature when we read it, I do use it and I do give students permission to also say it, but we have this conversation, right, a larger one than what I'm saying here, but in discussion, we honor and respect the different sensitivities, right, that exist. So, creating a safe space. I think that's crucially important when we're talking about the N-word. There are some balances that need to happen. Don't put Black people under erasure. Don't put the history of enslavement and the negative racial epithet under erasure. Deal with that, and don't put Black culture under erasure, either, right, by trying to just skip over it.

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Balance with those sensitivities and balance with the need to teach those works of literature.

Davies: Excellent. Follow up answer to that question. I think the questioner definitely appreciated it, and I appreciated it as well. Just because it is something I find that in our new kind of awakening, folks are getting, I guess, reactionary about the things that need to be eliminated, removed, and whatnot, you know. Everybody's kind of trying to be as sensitive as possible right now, to a fault.

vay: And I'm going to briefly answer the question about online teaching because I think I am not the best person to answer that question. I'm not the expert in online pedagogy. I'm struggling just like everybody else, and I am a performance, I teach performance, right, and performance has to be live in my field, and the field of performance studies. It's a live thing, not recorded, right, so we have, my university, we have to do that if we offer something synchronous, we have to provide the opportunity for asynchronous as well but that doesn't work with live performance.

So, Gloria Naylor, Gloria Naylor. And you just put Gloria Naylor, just someone's from the, from the question from the chat box, Gloria Naylor's essay "Mama, What Does Nigga Mean?" or you can put that in there or you can put Gloria Naylor "Meanings of a Word."

But anyway, just to underscore on the online teaching, I think that we have to be, we have to borrow from the feminists' doctrine of love, which is to try to end domination in all its forms. And so, I try to be kind to my students, and I try to understand that even if no one has died from Covid in their families, even if they live in a comfortable environment, even if they haven't had any problems, we're all still struggling with the effects of a pandemic on all of us in different ways. And so, I try to extend kindness to them in ways that go over and beyond what I would, exceptions that I would normally make in an in-person, face-to-face classroom, because we're all dealing with this. And so that's the only answer. I have to tread carefully and be kind.

Davies: I think that's the best answer, honestly. That's what our entire experience has been, is just kind of being sensitive to the fact that everyone is going through a bad time. Um, we're almost actually out of time, but I do want to give space to what you're working on currently, and, you know, I read that you were doing two monographs and a teaching guide, I believe, the *Straight Black Queer Gender Anxiety* and *The American*

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Dream and When Teachers Hurt: Narratives of Failure and Success in Teaching and Learning. And also, I cannot stress how hyped I am about this, but *The Pocket Guide to Code Meshing: Raise Your Authentic Voice in Academic and Public Speaking and Writing*, a book that I needed when I, you know, joined this environment in 2013. Could you speak more on that and what you've been working on?

vay: Yeah. Thank you for asking about those. So, *The Pocket Guide to Code Meshing* is a book that is like the self-help books from the late 70s.

Davies: I love it. I love it already.

vay: So, it's a book. Do you know *The Writer's Way*? I mean, not *The Writer's Way*, *The Artist's Way*?

Davies: Yeah, yeah, I know *Artist's Way*.

vay: It's sort of like a journal book for artists. Well, this book for me is a book for teachers. It's not a book for students, although teachers can use it in a classroom. It's asking teachers to go through their journey of writing and reflect on their voice and how they use it in order to think about the pedagogy they're going to teach to students. So, it starts with the literacy narrative. I'm asking them to think about their experiences with school and literacy and to write, and that literacy narrative carries us through the book, where I'm guiding them through certain exercises to experiment with.

I had given you an example earlier. I didn't say that it was from the book, but it is how to funk up your clichés, right? So, you say "the proof is in the pudding." And I throw out these clichés in the book, and I ask you, how do you funk that up as opposed to having a rule that says don't use clichés? How do you make that so that the cliché actually serves the purpose of your writing, right, because that's really what the writing teacher wants to get us to do. So, that's one of the examples in there. I'm asking them to sort of think about the ways in which they use punctuation.

Also, I ask teachers to think about their own home linguistic backgrounds, where they came from, the influence of languages and their current influence of languages and look at their writing on how they can add that into the development of that literacy narrative, because the literacy narrative also is a hybrid form. It's not just a story, but it's an academic exercise. It asks us to reflect on it and then enlarge from there. So

that's the *Pocket Guide to Code Meshing*. It's sort of like the Vershawn Young's, what is that, those two people, Strunk & White?

Davies: Strunk & White. Yes! You can call it "Funk & White."

vay: I know we are running out of time. That other book, *Straight Black Queer*, um, is looking at the ways in which professional upper middle-class Black men have to negotiate their gender and their gender in relation to their race in the mainstream. So, I look at Barack Obama. I look at a judge by the name of Olu Stevens out of Louisville, Dave Chappelle, who has spoken quite vocally about this, and then I do a little bit of looking in the introduction at James Baldwin and in the conclusion at Tyler Perry.

Davies: Ooh, Tyler Perry.

vay: He's very complex, which is why I leave him for the conclusion.

Davies: Oh yes, he is very complex. I would have lots of things to say. But I won't say them on this Zoom.

Balester: I hate to do it, but we are out of time. So, Flo, you hear that applause? Because I can hear it, I think it's definitely applause. Thank you very much.

Davies: Yes, thank you so much.

vay: I really appreciate having this conversation with you wonderful interlocutors. Thank you so much.

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Introduction to “Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing”

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TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing

Sue Hum, “Advocating for Social Justice: Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Construction in an Infographic Assignment.”

Natasha N. Jones, “Citational Practices: Shifting Paradigms.”

Jennifer Sano-Franchini, “Programmatic Efforts to Address Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing.”

Delivered Monday, February 22, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

“Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing” took place initially as a panel on February 22, 2021. From there, the following essays emerged, each

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examining why and how matters of social justice may be addressed in technical and professional writing programs, from assignments to citation practices to working groups.

In the first piece, “Advocating for Social Justice: Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Construction in an Infographic Assignment,” Dr. Sue Hum identifies “the unmediated, ahistorical, apolitical tendency in technical communication [that] continues to embrace a utilitarian, pragmatic approach,” and she argues, “It is in these approaches that racism hides, in the cracks and crevices of local contexts and utilitarian approaches.” Hum observes, “Any success in integrating inclusive approaches to curriculum requires an antiracist treatment of knowledge construction,” and she shares with us the efforts that she and four doctoral instructors have made to create an infographic assignment designed to combat the racism inherent in infographics, originating as they have to serve racist, imperialistic purposes.

In “Citation Practices: Shifting Paradigms,” Dr. Natasha Jones argues for the importance of citation practice focused on the recovery of the origins and the amplification of the work of marginalized critics, as opposed to listing citations simply as the performance of a quantitative exercise. Jones discusses “citation practices and what this means in regard to knowledge legitimization and meaning-making,” and she “draw[s] on Black Feminist scholars to reframe how we think about citation practices and how we engage in citation practices.” Jones urges us to consider a “move toward coalitional engagement in citational practices” as a critical part of working towards social justice in writing and in teaching writing.

In “Programmatic Efforts to Redress Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing,” Dr. Jennifer Sano-Franchini recounts how she was galvanized in 2020 by a series of critical events—the murder of George Floyd, the “wave of worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that followed,” and first one call to action issued by ATTW President Angela Haas and then another by ATTW Vice President Natasha N. Jones and ATTW Fellow Miriam F. Williams—to issue her own calls to action. In the following piece, Sano-Franchini encourages us to consider what we can and should undertake in our own spheres to combat racism and white supremacy, as well as how we might go about doing so. She provides readers with a detailed account of what, where, and how white supremacy is; conversations about how programs may begin to address it; and her own first-hand experiences as an organizer of and participant in these conversations.

In these pieces, Hum, Jones, and Sano-Franchini call attention to the ways in which technical and professional writing is neither neutral nor objective, as has been

Carly-Miles

assumed in the past. Each of these scholars focuses our attention on the ways that assumptions about and in this field have perpetuated white supremacy, and they offer their critical reflections on what those who would address racism and upset hegemonic systems in writing classrooms and writing centers should seriously consider in order to begin to do so effectively.

About the Author

Claire Carly-Miles is an instructional assistant professor in the English Department at Texas A&M University. She is the coordinator of Technical and Professional Writing and the co-coordinator of Introduction to Writing about Literature, and she has worked collaboratively since 2019 to create open educational resource (OER) textbooks for both of these multi-section writing courses. Currently, she continues to participate in the revision of these OER as well as in the writing of a new OER for the department's Science Fiction and Fantasy minor.

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Advocating for Social Justice: Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Construction in an Infographic Assignment¹

Sue Hum, Ph.D.

University of Texas at San Antonio

TEACHING WRITING NOW:

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing

Delivered Monday, February 22, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

The undergraduate students in a technical writing course are asked to identify an infographic that addresses issues of race and inclusivity and to discuss the success to which that infographic's design strategies tackle difference. In a response to an example infographic posted by his classmate, a student critiques the infographic that compares the demographics of the US population with the demographics of worker representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. That student points out that this comparison, a false one in his opinion, positions

¹ Land acknowledgement: The University of Texas at San Antonio's three campuses are located on the ancestral territories of the Coahuiltecan people, indigenous stewards of this land. In addition, other American Indian communities, including the Lipan Apaches, the Tonkawas, and the Comanches, have dwelled on and traveled over these lands and territories in Central Texas.

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whites as tyrannizers. He disagrees with the premise of the infographic that unequal demographic representation in STEM is a sign of racism, sexism, and corruption; he maintains that this premise is flawed and too simplistic. This student's response engages in knowledge telling, a transactional approach to reading and learning that "involves a relatively shallow engagement, a regurgitation of content with little analysis or reflection."² His knowledge telling approach contrasts with the purpose of the discussion prompt, one of knowledge construction, an approach that underscores the ways in which data, design, and persuasion are not neutral, objective, or disinterested.³ The instructors of this technical writing course sought to underscore through the infographic assignment and a related online discussion that knowledge construction involves deep engagement, is promoted by the use of various techniques, and requires open-ended questions in order to address the issue of race in two ways: how neutral, utilitarian stances elide cultural differences and how racialized inequalities and cultural exclusions are maintained in subtle ways. This student's response points both to the urgency for and challenges of augmenting a technical writing course with antiracist pedagogy.

This course, like similar courses taught across the nation, is treated by scholars, teachers, and students as a data-driven, neutral, disinterested endeavor, prioritizing workplace, professional, and business communication. The technical writing course, with its focus on quantitative literacy, needed to engage students in meaningful assignments with an explicit focus on race and racism. Recent socio-cultural movements, compounded with the inequalities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, augmented the urgency for revisions.⁴ Recent scholarship urges intentional engagements with racism for the development of socially aware communicators

² For a discussion of "knowledge telling," see M. Scardamalia & C. Bereiter (1987). Knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in written composition in Sheldon Rosenberg (Ed.), *Advances in applied psycholinguistics*: Vol. 2 (pp. 142–75). Cambridge UP. The use of the term "transactional approach" aligns with Dan Melzer's definition, one that identifies student writing that seeks not only to inform but also orients teachers as the primary audience and examiners of student writing; see D. Melzer (2014). *Assignments across the curriculum: A national study of college writing*. Utah State UP.

³ For a discussion of active knowledge construction, see M. Carter (2007). Ways of knowing, doing, and writing in the disciplines. *College Composition and Communication*, 58(2), 385–418.

⁴ In Fall 2020, I worked with four, second-year doctoral instructors, all teaching this technical writing course for the first time at the University of Texas at San Antonio, a Hispanic Serving Institution with almost 20,000 Hispanic students or 57% of the student population. These doctoral instructors—Kandice Diaz, Victoria Ramirez Gentry, Karyn Hixson, and Abby Mangel—and I worked in partnership to integrate the infographic assignment that introduced issues of race and design into the course, which was taught online, both synchronously and asynchronously. This course is a lower-division, core curriculum course that enrolls students across the university. About 22 sections, capped at 25 students, are offered annually.

capable of participating in an era of globalization.⁵ Natasha Jones and Rebecca Walton have pointed out that the last two decades have not adequately addressed the ways in which we alleviate oppression through ethical civic action. They call for “social justice research” in technical communication, an approach that “investigates how communication, broadly defined, can amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced” (242).⁶ This emphasis on redressing inequities begins with addressing silences and identifying opaque structures to develop frameworks better suited to promoting cultural competencies. After all, as Jennifer Sano-Franchini reminds us, “there are no quick or easy solutions that will instantly ‘eradicate’ the deeply embedded systemic, social problem of racism” (43).⁷ She proposes the use of a culturally reflexive framework in design, one that foregrounds complexity and a dialogic view of culture; it encourages designers to complicate race, and, by so doing, discourage and minimize racial profiling, stereotyping, and discriminatory language. By contrast, the unmediated, ahistorical, apolitical tendency in technical communication continues to embrace a utilitarian, pragmatic approach. It is in approaches like this that racism hides, in the cracks and crevices of local contexts and utilitarian approaches.

This paper details one local response to antiracist pedagogy, starting with a pilot initiative related to an infographic assignment. I highlight the mixed success and challenges of crafting a course that honors both technical writing and antiracist pedagogy goals. Following Sandra Harding’s warning against an add-and-stir approach, the doctoral instructors and I undergirded technical writing content with overt rhetorical strategies that call attention to structures that enact racism. Across eight sections, we sought to pilot difficult class conversations about race within the structure of a single assignment. Persuaded by Martin Luther King Jr.’s admonition against devotion to order to maintain a negative peace, we opted to embrace the tension that comes from striving for the presence of justice.⁸ King, explaining about the privilege

⁵ See A. M. Haas & M. F. Eble (2018). Introduction: The social justice turn in *Key theoretical frameworks: Teaching technical communication in the twenty-first century* (pp. 3–20), UP of Colorado & Utah State UP. See also “Introduction,” *Performing AntiRacist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*. Ed. Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young, UP of Colorado, WAC Clearinghouse, 2017. 3-16.

⁶ Jones, Natasha N. and Rebecca Walton, “Using Narratives to Foster Critical Thinking About Diversity and Social Justice.” *Key Theoretical Frameworks: Teaching Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century*, Ed. Angela M. Haas and Michelle F. Eble, UP of Colorado, Utah State UP, 2018. 241-67.

⁷ Sano-Franchini, Jennifer. “What Can Asian Eyelids Teach Us About User Experience Design? A Culturally Reflexive Framework for UX/I Design.” *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization*, 10.1 (October 2017): 27-53.

⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 1963.

of complacency with the status quo, describes “the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.” Recognizing that a status-quo, utilitarian approach to technical writing engages in what Joyce E. King calls “dysconscious racism,” “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (135),⁹ we initiated this pilot intervention as a first step toward cultivating antiracist goals in a technical writing course.

By introducing undergraduates to the relevance of race and by taking an explicit stance in discussing the ways in which design choices overtly and covertly contribute to racial inequity and social injustice, these doctoral instructors advocated for social justice in their technical writing curriculum. As teachers, they invited students to participate and contribute to antiracist efforts, even while knowing that some students might resist. In addition to content changes, we designed support assignments, resources, and activities for students to engage openly with each other’s racial experiences even as they acknowledged their own positionality. The pedagogical mechanism of change is the infographic, framed as knowledge construction rather than knowledge telling. The goal is to forge in students a desire to build knowledge in communicating for racial justice and participating in a collective responsibility by using the multimodal dynamism of the infographic as their communication of choice.

The Infographic Assignment

The infographic assignment tasks students with selecting and reading a statistics-based article that provides a deep dive into a topic. The source is the PEW Research Center, a non-partisan fact tank that informs the public about issues, attitudes, and trends through public-opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis, and other data-driven social science research. Relying on the data provided by PEW, students are encouraged to create an evidence-based argument for a specific action and to communicate that action to an audience within a particular rhetorical situation. Students, habituated to the superficial, transactional approach of knowledge telling, seldom move beyond accurate summary and paraphrasing, even though they are provided with examples and resources of how to engage in knowledge construction. In addition, to augment awareness of diversity, students read about race and design, analyze an example of an infographic dealing with race and incarceration, and

⁹ King, Joyce E. “Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers.” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 60.2 (1991): 133-46.

contribute to a discussion that explores race and design explicitly.¹⁰ These resources introduce students to the genre of the infographic, along with its design conventions, as well as underscore the importance of knowledge construction.

Before designing their own infographics, students engage in discussion to consider how these design conventions may in turn enact racial injustice. The assigned readings offer students some avenues to explore the ways design can ameliorate systemic inequity. These include layout, color, composition, line, symbols, typography, and interactivity, among other elements. In addition, students were prompted to consider the relationship between design and racialized tropes. Such processes encouraged students to think critically and inclusively about the ways in which design decisions in infographics may participate in making some readers feel unwelcome, alienated, or marginalized. In brief, this infographic assignment is designed to help students learn to read and produce data-driven visual arguments for social justice.

As one might imagine, the content and the more overt processes of addressing race resulted in uneven and sometimes challenging experiences for the doctoral instructors. Even though an instructor's identity has a direct impact on the outcome of a course, it is rarely addressed in the classroom. For example, might these doctoral instructors engage in what Romeo García and Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa call "strategic neutrality," defined as "epistemic and performative pedagogical practices (rather than civil disobedience), which can be drawn from and grounded in epistemic violence" (208).¹¹ This approach allows instructors to acknowledge the ways in which friction represents a means to engage a range of responses, including forms of resistance, from students.

Student reactions to this pilot intervention, addressed in this paper, fall into three groups of responses. First, some students' positive approaches were marked by an uncritical embrace of diversity, where racial differences hover at the surface level. This stance provides cover for an active avoidance of discussions of systemic racism, along with a failure to interrogate white privilege and institutional exclusions. By this, I mean that students expressed the belief that diversity is valued, and that people should be treated equally. However, this belief is just the first step in an embrace of

¹⁰ For example, see Erika Kim, "[Depicting Race in Iconography](#)," and Lindsay Stuart's, "[How the United Nations Uses Icons to Help Support Humanitarian Efforts Around the World](#)." A discussion question on design and race focused on Jason Killinger's "[Educate vs. Incarcerate](#)" infographic, and his [bibliography](#), available as a google document.

¹¹ García, Romeo, and Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa. "Encounters with Friction: Engaging Resistance through Strategic Neutrality." *On Teacher Neutrality: Politics, Praxis, and Performativity*. Ed. Daniel P. Richards. Utah State University Press, 2020. 207-220.

racial equity with the goal of enacting social justice. Students might be encouraged to consider the ways in which design of infographics enacts structural racism at the local level. For example, the choice to italicize Spanish words or avoid the use of Spanglish endorses an othering.

Second, another set of student responses involved “whataboutism,” which seeks to redirect attention away from race and racism, for example by creating a false equivalency of exclusion of minorities with exclusions of whites. Even as Kimberlé Crenshaw reminds us of the intersectional dynamic of oppressions,¹² these students broaden the discussion to include other oppressions, inevitably shifting the focus and the blame for inequality. By so doing, the nature of oppression becomes too general, widespread, and thus unaddressable. I am not dismissing issues of gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and so forth. Rather, I am highlighting the potential paralysis that occurs when students are faced with generalized systemic exclusions. It is difficult for students to contextualize these systems of oppression within racially minoritized communities. Thus, students’ design choices might focus on local contexts as they are encouraged to become more knowledgeable about the concerns of their stakeholder audiences.

Third, as expected, some students expressed resistance and frustration, engaging actively in class discussion boards. Although they wrote extensively about issues of race, their perspectives underscored polarization or an either-or binary. Some students also tended to reduce racism to a single source, whether microaggressions, implicit bias, or institutional racialization. These reductive approaches diminished the complexity and dynamism of race-related concerns and tended to take the form of accusations and/or blaming. By contrast, other students might feel called out and become defensive. Alternatively, they might counter accusations with personal attacks, thus shutting down conversation. To be antiracist advocates, doctoral instructors must learn not only to engage in the tension, resistance, and raw intensity of emotion, but also to facilitate conversations about difficult topics. Any success in integrating inclusive approaches to curriculum requires an antiracist treatment of knowledge construction.

Antiracist Knowledge Construction in the Infographic

Knowledge creation is not value neutral but is contextual, always already culturally situated so that design decisions are interpellated with existing cultural knowledges,

¹² Crenshaw, Kimberlé W., *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. The New Press, 2017.

organizing logics, and hegemonic understandings. Infographics--the output of knowledge construction--are inherently rhetorical, and therefore interested, bias-laden visual artifacts that contain both explicit and implicit arguments. The implicit arguments depicted in infographics may consist of many seemingly minor decisions about data and design, from the inception of a research project through to the final publication of the infographic. Select visualization formats, design decisions, and numerous other choices made within the infographic all frame and direct the possible range of interpretation. Furthermore, infographics may reflect underlying biases, ideologies, and beliefs that in turn structure and reproduce past inequities and harmful realities.

The pedagogy on the infographic does not currently integrate important critical practices for social justice. For example, infographics are assumed to be an impartial medium that enact the functional work of displaying information. This illusory functionalism may obscure an understanding of the ways in which design performs structural racism. Because infographics are a compelling and resonant medium through which much contemporary communication is represented, this intervention is particularly timely. The rhetorical qualities of the infographic underscore persuasive purposes of individual design decisions or visual conventions that allow for mitigating or reinforcing racial inequality and social inequity.

Even as students grapple with quantitative literacy and the strategies for data visualization, they might be exposed to the work of visual theorist Johanna Drucker. Drucker argues that the standard visualization conventions with which we are most familiar—bar graphs, line charts, pie charts—were constructed in European countries to manage the resources garnered from colonial expansion and industrial transformation.¹³ Such visualizations were “created to track demographics, trade, war, and debt, incurred by their growing empires”¹⁴ so that their purposes are imbued with imperialism and conquest.

At the same time, traditional, value-neutral approaches to knowledge construction warrant a rationalistic epistemology, which constitutes another form of oppression. For instructors to engage in knowledge construction, they frequently present the dominant view of knowledge, which is an amalgam of rational, experiential, communal, and evidence-based practices. This rational stance often requires of instructors a neutrality that eschews the epistemic violence that cultural rhetoric has

¹³ Drucker, Johanna. “Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 5.1 (2011):

¹⁴ Hepworth, Katherine, and Christopher Church. “Racism in the Machine: Visualization Ethics in Digital Humanities Projects.” *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly* 12.4 (2018): 1-16.

highlighted. Neutrality, as Bernadette Longo reminds us, does not account for the struggles for knowledge legitimation that are influenced by larger cultural, institutional, political, economic, and/or social relationships, pressures, and tensions.¹⁵ Recent work has challenged that rational-capitalist epistemology. Iris Ruiz and Damian Baca offer us decolonial options for pedagogy.¹⁶ Cruz Medina applies Walter Mignolo's "epistemic disobedience" by complicating the primacy of English as a language for knowledge building.¹⁷ And Rebecca Walton, Kristen Moore, and Natasha Jones advocate building on Patricia Hill Collins' black feminist epistemology as a framework for community-based teaching.¹⁸ Antiracist pedagogy challenges the objective, apolitical, utilitarian, and pragmatic impulses of technical communication in general and the infographic in particular.

As the doctoral instructors and I revisit the infographic assignment and seek to extend antiracist pedagogy to other portions of technical writing, we maintain three dominant principles. The first is to situate race locally by helping students revisit what they know and embrace ways of experiencing the new. The second requires an overt recognition of the stereotypes, tropes, and frames of race that shape our design choices in order to apply them appropriately and creatively. The third is an embrace of multilingualism and linguistic diversity through functional and critical analyses.

At the heart of an antiracist pedagogy is the belief in universal equality and equity. The classroom remains a site that is capable of sparking a revolution or reproducing structural inequities. Despite these mixed successes, and despite the vocal protests of some students, like the undergraduate I described at the beginning of my paper, the doctoral instructors and I reject a negative peace. Rather, we recognize that the next generation of students benefits from our commitment and efforts to shape a positive peace. Antiracist pedagogy is forged by friction and resistance, and the stressors that come from thinking, acting, teaching, and theorizing are critical to our future.

¹⁵ Longo, Bernadette. "An Approach for Applying Cultural Study Theory to Technical Writing Research." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 7.1 (1998): 53-73.

¹⁶ Ruiz, Iris, and Damián Baca. "Decolonial Options and Writing Studies." *Composition Studies* 45.2 (2017): 226-229, 269, 272.

¹⁷ Medina, Cruz. "Decolonial Potential in a Multilingual FYC." *Composition Studies* 47.1 (2019): 73-94.

¹⁸ Walton, Rebecca, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones. *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action*. Routledge, 2019. 105-30.

About the Author

Sue Hum is Professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She specializes in visual rhetoric, antiracist pedagogy, and writing enriched curricula. She is co-principal investigator of over \$1,800,000 in funded projects from the National Science Foundation, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Burroughs Wellcome Fund. She is author of *Persuading with Numbers: A Primer for Engaging Quantitative Information*, (Kona, 2017) and co-editor of *Open Words: Access and English Studies*, available through WAC Clearinghouse.

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Citation Practices: Shifting Paradigms¹

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TEACHING WRITING NOW:

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing

Delivered Monday, February 22, 2021 from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

Introduction

Thank you to the organizers for inviting me to talk. I'm really excited to be here today. I'm going to talk about changing how we think about citation practices in the academy. So, this reaches beyond the field of technical communication, but because I am in technical communication, I do draw on some technical communication scholarship.

¹ Note: The original version of this talk was given on Monday, February 15, 2021 as part of The Texas A&M University Department of English's Teaching Writing Now Symposium. It has been edited for publication and includes references to and citations from the author's previous and forthcoming published work.

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It's interesting because I've been thinking quite a bit about citation practices. Specifically, as I've mulled over this presentation (and given a couple of other presentations), I've been grappling with the ways that knowledge is taken up and legitimized in our field (technical communication), but more broadly in our discipline. In an attempt to tie some ideas together and also, in rethinking some of my own ideas, I circled back to citation practices and what this means in regard to knowledge legitimization and meaning-making. So, in this talk, I draw on Black Feminist scholars to reframe how we think about citation practices and how we engage in those practices.

First, when I say citation practices, I am referring to not only who we cite but how we cite and the impact that these practices can have on the field. There is important work being done that addresses citation analysis. For instance, I am aware of forthcoming work from Johnson, Moore, and Sanchez (unpublished) that will examine how the concept of intersectionality gets taken up in engineering education domains through citation practices. There is also work being done on citation and network analysis by scholars in and beyond technical communication. I'm not talking specifically about citation analysis here, but I am interrogating the justice-oriented ways that we approach citations.

When I considered how citation practices are taken up, I began to notice some patterns. Briefly, and I won't cover them all, we can observe four approaches to citing:

- 1) Absence
- 2) Cursory Mentions
- 3) Listing
- 4) Coalitional Engagement

Let me say that these broad categories are not mutually exclusive, and one can sometimes find a combination of these approaches to citational practices in a single text or article. But, for now, I just want to discuss what these practices look like and the implications that they have.

Absence

The absence of scholarship by marginalized and multiply marginalized scholars is characterized by citation practices that privilege traditional, Western, white-male, cis-het scholars at the expense of Black scholars, scholars of color, or multiply marginalized scholars—who are excluded, even as they have expertise on a given topic. These “traditionally” cited scholars, as Shelton (2019) notes, “reflect the accumulation

of resources at the center of society's social, economic, and political institutions" (p. 10). When I think about this type of citational practice, I acknowledge that this points to what I understand to be an issue of silencing practices, as defined by Dotson (2011), and knowledge legitimization.

So, in fits and starts, I've been writing about and thinking about how silence and silencing work as a gatekeeping mechanism that often devalues certain ways of knowing, learning, and meaning-making. In an article I wrote in 2016 about narrative inquiry methods in human-centered design, I discussed how narrative and the privileging of lived experience can help eliminate silencing and silencing practices ("Narrative Inquiry..."). As I think about some of the claims I made in that article, reflectively I understand that I was discussing what Dotson (2011) called "testimonial quieting." In a 2021 publication, I discuss Dotson's (2011) frame for silencing practices, in which she provides a definitional situatedness for understanding subtle ways that Black women's knowledges, in particular, are devalued.

In her definition of testimonial quieting—"an audience fail[ing] to identify a speaker as a knower"—Dotson (2011) makes clear that the knowledge(s) exist, is useful, and is applicable, but is delegitimized in a way that "disappears" ways of learning, knowing, and meaning making, rather than amplifying epistemologies (p. 242). As Dotson further argues, delegitimized knowledge(s) is often supplanted by dominant and "traditional" ways of knowing and engaging. Dotson notes that "local or provincial knowledge is dismissed due to privileging alternative, often Western, epistemic practices" (p. 236). Moreover, I argued then that by "drawing on the theoretical frame of Black Feminist Thought (Patricia Hill Collins, 2000), Dotson notes how the presumption of incompetence constrains Black women's ways of learning and knowing and restricts the spaces and places in which Black women can engage in epistemic and knowledge-making processes and practices" (Jones, 2021, p. 62).

We also can understand this as a way of devaluing knowledge in favor of gatekeeping that relies on arguments about what counts as experience, arguments that interrogate what is "professional" and rigorous, and arguments that set up false standards about methodological purity. We see some of these gatekeeping and silencing practices when we hear scholars question methods like autoethnography, narrative, counterstory, and work that engages in genre bends and blends.

As I note, first in an article on narrative and silence in human-centered design (Jones, 2016) and then later in a book chapter on silencing practices in scientific communication (Jones, 2021):

Silencing occurs in a variety of ways and for several different reasons. Silencing is defined broadly as “not being heard or understood, not being included or represented, being ignored or delegitimized, not being valued, or . . . marginalized” (Jones, 2016, p. 478). Feminist conceptualizations of silence interrogate how power is constructed, maintained, and manifested, with the understanding that “power can silence or support the voices of others” (p. 478). Further, when considering silence specifically from a Black Feminist perspective, “silencing is often systemic and systematic” and “can occur without malicious intent, ill will, or even active engagement,” with complicity finding a path through “heteronormative, patriarchal, eurocentric” ideologies that go unacknowledged and unchallenged in any explicit way. Resisting silence is about being explicit and removing opacity (p. 478).

In essence, silencing works, as Dotson (2011) notes, to separate a group from the linguistic reciprocity that enables and recognizes knowledge-making. Dotson argues that epistemic violence is a “type of violence that attempts to eliminate knowledge possessed by marginal subjects” (pg. 236). Further, Toni Morrison (1993) argues, and we quote in our book, that the goal in this type of violence—violence around language—and as I argue, the silencing of and the taking away of language is “estrangement.”

In regard to citation practices, the exclusion of scholarship from marginalized and multiply marginalized folks works to “estrangle” these scholars from their academic disciplines. It invalidates their work. It obscures their work. It disappears the knowledge that they create. To be clear, I don’t make claims that this disappearing of scholarship by marginalized and multiply marginalized folks is malicious or intentional, though it can be. However, it does have implications and consequences that reverberate within and across our academic fields.

A generous take on this phenomenon is that folks want to do better, and I’d even argue that we’ve seen in our field and our discipline that folks are trying to do better.

As Kristen Moore, Rebecca Walton, and I describe in our book *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action* (2019), the first step to redressing injustice is a recognition of injustice and oppression. And I do think folks are recognizing the problem with this approach to citation practices. In fact, the next approach to citation practices is, I’d argue, what is born out of a response to this recognition.

Cursory Mentions

I describe cursory mentions as akin to name-dropping. In this sense, a scholar might mention the name of a prominent marginalized or multiply marginalized scholar as a way to signal some brief acknowledgment of the work that this scholar may have done. This is not, in itself, inappropriate, and there are valid reasons for cursory mentions in our scholarship. So, I'm not addressing those valid reasons, but I am addressing cursory mentions that do performative work without truly being purposeful in citing work from marginalized or multiply marginalized scholars.

One of the things we've seen with the social justice turn in technical communication is the desire to incorporate a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and ideas into our work. This is a good thing. Folks who haven't before thought about the justice- and inclusion-oriented impacts of their work are doing more to be reflective and engage in practices that seek to acknowledge the field of technical communication's complicity in oppression and oppressive behaviors. This means, in turn, more folks are working to cite more Black folks, POC, and queer folks in their research and scholarship. They are revisiting and revising their syllabi to include perspectives and scholarship from those of us at the margins. Again, this is a good thing. But this new incorporation of work from multiply marginalized folks must be done in a way that does not do harm to, exploit, or extract from the very communities that we try to engage with.

Listing

Listing happens when scholars include citational lists that name scholars in list form. I see listing happening in more than one way though.

Listing to quantify (focus on numeric representation)

Listing as a way to bolster the number of marginalized or multiply marginalized scholars included in a work focuses on quantity instead of true engagement. Listing without an understanding of amplification is akin to racial quotas and representational diversity measures that ask us to count the number of others in the room (whether those "others" are truly included or not). Further, Jennifer Nash (2019) argues citational practices that are not genuine engagements with scholarship are "predatory" and that "a scholar may cite a Black woman to give the appearance of being more liberal, instead of having authentic respect for the Black woman's work and genius."

Of course, this is a problem. Nash calls this using citation as a “credential.” If the focus is purely on the number of marginalized folks you cite, then you are using those folks as a tool rather than doing the dialogical work that we’ve been trained to do as researchers. In this sense, citation practice becomes purely utilitarian and a performative means to an end. There are, of course, reasons to cite works in list form, but those reasons should not include a “diversity headcount.”

Now, I don’t think listing is always a bad idea. However, I think it’s important for us to ask: How/when does listing work, and when is listing disingenuous?

Listing to amplify (call attention to the existence of the work)

Sometimes, listing can help to amplify by specifically calling attention to the existence of work by and about marginalized and multiply marginalized scholars (Cooper 2017). In other words, this type of listing resists arguments that the work doesn’t exist, the scholars are not there, or there is a gap that scholars who are marginalized or multiply marginalized have not addressed. In this way, listing can explicitly push back against silencing through a citational version of “talking back” to gatekeepers upholding oppressive ideals about where knowledge can be located and whose knowledge is valid (or even where and whose knowledge exists). For example, in *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn*, Drs. Walton and Moore and I (2019) use this practice in our chapter detailing critiques about the social justice turn in technical communication. One of the critiques—that the reason for not citing marginalized and multiply marginalized scholars in our work or including these scholars on our syllabi—is that there just aren’t many of us out there. To be clear, there is no pipeline problem. Listing to amplify, as defined by Cooper (2017), becomes one way to address this myth head-on.

Listing can also provide a way to trace the development of concepts and ideas that have not been centered in our research and scholarship. We see this in literature reviews, and this type of listing can afford us a way to acknowledge how marginalized scholars have been at the fore of certain concepts, ideas, and theoretical frameworks that get taken up in popular thought but don’t get credited back to the originators of those ideas. Cooper (2015) addresses this phenomenon in an essay on the future of Black Feminism.

In *Love No Limit: Towards a Black Feminist Future (In Theory)*, Cooper argues,

Despite the “citational ubiquity” of concepts like intersectionality in fields and disciplines across the humanities and social sciences and despite the

proliferation of vibrant cultures of Black feminisms on the innerwebs, academic Black feminisms still confront a “culture of justification,” in which one is always asked to prove that the study of Black women's lives, histories, literature, cultural production and theory is sufficiently academic, and sufficiently “rigorous” to merit academic resources. (p.7)

Williams and Packer-Williams (2019) remind us that Black women scholars, as noted by Cooper (2017), take up “cope” with Black women’s scholarship being ignored (p. 2010). In this way, even listing to amplify must be done carefully and purposefully. In essence, though ideas, concepts, and theories by and about Black folk and POC appear in publications, there is still a push to justify the belonging, the appropriateness, the rigor behind these ideas. Sometimes, lists don’t allow for a deeper engagement and then the danger of citing work by Black folk and POC without genuine engagement with those ideas leaves the marginalized and multiply marginalized scholars to do the heavy lifting of that justification work--to go back and reiterate why what they’ve said is valid, misconstrued, misattributed, misunderstood, or taken up in uncritical ways.

Specifically, in relation to scholarship by and about Black women, Williams and Packer-Williams (2019) point out that, even as Black women contribute to academia in important ways, they are, as the scholars note that Cooper has suggested, “perpetually misunderstood, not seen, and/or deemed inconsequential” (n.p.). The authors go on to say that “one coping response might be for Black women academicians to take up the posture of advocating, naming, and amplifying the accomplishments of other Black women and themselves” (n.p.). This productive response is what Cooper (2017) describes as listing and is the purpose of the Cite Black Women Collective organized by Dr. Christen Smith at the University of Texas at Austin. Both advocate a praxis of honoring and acknowledging the intellectual work of Black women because often their work is rendered invisible.

So, in this sense, we see Black women taking up listing as an amplifying practice. In regard to citation practices, this listing can function in much the same way—to make work visible. As Mckoy (2019) notes in her work on amplification rhetorics, this rhetorical move to center marginalized knowledges and epistemologies underscores a desire to reclaim agency, making the work not only visible, but valid and valuable. But it’s still work being taken on by Black women! It’s still labor. It is making moves that are necessary, but that are also rhetorically invisible labor that other scholars don’t think twice about—that is, how can I amplify the work of scholars who

look like me, who have similar experiences in the academy as me, who are on the margins like me?

The interesting thing about this approach to listing and how Black women use listing is that it keys into the idea of amplification and advocacy in coalition with *one another*. It moves multiply marginalized folks into a knowledge-making space that brings them together to achieve a commonly sought goal. This space is dynamic and shifts—like any other coalition. Sometimes, you bring in voices that serve one purpose or another. Other times, you bring in voices for the express purpose of holding up your, what Cooper (2015) calls, “foremothers,” those that came before you and made a space for your work. In other words, this Black feminist, coalitional approach to citation practices allows Black women scholars to be in coalition in a way that both honors and acknowledges each other’s intellectual work—work that is too often disappeared in the academy.

This brings me to the final approach, citational practices that focus on coalitional engagement. What has Cite Black Women taught us? What have our “foremothers” taught us? What can we learn about knowledge-making from Black Feminist traditions?

Coalitional Engagement

Recently, a colleague of mine brought this concern to bear in a tweet, asking about the role of engagement in citation practices and how we can be critical in our citation practices, and I agree with him that engagement is key. It’s nice to see citations by Black folks and people of color, but what good does that do without engagement.

I refer to Shelton (2019), who says, “Seeking out a framework for knowledge production that explicitly rejects the primacy of Western philosophical and rhetorical traditions can feel like working in a void when mainstream education (both formal and informal) is built exclusively on these premises” (pg. 18). When you tie citation practices to knowledge production, knowledge legitimation—work on that void continues, but we can move to “circumvent” and “subvert,” as Shelton argues (pg. 19).

I think here, the fundamental ask is that we shift how we think about citation practices; not as a performative act of solidarity, not as utilitarian, but as a way to amplify *and* be in coalition with each other.

This requires that we move away from thinking about citation as purely a way to map and trace the traditions of the field. What does “tradition” mean to the Black woman scholar?

The reason why this gets sticky is because often the “traditions” and dominant narratives about a scholarly space, place, idea, or discipline leave out important voices. Marginalized folks and the work of marginalized folks have been long overlooked, disappeared, and devalued. This becomes a vicious cycle when we only trace the narratives (and not the antinarratives or counterstories) and fail to take time to purposefully amplify what Mckoy (2019) calls marginalized epistemologies, the ways of learning, knowing, and making meaning (p. 46).

If we only think in utilitarian terms about citation practices, we are also more likely to try to identify gaps and holes. Many of us are trained as researchers to identify the gap and then fill it. Cooper (2015) notes: “Traditional academic strictures themselves require a “displacing and supplanting of previous knowledge” to prove what is new, novel, and useful about one's contributions” (pg. 7). We rarely are trained to look for ways to amplify existing, but devalued work or to address a community need or to expand on what work has been done in a marginalized community. This orientation to research is almost always deficit-based (Something is missing; something is done poorly; I can do something new and something better). This orientation also encourages the type of toxic competitiveness that further marginalizes those who are already seen as not valuable as scholars. Guzman and Amrute (2019) acknowledge this problem when they state that “we want people to know we’ve got something to say, so we conveniently forget all the others who co-created our ideas: (mostly) Black and Brown women and people who don’t have formal credentials (like the people we interview)” (n.p.). They call this the problem of lineage and originality (acting AS IF we stand alone).

So, what is next? How can we shift these citational paradigms? I think we can move toward coalitional engagement in citational practices. Some Black feminist scholars have provided us with ideas about what that might look like already. Instead of claiming these ideas as new, I attempt here to extend on these ideas and place them under the umbrella of coalitional engagement. In order to do that, I ask the following questions that, as my colleague Kristen Moore often reminds me, we can think through as a coalition together—and start a dialogue about what this shift might be.

First, what might it look like to engage in citation practices as a way of honoring those before us (instead of working to prove that we are “in company with”)? What might shift about our practices if one of the goals is to honor?

How do we move from citation practices that merely acknowledge to citation practices that amplify?

Nash (2019), in a lecture entitled “Citational Desires,” asks us to treat “Black women’s work with care and respect [that] shows that the user’s engagement with

black feminist work is conscientious. Respect can help distinguish ‘stewards’ of Black women’s work from ‘trespassers.’” What might respect in citational practices look like? How can we be good stewards of the work of marginalized and multiply marginalized folks (without coopting or extracting labor for our own)?

How can we build coalitions with marginalized and multiply marginalized scholars that then influence who we coauthor with, how we coauthor, and how we cite?

I’d also like to encourage you all to check out [#citeBlackwomancollective.org](https://citeblackwomancollective.org) to view some of their work on how they conceptualize the praxis of citation.

Thank you for your time.

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About the Author

Natasha N. Jones is a technical communication scholar and a co-author of the book *Technical Communication after the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action* (2019). Her research interests include social justice, narrative, and technical communication pedagogy. Her work has been published in several journals including, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization*. She has received national recognition for her work, being awarded the CCCC Best Article in Technical and Scientific Communication (2020, 2018, and 2014) and the Nell Ann Pickett Award (2017). She is the president for the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) and an Associate Professor at Michigan State University in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department.

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Programmatic Efforts to Redress Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing

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West Virginia University

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing

Delivered Monday, February 22, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

The worldwide Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, following the unjust, state-sanctioned murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery, amongst too many others, appeared to mark a turning point for many academic institutions in terms of attitudes toward anti-racism and anti-Black violence of all kinds. This is certainly not to say that racism and white supremacy in the academy were resolved by any means. Rather, it was as if anti-Black, state-sanctioned violence, which had long been denied by many in the academy and beyond, became indisputable. People generally seemed more willing to listen. And although this sea change appeared following the events above, this moment was truly only

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possible because of centuries of collective efforts, primarily by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) organizers and intellectuals who have done the important work of articulating racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy; raising consciousness; and organizing for equity and improved material conditions for BIPOC and other minoritized communities.

These efforts have brought on changing conditions and responsibilities, not only for students and faculty but also for many administrators in higher education, who are now more than ever rightfully called upon to address anti-Blackness and dismantle white supremacy within their organizations. Gone are the days when administrators could very easily deny, silence, and shroud over racism in our organizations and programs—or so some of us hope. Instead, administrators are increasingly called to take action when we are found to employ self-proclaimed white supremacists and faculty who enact racism in various ways. Administrators are also called upon to respond to curricula that center Eurowestern perspectives as well as the inability to recruit and retain faculty of color, even as there are some existing faculty who are resistant to such efforts in their units. How should administrators respond to and negotiate the varied perspectives and viewpoints—not just about whether racism is a fact of our contemporary lives, but also how precisely to address these problems—held by those within their unit?

This essay attempts to work through these questions and others as it reflects on and discusses some programmatic efforts to redress anti-Blackness in an undergraduate technical and professional writing program housed at a predominantly white research-intensive institution in the mid-Atlantic South, from my perspective as a non-Black, Asian American, woman of color and director of that program. Moreover, although I focus primarily on programmatic action, I insist that many of the ideas I describe in this essay can and arguably should be applied to our work with students. Specifically, we need to teach students to think critically about the institutions in which they are enrolled and work, as well as of the agency they do wield as stakeholders within those institutions. My experience as the Director of a Professional and Technical Writing program, a program that relies heavily on full-time, non-tenure-track instructors in a predominantly white institution, has taught me that administrative support is critical for encouraging large-scale considerations of diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom.

Going back to the context of summer 2020, as Black Lives Matter protests resurged across the globe, the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) President, Angela Haas, issued a call to action for non-Black members, in particular, to take steps to redress anti-Blackness within our spheres of influence. Moreover, Haas

(2020) asked that we “confront our complicity in anti-Blackness and how we have personally benefitted from the institutions and systems that uphold white supremacy and then assess how we can use our personal agency and privilege to make anti-racist change.” As an Asian American woman in technical communication, I understood Haas was speaking to me and others like me. I was led to think about the ways in which I have been complicit in anti-Blackness and how I have “personally benefited from the institutions and systems that uphold white supremacy.” I recalled how I had taught professional writing courses using the ostensibly value-/culture-neutral language of “clarity” and “appropriateness,” without always and persistently asking: Clear to whom? Appropriate in what context? As an Asian American woman, I am often read as non-threatening, as a “safe” minority, and thus welcome into professional white spaces—usually until I open my mouth about racism and inequality, after which I’m treated with resentment or as a threat. I considered how I had adopted dominant U.S. standards of “professional” dress and appearance, and I know that doing so has enabled my access into various academic whitespaces. I realize that because I am read through the myth of the “model minority,” I am presumed to have certain capacities, especially in terms of technical ability and work ethic, while I am also presumed to lack what some view as true insight or depth. I also understand that as a so-called “model minority,” I am presumed to come from a middle-class, educated family that emphasized the importance of education and “not rocking the boat.” I know that what my actual background and upbringing was like is erased and replaced with that stock image. Moreover, as a newly tenured faculty in my first year as Director of the Professional and Technical Writing program at my institution, I understood that Haas was calling on me to consider how I could use my “personal agency and privilege to make anti-racist change.”

As I’ve moved through the ranks of academia, I’ve found that those transitional moments shifting from graduate student to tenure track and pre-tenure to tenured and administrative positions were all key lessons in the affective imprints of systematized power. It took time and processing for me to understand that I now possessed certain capacities and privileges to enact changes that would have been much more challenging if not impossible before. It took even more time to internalize those understandings in an embodied sense. I was used to being the person critiquing administration and agitating upward. It took more than a minute to realize and feel in my body that I was now one of those administrators I’d been critiquing, with greater authority than I’d had previously, and that I should be looking to myself, at least in part, when engaging in institutional critique because I now had a greater capacity to enact change in the direction of racial justice and equity.

That same summer, ATTW Vice President Natasha N. Jones and ATTW Fellow Miriam F. Williams (2020) issued a statement wherein they called for the “just use of imagination” that “supports the deconstruction and abolishment of oppressive practices, systems, and institutions.” They explain that “a just use of imagination is not destructive, even as it seeks to dismantle, because using imagination in this way also calls for the replacement of oppressive practices with systems that are founded on equality, access, and opportunity.” In addition, they state, “The just use of imagination is not just conceptual. It must be enacted.” This call challenged me to think more expansively and creatively about what it means to re/vision a piece of an institution that is disproportionately white and that implicates many different stakeholders with sometimes divergent interests and concerns. In addition, with the backing of the national ATTW, these important calls within our profession supported my efforts to engage in a “just use of imagination” locally within my own program.

At the time, I had just completed my first year as the Director of the Professional and Technical Writing undergraduate program at my university. As a tenured Asian American woman in a position of administrative authority, I was compelled by these two statements to think about what I could do to make lasting, material change in the direction of redressing anti-Blackness and white supremacy. What would make the most sense in the context of my specific program? I noticed how many academic programs, including my own department, released statements affirming that Black lives matter. Although I personally do believe there is value to such statements, I recognize that they are not ends in and of themselves. That is, such statements do contribute to the culture and climate of an organization. It’s the difference between an administrator who openly acknowledges that racism exists versus one who prefers not to say it aloud. In the former situation, employees and students of color are validated rather than gaslit, and their realities denied. But of course, not gaslighting Black folks is not nearly enough. In addition, I had heard critiques of such statements when not accompanied by more direct action, and I wondered what the most effective approach would be. I decided to start a working group to address anti-Blackness within our program. I will share with you what we did and why and how we did it, not to present it as exemplary or to say that this is what others should do, but rather to participate in a conversation about how we might make anti-racist, institutional change in ways that make sense for our respective contexts.

To form the working group, I emailed the faculty and GTA (graduate teaching assistant) listserv for the Professional and Technical Writing program and invited all who were interested in doing so to join me to address anti-Black racism in our program. I believed it was important that the membership of the working group was

entirely voluntary. I was not interested in this space being used to “debate” with people who had lukewarm feelings about the injustice of anti-Blackness and white supremacy—for me, there is a time and place for such conversations, but this was not it. I also understood it as a way of communicating to the program that everyone who wants to be a part of this effort is capable of—and responsible for—taking actions to redress anti-Blackness and white supremacy. I especially wanted to support those with the desire to engage in racial justice but who perhaps didn’t know what to do. Yet, I was not about to require anyone to do unpaid work, keeping in mind that our program was composed of many non-tenure track faculty who are not compensated for doing service. I included a description of the working group’s purpose, which was to collectively strategize and take concrete actions to redress anti-Blackness within the Professional and Technical Writing program, whether in relation to curriculum, pedagogy, recruitment, or any other domain. I also shared Dr. Haas’ call along with Cecilia Shelton’s recent *TCQ* article, “‘Shifting Out of Neutral’: Centering Difference, Bias, and Social Justice in a Business Writing Course” (2020) to provide some context for the formation of the group. After hearing from several people who were interested in participating, we set up a meeting that took place on Zoom on Thursday, June 11, 2020.

To discourage performative allyship while also being open to genuine collaboration and also to respect people’s time, I prepared a flexible agenda with prompts for discussion. After introducing ourselves to one another and discussing guidelines for how the group would function, we got straight to work as we engaged in three steps: 1) problem identification; 2) cluster formation; and 3) working in clusters to determine outcomes, roles, and methods to be implemented. For step one, problem identification, we endeavored to understand the problem of anti-Blackness and white supremacy in the Professional and Technical Writing program. We focused on our program in particular not because it is more problematic than other units within the university but rather because we felt that this was the place where we were best positioned to enact anti-racist change. But first, because anti-Blackness and white supremacy can—and often is—interpreted in different ways and manifests in numerous ways, we discussed the terms and their applications to higher education and professional and technical writing. I had prepared some research on terminology and anti-Blackness in higher education that I shared with the group. I mention this because sometimes I get the sense that, because of the courses I teach, people at times assume that I arrive already prepared to do this kind of work, that I’ve internalized and memorized terminologies, theories, and histories, including the relationship between anti-Blackness and higher ed, and that I am recalling ideas based on my specialization.

This can sometimes translate to white folks seeing *themselves* as ill-prepared to do anti-racist work, because they didn't come in trained and already aware of these things. In actuality, I took the time to do research to prepare for the meeting while also making an effort to be reflexive of my own positionality and privileges. So, if you can do research, and if you are willing to learn, you can (and should) engage in anti-racist action. At the same time, non-Black folks in particular need to do so with a sense of humility—an understanding that we do not and will not ever fully understand anti-Blackness. Yet, we need to be open to learning and listening anyway because the goal is not to achieve expertise, but to participate in ongoing efforts to redress anti-Blackness and dismantle systemic racism.

In my research, I consulted existing explications of anti-Blackness, particularly by Black thinkers. What I found was kihana miraya ross' (2020) description of anti-Blackness as “a theoretical framework that illuminates society's inability to recognize [the] humanity [of Black folks]— the disdain, disregard and disgust for [their] existence.” In other words, it is not limited to consciously hating Black people. Rather, anti-Blackness is a “fundamental component of the identity of this nation,” and ross (2020) also says that anti-Blackness is “endemic to and is central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life.” That is, anti-Blackness is not an exception; it is a ubiquitous element grounding current U.S. sociopolitical system and thus an always present lens through which we *all* interpret our social, economic, historical, and cultural realities, even as some of us endeavor to resist and reform it.

In the context of higher education, Dancy, Edwards, and Davis' “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era” (2018) outlines how, in alignment with ross' articulation of anti-Blackness, “Public education...is predicated on anti-Blackness. Public education funding is a direct model of plantation politics. The maintenance of a public education system dependent on property taxes institutionalizes a social arrangement of dispossession. It also serves as an anti-Black filter for higher education” (p. 187). In addition, they describe several ways that anti-Blackness manifests in higher education, where Black perspectives are othered—in theory, research, curriculum, etc.; Black faculty are often mistaken for students, janitorial or other staff, etc.; and Black faculty are often dismissed as “diversity hires.” In other words, “For a Black [person] to exist within higher education as a thinking being is oxymoronic in the white psyche” (p. 184). Dancy, Edwards, and Davis also describe an extractive relationship between universities and Black communities, where “Black male bodies on college campuses are seen as primarily generators of income and properties of entertainment” (p. 184).

In addition, “Microaggressions, tokenism, impostorship, and racial battle fatigue attest to the psychological torment regularly visited upon Black humanity in higher education” (p. 188). Within our own university, I’ve witnessed many of these things. To provide one modest example, I think of how as of summer 2020, out of the 213 buildings on our campus, only two are named after Black folks—the first, Peddrew-Yates, is named after the first Black student to enroll and the first Black student to graduate from Virginia Tech. The second was re-named very recently in 2019, after the Fraction family, who were among the 200–250 enslaved people at the plantation that existed on the land the university currently occupies. In these ways, anti-Blackness is structured into the very buildings and physical campus of the university.

Now, what is white supremacy, particularly as it concerns academic institutions? It’s the idea of white superiority, as upheld by social systems such as policing, governance, religion, parenting, insurance, and education. As Charles Mills (2014) wrote in *The Racial Contract*, “White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” As Rivkin and Ryan (2017) explain, historically, the very “cultural category of whiteness came into being as a response to the presence of feared ethnic others such as African Americans in the United States” (p. 1104), and thus as a gatekeeping mechanism restricting BIPOC people from resources and power in the U.S. Mills (2011) explained the ubiquity and influence of white supremacy in “White Supremacy and Racial Justice, Here and Now,” observing that “white racial domination—white supremacy—has been central to U.S. history” (p. 326) and that it operates through “at least six dimensions: economic, juridico-political, somatic, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, and ‘ontological’” (p. 329). In other words, it is “a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (Mills, 2014, pp.1, 3). Moreover, white supremacy works as it “denies subpersons not merely moral and cognitive but also aesthetic parity” (Mills, 2014, p. 120). It is taken for granted; “it is the background against which other systems, which we *are* to see as political, are highlighted” (Mills, 2014, 2), and thus assumed to be neutral. Likewise, as George Lipsitz (2006) explains, “Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 1). It is treated as the standard for all measures of value, and it is thus equated with humanity. It is informed by negative conceptions of Blackness. This relates to issues within technical and professional communication that treat standardized white American professional discourse as “neutral” and the goal for “good” writing. Moreover, such perceptions of this style of writing are contingent on negative

conceptions of Black language and culture as purportedly “unprofessional.” To use the term “white supremacy,” then, is to upend it by visibilizing asymmetrical power relations on the basis of race by making whiteness visible and thus not-neutral (Mills, 2003).

White supremacy that is considered by and large socially unacceptable for most people would include hate crimes, Blackface, the N-word and other racial slurs. Covert white supremacy, which is by and large considered socially acceptable for most people, include white silence, Eurocentric curricula, the white savior complex, respectability politics, tone policing, paternalism, hiring discrimination, bootstrap theory, “rugged individualism,” prioritizing white voices as experts, tokenism, English-only initiatives, considering AAVE “uneducated” or “unprofessional,” and Eurocentric beauty or design standards. I share these examples to further show the scope and scale of the problem and the extent to which it is naturalized for many people. White supremacy is obviously not a simple problem with a simple solution, and there are many domains of program administration where I believe anti-Blackness and white supremacy need to be redressed, including curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices, recruitment, marketing, and professional development and programming.

To visibilize whiteness and thus to address a few of the ways in which white supremacy is infused through our own program, I came to the meeting having done research on our Professional and Technical Writing program enrollments and having looked at our student demographics to see who’s missing or numerically underrepresented. Although quantitative measures are limited and often used to cover over qualitative forms of systemic racism, it is also one important measure and starting point for addressing the most basic element of inclusion. As of June 2020, only three of our 156 majors identified as Black students. Four identified as mixed race where Black was one of the options selected. Ten identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 15 as Asian, none as Native American or Hawaiian, and 12 as other mixed race. One hundred twelve or 71% of majors identified as white. When compared to the student demographics at our university more generally, our program is whiter than the university at large, which at the time was 65% white. I also gathered data regarding our faculty demographics. As many of us may have experienced, it is not uncommon for even minority-majority institutions to employ faculty who are predominantly white. Based on an unofficial estimate, as of Fall 2020, we had ten full-time tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty teaching in our major. Eight were white, and two were Asian. We can see here that our faculty codes as even whiter than our student body (80%). Again, this pattern is not at all uncommon in many higher education settings.

Programmatic Efforts to Redress Anti-Blackness...

After discussing this context and coming to a better understanding of the problem we had come together to address, we began to talk about what we, a working group of thirteen dedicated faculty and graduate students, could do to address anti-Blackness and white supremacy in our program. We moved into step two, cluster formation, as we formed four smaller groups based on our own priorities and individual interests: one on pedagogy, one on mentoring, one on recruitment, and one on programmatic culture. In other words, what guided these areas of focus was not their efficacy or the level of importance per se, but rather the interests and concerns of working group members. I believe it important to be responsive to the interests of the group because anti-racist institutional transformation is expansive, long-term, ongoing work that requires collective action, and because I believe that when people are able to contribute to the direction of the work they are doing, that builds their investment in that work. In addition, I believe when people are interested and invested in the work they are doing, they will do their best, most creative work, in part because they may feel most equipped to do that work. The work needed to be manageable given all of our other responsibilities that were not lessened or rerouted as a result of our efforts on this working group.

As a collective, we had conversations about how we wanted to work—whether there would be any kind of structure within the group. We wanted to keep things egalitarian where all members' voices are valued. At the same time, I expressed that it is important to bear in mind that *not* assigning roles too often results in ambiguity and additional invisible labor, usually for those who are already minoritized. So, within each cluster, there was at least one person who agreed to manage the work of the cluster, i.e., call meetings, do any necessary agenda setting, and report back in larger group meetings, etc. In addition, the working group became a way to diffuse and infuse throughout the program conversations about anti-Blackness and white supremacy. The working group became a way of building up conversations and momentum locally in the service of anti-racist institutional change.

Some considerations for those who might be interested in doing something similar at their own institution: I believe it is helpful to think about challenges that might be anticipated while doing this work, including any kind of resistance from faculty or students. This is not to say that if there is resistance, don't do it, but more that it helps to be prepared to address any challenges that might arise. In addition, what resources are needed, and do we have access to those resources? Will we need to look to other parts of the department or university for those resources? There are almost always other people and units within the larger institution who are working toward similar efforts, and it is important to consider how we might work together.

How do we work with sustainable anti-racist institutional transformation in mind? I think the events of summer 2020 inspired in many of us an especially strong sense of urgency to do antiracist work. It felt like the timing was right and substantial change might be possible. But as the discussion of anti-Blackness and white supremacy shows, anti-racist institutional transformation is a long game, to borrow the words of Dr. Adam Banks, and trying to do it all in one summer is a sure recipe for burnout.

For this reason, we decided that each cluster would work to identify and carry out *one* thing that they would accomplish that summer. The pedagogy cluster worked on a statement and anti-racist teaching workshop series; the mentoring cluster worked on a guide to best practices for mentoring; the recruitment cluster worked to gather information about recruitment practices in the university and what was possible for our program, given that we are one among three undergraduate programs within our department, and with the university's branding guidelines in mind; and the programmatic culture cluster decided to work on a bibliography of works by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color scholars in technical and professional communication. In addition, as a group, we agreed that it would be great to have some guest speakers visit with our program, and we brainstormed names of who we might invite. This made a lot of sense for our local context given that non-tenure track faculty have long requested professional development opportunities in the program. Below I describe two of these efforts that are currently publicly available.

[The Bibliography of Works by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Technical and Professional Communication](#) is available online on a Google Doc. The goals of the bibliography were to affect program culture by supporting teachers who want to attend to citation politics as they build syllabi and by serving as a resource for researchers who want to attend to citation politics in their research and writing. For these reasons, we decided to organize the bibliography around themes. Again, for non-tenure-track faculty who are already tasked with so much, programmatic support is absolutely necessary to provide teachers with the tools they need to draw on concepts and ideas in ways that make the most sense to them and their pedagogy. The bibliography also amplifies BIPOC perspectives and voices in the field more generally, and I can say that I myself used the bibliography when designing my technical communication grad course in the Fall.

Second, we organized a virtual panel on Black Technical and Professional Communication that fall, featuring Kimberly Harper, Constance Haywood, Natasha Jones, Temptuous Mckoy, Donnie Johnson Sackey, Cecilia Shelton, and Ja'La Wourman, members of the CCCC Black Technical and Professional Writing Task Force created under the leadership of CCCC Chair Vershawn Ashanti Young. The

goals of the event were to affect program culture, recruitment, and pedagogy by serving as a professional development opportunity for teachers in the program, highlighting emerging scholarship that presents new ways of thinking about research, teaching, and service in technical communication. The panelists spoke about topics such as Black UX design, Black entrepreneurship, Black rhetorics of health communication, Black activists as technical communicators, Black experience and expertise in regulatory, policy, and legal communication, Black research methodologies, methods, and ethics, and Black TPC as community. As a result, the panel amplifies important perspectives and voices in the field that we should all be listening to. There was a huge turnout for this event, with more than 300 unique participants attending the virtual panel, and I received several messages from people who expressed how much they enjoyed and learned from the panelists.

A few considerations for planning an event like this: first, it is important to compensate Black scholars for their labor and for the intellectual contributions we are asking them to make for our institutions. I initially had a budget of \$1500 to spend on this event, which, when divided among the seven panelists, came down to a little over \$200 per panelist; however, my colleague Dr. Sheila Carter-Tod brilliantly suggested that I try to get sponsorship from other units within the university including the Center for Communicating Science and the Engineering Communications Program. So that's what I did. I reached out to some ten units on campus and almost all of them agreed to provide support including funding to go toward the speakers' honoraria. Aside from making connections amplifying this work within our university, we were able to increase the speakers' honoraria so that they would each receive \$1150. What Carter-Tod taught me was that yes, we are often constrained by limited budgets, but it is important to think of creative ways to supplement those budgets.

As a way of continuing to build a momentum around these conversations and a community of anti-racist practitioners in our program, I invited participation among working group members, as well as others who might be interested in this work, to help moderate the panel and livetweet the event. This also became a way of providing professional development opportunities for graduate students. And to enhance accessibility for this event, we ordered live captioning services, recruited live tweeters, and made public the video and transcript for the talk, which is now available on our open institutional repository, [VTechWorks](#).

Angela Haas (2020) asked in her call to action that we "REPORT out [our] tangible anti-racist actions...not to seek affirmation, [but] rather to participate in anti-racist skill sharing...to inform and drive more productive action." So, I'm going to share some challenges that we encountered while engaging in these efforts. One of

the biggest challenges was that the working group was composed of volunteers who were primarily people in precarious positions within our university, including graduate students and pre-tenure and non-tenure-track faculty. Among the 13 people who volunteered for the working group, only one other person and I were tenured faculty—however, it is perhaps worth noting that we are the only two tenured professors active within the program—and the other person ended up needing to step back due to other demands at the time. This makeup for the group became a problem because of legitimate administrative concerns about service during the pandemic, and, in my humble opinion, less legitimate concerns about “duplicated efforts” within the department, as opposed to what should be the given that *all* units should be working to address anti-Blackness and white supremacy. What do we do when those who are seemingly most invested in and able to make anti-racist institutional transformation are in positions where such work is not valued? How do we negotiate the desire to respect each individual’s agency while not overloading or disadvantaging those who are already in precarious positions?

Finally, a couple of pedagogical implications. Although I’ve focused on programmatic actions, I believe what I’ve shared does have pedagogical implications. First, institutional structures affect who is in our classes and what happens in our classes, and I believe that these two deliverables—the bibliography and the recording of the Black TPC event—are useful resources for teachers. In addition, I believe that a similar approach toward anti-racist institutional transformation may be adapted for a classroom context. How can we work collaboratively with students, with their interests and expertise in mind, to make our institutions less racist? How do we teach them to pace themselves while also understanding the urgency of addressing anti-Black racism? How do we teach them to strategize in ways that are attentive to the power structures embedded within institutions? How do we teach them that they can and should make a difference?

Coda

In the last year, as we’ve seen a growth in online webinars and Zoom events, and as I have received unprecedented requests to speak about anti-Asian racism specifically and Asian American experience more generally in these events, I have corresponded with a number of event organizers about the problem of white supremacy in event planning, with varied results. Yet, I want to highlight a few of the issues I’ve seen enacted, even among justice-oriented anti-racist and feminist scholars—not to drag

anyone but rather in the hopes of moving us all toward more equitable institutional practices in programming and event organizing.

First, representation and quantitative inclusivity still matter, and it is imperative that event organizers plan with intersectionality in mind. As Jones, Gonzales, and Haas (2021) wrote, new social justice initiatives “must be pro-Black and intersectional” (p. 33). In other words, drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, event organizers need to keep in mind how intersecting oppressive arrangements affect people differently on the basis of not only race and ethnicity, but also gender, sexuality, disability, colorism, and other factors. It is fine to have a narrow focus for events, but that focus needs to be explicitly stated as such. For example, if the goal of an event is truly to focus on and further prioritize white male perspectives about some topic, then the name of the event should be indicative of that narrow perspective. Gender still matters, and there is a difference between men of color and people of color. And if your anti-racist initiative is disproportionately cis male, with only a token woman or genderqueer person of color, that needs to be reflected upon. If you find that women of color and genderqueer persons of color are declining your invitations, ask yourself why that is. What messages are you sending that are giving people the very real impression that your event is not worth their time, whether for reasons of inadequate compensation, or because they do not trust that their experiences will not be minimized, or for some other reason? It is also important to think about inclusion of people from a variety of institutions and who hold a range of positions within academia.

Second, promotional materials for events, too, should be designed with equity in mind. Visual rhetoric matters to anti-racism, and organizers should examine their promotional materials for what is being communicated in and through their design. For instance, the ordering or visual prioritization of names—whether through font styles or size or placement—should be thoughtfully arranged so that racially and otherwise minoritized speakers are not undermined. In general, all other things being equal, speakers should be listed in alphabetical order. If there are reasons to adjust the order, whether because certain speakers are listed as keynotes and thus should be highlighted as such, or for other reasons, those reasons should be apparent to readers. Designers should also be thoughtful about how particular kinds of work are represented, i.e., how they position certain speakers as intellectuals and “real researchers” and others—usually minoritized speakers—as “mere practitioners.”

Third, event organizers should fairly compensate speakers who would otherwise be doing uncompensated additional labor on behalf of their organization,

especially if they are being asked to speak on emotionally challenging topics related to experiences with racism. Exposure, even for emerging scholars, is not enough.

Finally, if someone—and especially a person of color—takes the time to raise issues of white supremacy in your event, I urge that white scholars please save the defensiveness for their therapists. At times, when I've drawn attention to issues of representation, even in private email conversations, organizers have, instead of addressing the bigger problem of white supremacy as reflected in their event, chosen to correct minor errors in my calculations that really did not change the fact that BIPOC scholars were underrepresented within their program. I have also been told that it is unreasonable to compare the program make-up to the racial demographics of the U.S. rather than to the demographics of the very white hosting organization—even as the event was disproportionately white by the latter criterion. Further, such responses neglect to account for the long history of exclusion of Black perspectives, and how that history might figure into our current thinking about what perspectives should be uplifted and prioritized in our current numbers. A more appropriate response to such critiques would have been to thank the person for the time and energy they really didn't need to take to educate and improve your event and practices, to take their concerns seriously, to not deny and defend but rather to sit and reflect, before making the changes needed to address the issues raised—even if that means taking on the work to fundraise to highlight the work of women, genderqueer, and disabled scholars of color—because we truly don't need more events that pretend to value diversity or advance social justice while actually further prioritizing majoritarian white, heteropatriarchal perspective, enacting anti-Blackness, and sustaining white supremacy.

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Sano-Franchini

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Introduction to “Workshopping a Social Justice Pedagogy: A Workshop for Faculty and Graduate Students”

Lori Arnold, Ph.D.
San Jacinto College

TEACHING WRITING NOW: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

“Workshopping a Social Justice Pedagogy: A Workshop for Faculty and Graduate Students”

Gwendolyn Inocencio, “Pedagogical Centering & Radical Honesty: Building Affective Ties through Writing Feedback.”

Allison Estrada-Carpenter, “Meeting Students Where They Are At: Presentations, Students, and Invisible Concerns.”

Edudzi David Sallah, “International Students in the American Classroom: An Experience for Inclusive Pedagogy.”

Janet Eunjin Cho, “Creative Project: A Play.”

C. Anneke Snyder, “Understanding Themes of Liminality During the Pandemic.”

Landon Sadler, “Queer Is a Verb and Noun: Navigating Essentialism in the Undergraduate Classroom.”

Delivered Wednesday, February 24, 2021 from 12:00 – 1:30 pm.

In the initial planning stages of Teaching Writing Now: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Writing Classroom, the planning committee conceived of the event as a short conference that would offer the opportunity for graduate students and faculty

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to present where their work intersects with diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, when the pandemic necessitated a pivot to an online symposium, we decided on two events highlighting the diversity, equity, and inclusion pedagogy already in our department: “Teaching Writing Across the English Department Curriculum” and “Workshopping a Social Justice Pedagogy: A Workshop for Faculty and Graduate Students.”

As the graduate student representative on the committee, I organized a pedagogy-focused workshop and invited my fellow graduate students to participate. I put out a call to the graduate students in the English department to propose short presentations that would highlight a social-justice-focused aspect of their pedagogy. As part of their proposal, I encouraged them to submit a teaching artifact such as an assignment prompt, syllabus, or classroom activity that they have successfully used in the classroom at Texas A&M. Following the presentations, the second half of the workshop included small-group discussion of the artifacts and presentations as well as Q&A with the presenters about creating teaching materials that specifically focus on social justice and diversity. I was pleased with the enthusiastic response to this CFP. At a time when travel to conferences was not possible, this workshop provided graduate students with the opportunity to share their work with a wider audience. The graduate students featured in this section represent a range of experiences and backgrounds, as we have first- through fifth-year students, and international as well as domestic students.

In putting together the workshop presentations, I found that the topics naturally divided themselves into two halves. The first three represent approaches to inclusive pedagogy in the classroom. In “Pedagogical Centering,” **Gwendolyn Inocencio** focuses on the approach she developed for responding to student writing and providing feedback in the composition classroom based on the scholarship of Mesurier (2016), Inoue (2014), and Shelton (2020). She shares the comprehensive system she developed for providing targeted, specific feedback. Inocencio specifically emphasized the importance of teaching which instructor feedback to prioritize. Next, in “Meeting Students Where They Are at: Presentations, Students, and Invisible Concerns,” **Allison Estrada-Carpenter** explains how she adapted her approach to in-class student presentations in order to meet their diverse learning needs. Finally, **Edudzi David Sallah** shares the approach he adapted as both a first-time international student instructor and an online teacher during a pandemic. Sallah’s “International Students in the American Classroom: An Experience for Inclusive Pedagogy” offers strategies for engaging and including all students in the composition classroom even when the classroom is virtual.

The second half of the presentations focused primarily on approaches to teaching diverse literature in the classroom. These were primarily drawn from the experiences of graduate students teaching a course on writing about literature. **Janet Eunjin Cho** shares a creative project assignment that she offers to her students while teaching the genre of “documentary theatre.” Basing this assignment in Anna Devare Smith’s play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994), she encourages her students to create their own play documenting social justice issues relevant for today. **C. Anneke Snyder** also considers the conditions of the writing classroom and the introduction of literature focused on issues of diversity, inclusivity, and social justice. Through teaching literature that considers liminality, understanding identities, and offering flexible writing assignments to her students, Snyder responds to the circumstances of teaching during the pandemic. Finally, **Landon Sadler** discusses how he attempted to address some of the limited thinking he encountered from his students in a course on LGBTQ literature he taught in Fall 2020. He addresses assigning two texts that he hoped would help his students to understand “queerness as a noun”: a 1981 interview with Michel Foucault and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982). Sadler concludes by explaining that his goal is ultimately to help students avoid seeing groups as monolithic and instead understand the nuance of experiences and identities within groups.

I hope that the diversity of approaches as well as the care and empathy that graduate students at Texas A&M University demonstrate toward their students show through these presentations. The culture of empathetic and inclusive pedagogy that permeates the graduate program in English at Texas A&M University College Station allows these graduate students to meet the particular challenges that our symposium raised.

Arnold

Pedagogical Centering & Radical Honesty: Building Affective Ties Through Writing Feedback

Gwendolyn Inocencio
Texas A&M University

Introduction

My contribution is a simple strategy developed in my first-year composition class. I sought to provide students feedback that builds affective ties to writing, motivated by sound reasoning from pedagogical literature. Building positive attitudes toward writing aligns with my goal to help all students find their voices in composition classes. A step toward this goal is formulating strategies for clear, concise writing feedback that meets students where they are developmentally.

First-year writing courses typically include students from culturally rich backgrounds who can occupy the liminal space between a dominant language structure and their cultural and linguistic inheritance. I notice some students' tendency to struggle with the writing process in my classroom, so reducing struggle while facilitating growth for students from varied backgrounds, abilities, and attitudes toward writing is my primary pedagogical goal.

When I was a secondary-school English teacher, I used standardized test scores as the (supposed) tangible marker of student learning. However, as a first-year college-level composition instructor, such a marker was not available. No requirement to teach to a test exists; no post-course assessment of learning transfer is possible. As a result, I was left without a pedagogical center. To find my new center in this new capacity, I sought established pedagogical voices with tertiary education experience to build a reflective teaching practice.

Affective Ties

Jennifer Lin Mesurier (2016) became my first centering voice with her call to help students build strong affective ties to writing. She says: "Genre novices need to build affective ties, even simple ones related to the satisfaction from making an effective rhetorical choice in order for their knowledge to be fully accessible and usable" (Mesurier, 2016, p. 307). Students come to first-year composition courses to learn to express themselves in various field genres. Therefore, I must teach for the transfer of skills—not to a test. This means I must teach writing as opposed to simply

talking about writing because knowledge uptake requires aligning affective ties with performative experience. This differentiation between teaching and talking about means I model, and students perform; they practice, and I give feedback. For this process to work, freedom of expression must be possible in the drafting process, so that students can develop a growing sense of confidence in the relatively short time frame allotted to each assignment. Specific, precise, and efficient feedback is critical during this step.

In order to build the affective domain, I decided to use writing journals focused on tangible goals. Students perform writing metacognition through pre-assessment, followed with post-assessment of attempts that include peer reviews. I provide extensive feedback on rough drafts and give full credit for all genuine effort. I provide my feedback on rough drafts with no judgement of right or wrong, only suggestions, so students can develop a less anxious personal relationship with their writing. This approach prioritizes personal growth and individual choices over technical skill during drafting. Students track their goals using my assessment, their self-assessment, and peer assessment. For this approach to work, it hinges on my ability as the genre expert to provide students with pointed feedback that attempts to minimize confusion and maximize clear communication.

The result is a low-stakes writing environment for rough drafts centered on personal growth rather than measuring against a single standard. Students are given “room to struggle.” Thus, a writing community forms where the instructor, the student, and their peers reflect on writing. To foster this community and hone individual skills, I reinforce personal reflection, followed by strategic planning, followed by targeted action. For example, if a student self-reflects on a need for better paragraph transitions, then they must locate available resources with specific strategies that build better paragraph transitions. A plan of action is then the expectation that follows from locating these strategies.

Struggle Promotes Growth

I emphasize effort in my classroom to create the “more purposeful consequences” mentioned by Asao Inoue (2014) in “Theorizing Failure” (p. 332). I choose to speak of struggle rather than failure because inherent in struggle is recognized effort, and I seek and privilege student effort. I make the word struggle synonymous with growth. Inoue says: “[Our assessment of students] can create more purposeful consequences, particularly for those historically most likely to suffer ‘failures’ in writing classrooms: students of color, multilingual students, and working-class students” (p. 332).

With Inoue's concept for privileging effort embodied in my approach, I fully expected to see the pedagogical centering, the move to building affective ties, and my feedback to be directly reflected in student work. Yet, in all honesty, I initially saw minimal student application of my provided feedback. The comments made on their rough drafts rendered little-to-no change in their final drafts. Frustrated by students seeming to ignore my input, I was left to examine the quality of my comments. Confident that I follow best practices, I was satisfied my feedback content was sound. I took care to identify issues, explain them, then suggest solutions. Still, students did not consistently apply suggestions in their final drafts. Something needed tinkering, so I applied the same problem-solving protocol I suggest to my students: I personally reflected. I strategically planned, and I then acted in a targeted manner.

I used radical honesty in my personal reflection, a concept I encountered in "Shifting out of Neutral: Centering Difference, Bias, and Social Justice in a Business Writing Course," by Cecelia Shelton (2020). She describes "an inclusive pedagogical and organizational framework [originating in] Black Feminist genealogy" (Shelton, 2020, p. 22). In Shelton's modeled process of self-confrontation, she calls for confronting personal biases. This process required me to confront "the sometimes conflicting truths about whom I most want to help and whom I spend my teaching and learning time with" (Shelton, 2020, p. 22). I acknowledged my personal truth as a first-generation college student, which aligns me with my students who struggle with feedback application. The desire to do better and be better exists for these students, but the basic skills needed to apply feedback can be underdeveloped because of differing educational backgrounds. Through this uncomfortable self-reflection, I discerned my feedback presentation was the problem, not my feedback content.

Adapting Feedback Method

Mina Shaunessy (1979), in *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, speaks of the "economics of energy in the writing situation" (p. 394). Feedback can be overwhelming, especially for novice writers, the typically "underprepared" students. Though these students are intelligent and capable, the type and the amount of feedback they receive at this ability level can be intense for them. Therefore, I realized that students' "economics of energy" could be the contributing issue for their lack of feedback application in drafts. This notion derived from Nancy Sommers (1982) who says, in "Responding to Student Writing," that "these different signals given to students, to edit and develop, to condense and elaborate, represent also failure of teachers' comments to direct genuine revision of the text as a whole" (p. 151).

Furthermore, Sommers (1982) says when students see tons of marks with no scale of concerns offered, they see a spelling comment given equal weight to a comment about organization or logic. As one possible solution, I developed a simple color-coded schematic that groups my writing feedback into an easily visualized prioritization guide. I offer standard feedback within the document, color coded to correspond to specific levels of concern. I then offer a feedback summary followed by this color-coded legend accompanied by a brief explanation (Fig.1).

Please note that everyone receives 100% for submitting the rough draft, but that doesn't mean improvements aren't needed. See my extensive comments in the document.

I'm providing a scale of concern. Focus on these components as you revise your final draft based on my and your peers' feedback. Revise using this order of importance:

1. **YELLOW:** Consider any comments that suggest ways to strengthen your analysis as your primary concern.
2. **GREEN:** Consider any places where sentence structure or syntax issues confused the meaning of the sentence. I provided resources for most issues but ask for help if additional support is needed.
3. **RED:** Use the correct APA 7th edition formatting to acknowledge your sources. Failure to do so will negatively affect the final draft grade. *Improper citation is a form of academic plagiarism.
4. **PINK:** Correct any grammatical concerns. I point them out as teachable moments and as quick grammar lessons so that you can notice any patterns of misuse (We all have them! They are called “accidents of discourse.” Some become patterns we repeat every time we produce a draft, which is why peer review can be helpful.)

Figure 1: Color-Coded Feedback Summary for Rough Drafts

Use of Feedback Strategy in Student Drafts

Controversy surrounds the arbitrariness of prioritizing feedback content, so this list simply highlights my preferences. Strength of argument and analysis occupy the top priority. I then value sentence structure and syntax, which does not mean undervaluing authentic or diverse modes of communication. In fact, I praise and encourage unique word use and code-meshing that enriches content. I do teach and give feedback on stylistic conventions because most of my students are business and STEM majors in fields likely to enforce those communication standards, and, though I value rudimentary understanding of simple grammar guidelines, they occupy the lowest priority.

Obviously, no two papers look the same. As an example, Figure 2 shows a student's view when opening their paper in our Learning Management System, Canvas.

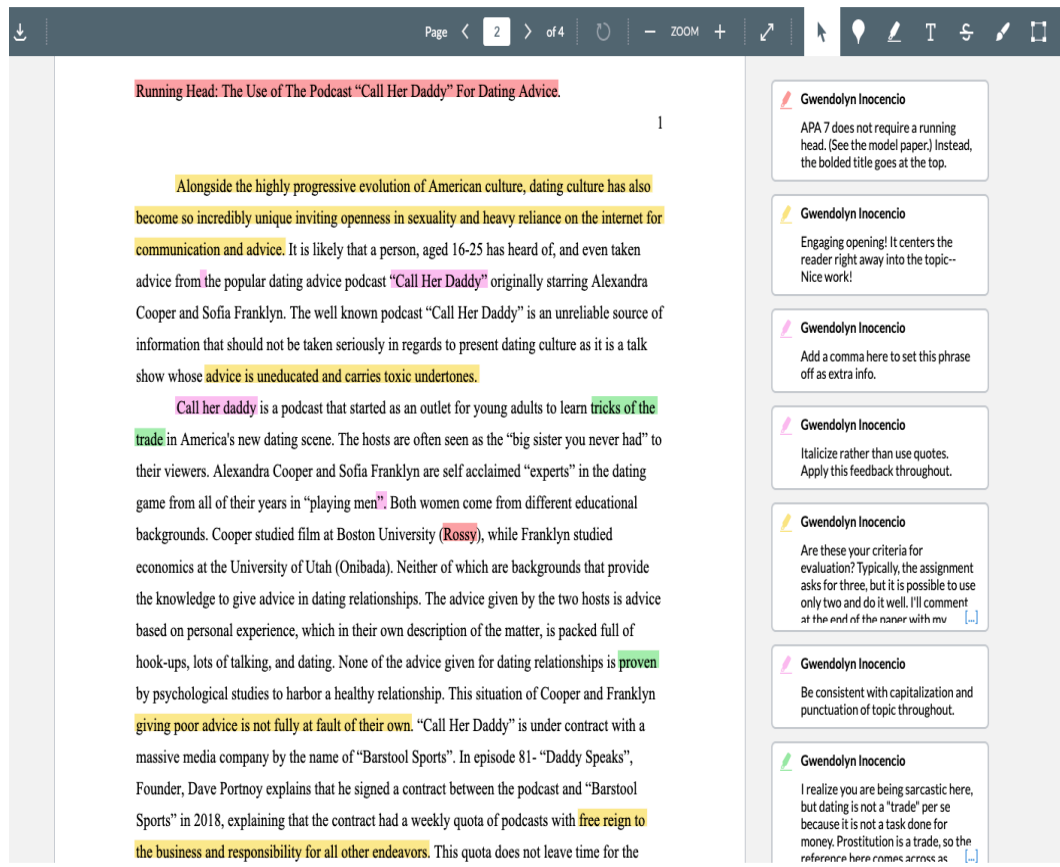


Figure 2: An Anonymized Example of a Student’s Draft with Color-Coded Feedback. Note: student work used here with permission.

Here, splashes of yellow call attention to the core structure of the argument. Patches of green indicate sentence structure, word choices, or phrasing that has confused the meaning of the text. Red points to citations or references issues, and grammatical issues are pink.

The colors are easily reinforced in communication and quickly become synonymous with what they represent. For example, in a green (or syntax-related) comment, I might suggest following demonstrative pronouns with their antecedents. I use technical grammar terms because I want to expose students to the technical language needed to locate supplemental resources that address issues in the text. Lastly, in a writing conference, referencing “green” (syntax) or “pink” (mechanical) issues negates the need for students to exhibit fluency in grammar terms. Color coding also helps me visually locate the issues in their papers during conferences. Additionally,

color coding highlights something done well—not just causes for concern. Note the praise attached to the yellow comment (Fig. 3).

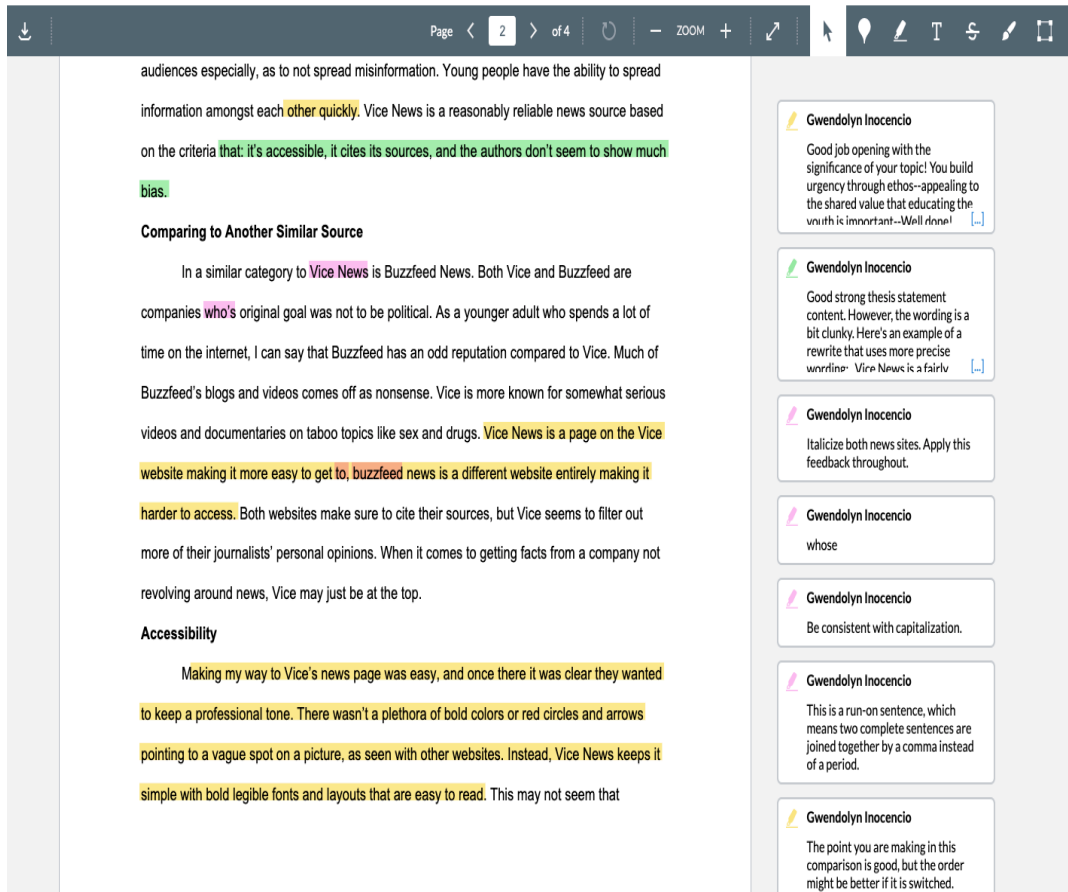


Figure 3: Anonymized Example of Praise in Color-Coded Feedback

Note: In response to a portion of the student draft highlighted in yellow, the instructor provides a comment that reads: “Good job opening with the significance of your topic! You build urgency through ethos—appealing to the shared value that educating the youth is important. Well done!” (Student work used with permission).

With each writing assignment, the colors gradually morph into language synonymous for the terms they represent. For example, the constant repetition of pink for grammatical terms (perhaps run-on sentences or semicolon overuse) becomes a category of personal development pursued by students individually or with my help. Students might arrive at writing conferences stating, “I tend to have mostly pink

problems.” In this sense, “pink problems” is the novice’s way of expressing that grammatical issues are a pattern in their writing. For a beginning writer unable to articulate the advanced labeling terms of grammatical structure, this simplified language fosters quick and easy communication options. This strategy simplifies the revision process, and it matches the consistency called for by Sommers (1982). She explains that successful commenting requires feedback to be mutually reinforced in the classroom. She says, “The key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other” (Sommers, 1982, p. 155). As I attempt to build an affective tie to writing, consistent expectations and “thoughtful commentary” are steps toward a less stressful, more communicative approach to writing feedback.

Conclusion

Through radical honesty in reflection, strategic planning, and targeted action, I learned that pedagogical intent does not always ensure student learning outcomes. Through this process and approach, I reach out to the students who need me most. I learned that foregrounding the affective domain does not ask that instructors compromise teaching writing skills. Also, a systemized feedback approach reinforces what I teach in the classroom, which creates consistency, clarifies communication, and fosters positive attitudes toward the drafting process. Finally, I learned that when in doubt, a little radical honesty and a splash of color can contribute a simple step toward addressing a complex problem.

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Meeting Students Where They Are At: Presentations, Students, and Invisible Concerns

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Introduction

My talk centers on a change I made to a research presentation assignment. This change was influenced by an experience with a student as well as my own personal experiences. A few years ago, I taught an Introduction to Literature course at Texas A&M University. In class one day, my students were presenting drafts of their research projects. Right before the start of class, a student expressed to me that she felt extremely anxious about doing this presentation. Her eyes were downcast, she was wringing her hands, and her voice was overwhelmed with emotion. She wanted to know what she could do because the presentation would influence her grade, and she repeatedly apologized to me for feeling anxious.

In that moment, I felt a lot of empathy for her. As both an undergraduate and a grad student, I have also had tense moments where my anxieties over my work, mental health, and physical health have collided. This student acted as though she was ashamed or apprehensive in revealing her worries to me. At times, I have also been dismissed by professors and left to figure it out by myself. Perhaps this dismissal stems from professors and graduate students not being health professionals. But perhaps it is also easier to do nothing.

A Quick Fix

I wanted to do something right then to address the situation, but it was difficult because class was about to start. I invited the student to wait. I ran to my office and picked a Funko figurine off my desk. I asked her to hold on to it to give her something to fidget with and distract her. I said that when she has to do her presentation to make sure to stand behind the podium so she would have something to hold on to. I explained I would have her present right before the break so, if she needed to, she could go to the bathroom to take a moment for herself. I made sure at the end of class to let her know how well I thought she did. I tried to think about what would have immediately helped me if I were in her shoes. Unfortunately, I was also struck with the awareness that those were just quick fixes to feeling worried about presenting in

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front of a large group of people. I did not feel as though it was enough or that I really helped her. I began mulling over the question: “What could I do to alleviate some of this anxiety that students have around high-pressure situations in the classroom?”

Confronting Pedagogical Values

The stress around research presentations in English classrooms is not surprising. How often have you or a peer internalized the toxic belief that presenting may be difficult and stressful but you have to push through it? It was not until this experience that I started to question the way I may be replicating these situations for students. We don’t have to suffer just for the sake of suffering, and our students deserve better. Consider how vulnerable students are when they tell an instructor, “Hey I’m struggling,” and how a lot of what we need to do regarding accessibility—and I know I could do better—is preemptively address that, so that students do not have to feel that burden to reveal to us. It is important to reconsider how we may be creating spaces that alienate, intentionally or otherwise.

I want to clarify that I believe more traditional research presentations can be valuable. However, in a lower-level course, with students who are not English majors, who have not had a significant length of time to feel familiar with their work, it is not surprising that they may feel an unreasonable amount of pressure to perform their research in this manner. This may be especially true for those who are shy or anxious and is obviously also complicated by ability, native language, and other factors.

I thought of how my primary concern as an instructor is to make students feel seen and heard. I take seriously the content I teach, knowing that literature is political and personal, and I attempt to provide a variety of stories to help avoid, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) reminds us: “the danger of the single story.” In addition to content, pedagogy also requires us to be thoughtful, adaptive, and versatile in our approach. How can we make scholarship accessible and engaging?

Making a Change

I decided that I would make a change in how I would do research presentations for that class. I would no longer have a student up in the front of the class, by themselves, presenting on work. Here I was informed by my experience visiting science conferences with my husband, a graduate student in astronomy, where I saw that poster presentations were common. I had never experienced poster presentations in a group environment in any of my English classes. Ultimately, I decided instead of

having individual students come to the front of the class to give presentations, I would break them up into groups and have them present in a mini poster conference style.

There would be assigned days where some students would be standing next to their posters, and other students would act as their audience. The students not presenting would come up to the posters with a list of questions I had prepared in advance and discuss the work in progress with the researcher. This format helped eliminate any student from feeling as though the focus of the entire class was singularly on them. It significantly reduced the pressure that my students were faced with as the people who had to present. It also helped the audience to be more active participants in the work of others and allowed for students to get feedback from multiple sources in one class session. While this process occurred, I would also monitor the questions and step in to speak to each presenter. I would also make notes on their work and let them know what I felt they should work on for their research paper and where I thought they were successful. I really want to encourage people to consider this as a potential model because I have not seen this practice in any literature classes that I had taken as an undergraduate or even in grad school.

Conclusion

I think that sometimes it can be difficult when you have invisible concerns in the classroom. Academia is not known for its grace and acceptance. I have experienced that vulnerability and fear of being judged. I know that there is pressure to “power through” your pain and discomfort. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) reminds us, “When teachers and students evaluate our learning experiences, identifying the classes that really matter to us, no one gives testimony about how much they learned from professors who were disassociated, unable to connect, and self-obsessed” (p. 129). One way we can evolve as instructors, professors, and educators is to take in the messages our students are sending us and show them through our actions that we are committed to meeting their needs to the best of our abilities. This poster presentation approach is a format that can be effective for meeting undergraduate students where they are at, particularly lower-level undergraduate students who are not English majors, and for considering how we can get them more engaged and how we can make learning a more active experience. This is a manageable change that, practiced more frequently, would make a difference.

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International Students in the American Classroom: An Experience for Inclusive Pedagogy

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Introduction

For a pedagogy workshop focusing on issues of social justice and diversity, I am pleased to share my experience as an international student in the American classroom and the impact of this experience on my pedagogy. What has this experience taught me about inclusive pedagogy, and how has it impacted my instructional/pedagogical approach so far? My aim here is to highlight, from my personal experience, how the assumptions of historical and cultural knowledge by educators inherently disregard diversity and promote social injustice and inequity in the classroom. It is important to note that professors or teachers are not the only people who operate with these assumptions, but students do as well in their contributions to class discussions and submissions.

Inclusive pedagogy, as predominantly explored by Christine Hockings (2010), prioritizes the design of pedagogical artifacts, including classroom activities, assignments, assessment tools, and course syllabi, to be essential and equally accessible to all students in their learning environment. These pedagogical designs acknowledge and respect the diverse perspectives and individual differences of the students as a way of promoting the cause of inclusivity in the classroom. As far as inclusive pedagogy is concerned, any classroom activity or pedagogical approach that does not consider student differences in terms of their cultural, social, and academic history/background, in addition to their mental, physical and cognitive abilities, subjects students from non-dominant cultures to a sense of alienation in their learning environments. This

alienation leads to dire effects on the students, such as imposter syndrome, inferiority complexes, stress, and depression. With particular attention to cultural and historical differences, international students become victims of racism in the American classroom when the assumption of knowledge is based on American standards of common knowledge.

My Background

I came to the United States in 2018 to pursue a master’s degree; that was my first time leaving my home country Ghana for abroad, and thus, my first major encounter with cultural, educational, social, and economic systems other than the Ghanaian systems. The assumption of cultural and historical knowledge in the American classroom negatively impacted my early experience as an international student in the American classroom. As a Ghanaian-African, I had educational training from the elementary stages to the bachelor’s level grounded in epistemologies shaped by Ghanaian-African historical and cultural norms, values, and principles. While my negative experience in the American classroom is apparently due to my educational history and cultural background, it also reveals the lapses in the commitment to inclusivity in the American classroom. Considering the American classroom as a place where multiple cultures and identities converge to learn under a common objective, inclusive pedagogy is important to ensure that the assumptions of historical and cultural knowledge do not become agents of racial superiority in the classroom.

My educational and cultural orientation as a student from Ghana is quite different from what there is in America. For example, while a student in Ghana, I did not seem to have the moral right to tell my lecturer that I was overwhelmed by a course assignment of any kind, and for that reason, I would need some consideration or accommodation of some sort. As I noted earlier, the educational culture is grounded in indigenous cultural norms and values that did not make it possible for me to realize the sort of injustice in that learning environment or the social justice flaws of that educational culture until later in my encounter with the American educational culture. This example highlights the importance of individual differences and experiences in issues of social justice and diversity in pedagogy. What it means is that I came to the American educational system with my Ghanaian educational experience of suffering in silence. An experience defined by a system that treats, for example, mental health issues as nonexistent or as mere excuses by students and teachers alike to escape their academic responsibilities.

Comparison to the American Educational System

From my experience in the American classroom so far, the kind of injustice I cited from the Ghanaian educational system does not exist inherently. However, the problem is with the assumption of knowledge by some professors and students alike. That is to say that a professor would assume that everybody in the classroom knows certain things. For instance, in the example I cited earlier, a professor may assume that if I am overwhelmed by an assignment or any course-related task, I will speak out, perhaps because speaking out is an American cultural expectation. Unfortunately, this was assumed of me. My educational and cultural histories were not taken into consideration. The culture of speaking out is one of the things I was not aware of in my beginning days in the American classroom: the simple fact that I could let my professor know at any point that I feel overwhelmed about a task, be it reading an assigned text or completing an assignment of any kind within a specific time, and that I would need some extra time to get that done.

No amount of information provided in a course syllabus is enough by itself to further the cause of inclusivity in the classroom. In my beginning days in the American classroom, I do not recall that the opportunity was convincingly presented to me—to set aside my educational and cultural experiences—to speak out in my challenging moments during the course. Just to be clear, the reference to my beginning days in the American classroom is specifically referring to the beginning of the first semester in my master's program. Later that semester, I began to identify with this opportunity more convincingly, but only at a time after a few things had already gone wrong for me. During that period, stress, anxiety, inferiority complex, imposter syndrome, and depression were the traits that defined my life as an international student in the American classroom. This is not to suggest that these traits do not resurface occasionally in my continuous experiences in the American classroom.

Concerning course content, the assumption of historical and cultural knowledge by some professors and students alike, especially where that knowledge does not form the basis for the class or has not been effectively covered in class, was a challenge for me in my beginning days in the American classroom. Now and then, I still run into that situation, be it a topic in class or an assigned reading, where certain amounts of specific cultural and historic knowledge are prerequisites for full comprehension of the topic or effective contribution to discussions on the topic. For fear of judgment and being looked at as someone who is not cut out for the course or the program at large, I pretend and endure the pressure of suffering in silence. This results in stress for me as I have to do extra readings to keep up with my American

colleagues. Likewise, the anxiety of the fear of being perceived as unintelligent keeps me from actively participating in class discussions. Imposter syndrome sets in because I know within myself that I am struggling yet acting as though all is well; subsequently, my achievements come to me as surprises because I struggle to acknowledge all the extra work and effort I put in to keep up. These experiences create a sense of inferiority complex for me, and they affect my social life and performance/behavior in and outside the classroom. Depression often becomes the result of my experience as an international student in the American classroom.

Experience as an Instructor

Prerequisites to courses are often constructed on assumptions that, at certain levels of education, one should be familiar with certain cultural and historical knowledge, topics, and subject matters. These prerequisites are inherent manifestations of racism in pedagogy because the assumptions are predominantly based on standards of the American culture, history, and educational curricula. Drawing from my experiences so far, I have learned to be aware of my assumptions about shared background knowledge as they are oftentimes culture-specific and generational. My experiences have informed my pedagogical approach and my relationship with my students. I have taught undergraduate students Rhetoric and Composition in the first year of my Ph.D. program, and I give so much credit to Dr. Terri Pantuso, who coordinated the course, for designing the course in a way that inherently honors the fundamental values of social justice and diversity in the classroom. Just to highlight a few of the components of the course design and my approach to them, the following are several ways for instructors to better reach students, especially international students, who do not possess the same cultural and historical knowledge as other students:

The students have an assignment to complete a survey at the beginning of the course. This assignment is due after the students have been introduced to the course syllabus. The survey is treated with utmost confidentiality by the instructor and if completed by the students, gives the instructor important and adequate information necessary to meet the diverse needs of the students in the classroom as best as possible.

The students have periodic individual journal-keeping assignments in correspondence with the instructor throughout the semester. This journal is designed to help both the student and the instructor keep track of the student's writing goals and improvement. This offers periodic updates for the instructor to be aware of where each student is at particular points in the course and informs the depth and focus of

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lesson plans for specific subjects/topics as needed to meet the varying needs of the students.

The course involves weekly posting and response assignments based on topics assigned for each week. The goal of these assignments is to ensure the active participation of students in the course and to foster dialogue among the students. My assessment of these assignments prioritizes the students' efforts and individual perspectives rather than what I would deem as a compelling submission in terms of content. This encourages the students to freely and unrestrainedly contribute their ideas and perspectives in class without any fear of judgment.

Finally, at the beginning of each Zoom class session, I send the students to breakout rooms in groups of two or three and ask them to say "Good morning" to one another and to share some love. This is a practice I learned from Professor Alain Lawo-Suka, Associate Professor of Africana studies and Hispanic studies at Texas A&M University, when I enrolled in his class. It was of great help to me so I thought it best to introduce it to my students. This allows students to get any possible support they might need, in terms of advice or encouragement, before the start of class. It allows everyone to share their challenges, as the adage goes—"a problem shared is a problem half-solved." Students may share their problems with their colleagues or ask questions related or not to the course and receive helpful responses. The goal is to lend support to mental health concerns and help students to be mentally sound and present during class time and beyond.

Conclusion

All these pedagogical practices as I have employed them in my classes are to ensure that every student feels set up for success, comfortable, and welcomed in the learning environment. To this end, diversity is honored and social justice is served as each student, regardless of their background, race, or ethnicity, gets equal opportunities and privileges within the learning environment to freely acquire knowledge and to contribute the same uniquely to the course, without fear of reproach.

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Creative Project: A Play

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Introduction

I am a dark individual,
and with me stuck in limbo,
I see darkness as myself.
[. . .]
and in order for me to be a,
to be a true human being,
I can't forever dwell in darkness,
I can't forever dwell in the idea,
of just identifying with people like me and understanding me
and mine. (Smith, 1994, p.255)

When designing a syllabus for my class, “Writing About Literature,” over the winter break in early 2021, I prioritized including Anna Deveare Smith’s documentary play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994) in my syllabus to help students gain a critical insight into the intersectional issues of racial tension, social injustice, and systematic racism. Although Smith’s one-woman performance piece recreates the Rodney King incident and subsequent civil disturbances that occurred in Los Angeles in April 1992 by utilizing the media coverage and the firsthand accounts of more than 200 interviewees for the play’s source, it shows a strong parallel to the recent events of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement and other numerous (un)documented events that expose the aspects of systematic racism deeply entrenched in the American society. In order to render visible to the students the historical relevance and continuity between past and present in a post-racial society and the urgency of racial violence, I implemented several pedagogical methods. Among these, I included a real-time digital project of reconstructing the timeline of the 1992 LA riots via an online platform called TimeGraphics, allowing students to freely modify and revise the “official” timeline based on the lived experiences of Smith’s interviewees. The assignment, “Creative Project: A Play,” is also a part of such pedagogical attempts that I designed to encourage students to heuristically understand

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not only the genre characteristics of documentary theater but also the intricacies of race politics that cannot be fully addressed without paying attention to those unrecorded and marginalized voices.

Creative Project: A Play

On the first day of the class, I introduced an assignment called “Creative Project: A Play” to my students as a part of the final project. Since the title of my class was “Writing About Literature,” I encourage the students choose between the two options of either writing a traditional literary analysis paper or creating a short play for a documentary theater. The “Creative Project: A Play” assignment is composed of four components, which include a proposal, an annotated bibliography, an artist statement, and a script. In a 200-word proposal, students were asked to provide their objectives for creating a play, key questions or issues at hand, and primary methods and venues for research that they were planning to take when collecting relevant information and sources before writing a script. Because I did not want to impose the idea on the students that only trained scholars and critics can generate discourse on certain social issues, students had freedom to explore a wide range of sources—library databases, news materials, personal interviews, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok—as critical sites of inquiry. Next, students individually went through the process of selecting a group of at least three interviewees who could provide diverse perspectives on the death of George Floyd, the recent Black Lives Matter movement, and issues pertaining to social justice and systematic racism. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students were strongly encouraged to use video-conferencing venues when conducting interviews.

Encouraging Diverse Research Methods and Sources

In the annotated bibliography assignment, along with their selection of interviewees and (non-)scholarly sources, students outlined a brief summary of the source or the content of the interview and how they planned to put the source(s) or the interview(s) in conversation with one another in their play. While students had complete freedom on the format and method of the interview, they were required to carefully select interviewees coming from different social backgrounds (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, etc.) in order to present rich and complex viewpoints regarding their research question. Because their play follows the tradition of documentary theater—meaning that they needed to adopt the interviewees’ words verbatim in their play—I reminded my students to enable the transcription function

before conducting an interview and to receive either a verbal or written consent from their interviewees for recording and transcribing the interview. Similarly, if they planned to incorporate any outside sources, I recommended for them to keep a document that contains quotes from the sources that not only seem relevant to the overarching theme of their play but also could create an interesting dialogue when put together with other quotes or interviews in their play (i.e., “What would the play look like if I place this author’s quotes after so-and-so’s interview?”).

After submitting their proposals and annotated bibliographies, students began working on their draft of an artist statement, which they submitted along with the script at the end of the semester. In a 700-word artist statement, students were required to provide a general overview of their play, significance and timeliness of their work, their philosophy for creating the play, a brief introduction of the characters/interviewees, any difficulties or interesting findings they would like to share throughout their researching and writing process, and additional observations or comments about the play. Due to the nature of documentary theater, it was vital that the lines in their script were taken verbatim from the original source.

When working on their scripts, students had full autonomy to curate and reorganize interview transcripts and content of primary or secondary sources into an order that they deemed rhetorically and aesthetically effective. Their play could consist of multiple acts or no acts at all (no word or page limit, of course), depending on the author’s intention. However, they were asked to include the following basic elements in their script: title of the play, scene heading(s), scene-setting direction(s), character name(s), and lines, preceded or followed by parentheticals which describe the actor’s action. By minimizing cues and restrictions in creating a play, students were able to have more room to navigate effective ways to demonstrate their research agenda as well as to execute their own artistic philosophy rather than to limit themselves within a formal framework.

Conclusion

The ultimate objectives for this assignment were to explore the issues of social and racial justice and systematic racism through multiple perspectives and scopes outside the students’ ideological comfort zones and to transform their findings into a theatrical form of representation; second, through the hands-on process of interviewing and researching, I anticipated my students to learn about the relational forces operating within the complex matrix of race. As Smith (1994) compellingly presents through the words of Twilight Bey at the end of the play, the issue of race

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cannot be reduced into the matter of one race versus another but must be understood as a relational one which does not bypass the fact that such conflict can occur within a racial group as well. Moreover, I wanted my students to seriously look into the process in which those race-related events are formed and to develop a critical eye of locating and analyzing the relational forces and the underlying structure of power in racial issues.

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Understanding Themes of Liminality during the Pandemic

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Introduction

For administrators, professors, and students, the challenges of distance learning and the accompanying upheaval, uncertainty, and unrest that began in March 2020 also continued throughout the summer and into the fall semester. After receiving the unexpected summer notification that in Fall 2020, I would be teaching English 203: Writing about Literature, I found myself confronted with multiple technical and pedagogical questions: How can I be attentive to students' needs and personal situations during the pandemic? How do I account for the unique hyflex learning situation in which I have never taught before?¹ How can I bring my own thoughts, ideas, and research interests into the classroom setting (and allow students to bring in theirs)? Most importantly, in what way(s) can I demonstrate to students that literature can encompass a wide range of authors and writing styles with a diverse set of experiences? In short, I was faced with two unrelated problems. The first issue was how to organize a course filled with meaningful teaching moments and learning

¹ At Texas A&M University, *hyflex* is the term used to describe a classroom setting where some of the students may be learning in-person and others via Zoom simultaneously. In contrast, *hybrid* is a term used to describe a course that may take place in-person one day and asynchronously or via Zoom the next.

experiences. The second was how to share these moments with students suddenly thrust into a virtual classroom setting.

Course Constraints and Inspiration from Baldwin

At Texas A&M University, Writing about Literature is a core-curriculum literature-centered, writing-intensive course for a wide array of students who are obligated to read at least four different genres and produce 5,000 words of writing during the class. In any semester, an instructor might teach students with every classification and any major from agriculture science to zoology. In turn, students receive instructors whose research interests widely vary. As a result, no English 203 course section or learning experience is ever exactly the same.

Inspired by James Baldwin’s “Autobiographical Notes” in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), which I had recently read in Spring 2020, I decided to center my English 203 course around the theme of liminality. I was specifically inspired by the following quote:

I know, in any case, that the most crucial time in my own development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this meant that in some subtle way, in a really profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building, a special attitude... I would have to make them mine—I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme—otherwise I would have no place in any scheme. (Baldwin, 1955, pp. 6–7)

I wanted students to think about what it meant for a fellow human to have a special attitude and special place in this scheme that Baldwin describes. Moreover, I wanted them to connect the course readings to the profundity that could be found in their everyday lives. Liminality, I thought, could be a way to link together the themes and ideas presented by Baldwin.

Course Design

When I organized the course, I wanted to incorporate the idea of a “line” that Baldwin describes. Though he might have used this term regarding genealogy, history, and the past, I wanted my syllabus to follow a line of ideas and intertextuality presented in literature. As a result, I arranged my course into three units in which students read texts written by an assortment of male and female authors in five genres—poetry, play,

novel, extended essay, and memoir. The first unit, which I titled “Discovery, Poetry, Liminality,” introduced students to a wide variety of authors from different backgrounds and understandings of their experiences—John Keats, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Marilyn Chin, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Anchoring the unit was the TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), and one of the goals of the unit was for students to pay attention to the different stories, diversity of lives, and multitude of experiences found in literature. We began by looking at John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as an example of traditional poetry in English. Countee Cullen’s “To John Keats, Poet, at Spring Time” (1925) and “Yet, Do I Marvel” (1925) followed in order to discuss Cullen’s desire to produce great poetry as he struggled with the realities of being Black in early twentieth-century America. Continuing our discussion of the Harlem Renaissance, we read “Harlem” (1951) and “I, Too” (1926) by Langston Hughes in order to discuss aspects of the non-white experience in the United States. Following this examination, Marilyn Chin’s “How I Got That Name” (1994) required students to think about what it means to be an immigrant in the United States. We then looked at “To live in the Borderlands means you” (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa to touch upon borderlands theory and consider concepts of hybridity. We ended the poetry unit by thinking through “Ceremony” (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko and the stories that are told and passed down. Here, we followed a line of literature that began with one of the great British Romantic poets in the nineteenth century and evolved into a focus on special places and special attitudes that exist within the contemporary United States and how they are embraced, explored, and articulated in literature.

The second and third units in this English 203 course traced a line of literature and expanded on the ideas of hybridity, belonging, and storytelling presented in the first unit. The second unit was titled “Shakespeare, Shylock, and (Anti)Semitism” and explored one of Shakespeare’s most problematic plays—*The Merchant of Venice* (1600). Focusing on the role of women, Jewishness, and the place of Jessica as we read the play, we then moved on to read *Shylock is My Name* (2016) by Howard Jacobson, which places the events of *The Merchant of Venice* in a modern setting with contemporary dilemmas and circumstances. This text required students to consider problems of racism, sexism, and identity in a manner that was more familiar to them than the original Shakespearean language and a sixteenth-century setting allowed. Because *Shylock is My Name* was published by the Hogarth Press, which was founded by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, the next text we explored was *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), which signaled the beginning of the third unit: “Woolf, Women, and (Un)Work.” In this unit, we discussed feminism, social expectations, and whether Woolf’s (1929) predictions

about women “in a hundred years” (40) had, in fact, come to pass by considering the gender struggles and issues in the students’ own lives and those of their generation. In her essay, Woolf (1929) claims that a woman writing thinks through her mother’s (97), and this idea was more thoroughly explored as we read Aurora Levins Morales’s *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from a History of Puertorriqueñas* (1997). Levins Morales’s memoir traces the matrilineage of Puerto Rican women to the first mother in Africa thousands of years ago and ends with the birth of the author herself. We ended the course returning to poetry by reading Rupi Kaur’s “the middle place” (2017) and thinking through the texts read and discussed throughout the semester.

Adapting to Pandemic Learning Conditions

Because my English 203 course was taught in the era of COVID-19, students had limited access to the library, were dealing with personal crises, and were hundreds of miles away from the Texas A&M campus, physically and emotionally. I had previously decided against assigning students a major make-or-break final paper. Instead, after every major text read in class—poetry, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Shylock is My Name*, *A Room of One’s Own*, and *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from a History of Puertorriqueñas*, students had the option to write a response paper. At the end of the semester, students had completed and received feedback on four response papers and created a writing portfolio based on three of these papers. In this writing portfolio, students submitted an overall reflection of their writing experiences throughout the semester as well as original and edited versions of their response papers.

Even though my students were not expected to produce a major research paper, I decided they would complete independent reading, research, and thinking so they could cultivate this skill set. Consequently, I created what I called the “Book Pick Project.” This project required every student to pick a book from a predetermined list that explored themes of liminality. Every student was required to choose a different book so that they would have a reading experience that was uniquely theirs as well as a project that would not be compared to another classmate’s work.² After reading their

² Texts read by students included: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, *Notes of Native Son* by James Baldwin, *The Last Girl* by Nadia Murad, *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *Under the Feet of Jesus* by Helena Maria Viramontes, *Unmarriagable* by Soniah Kamal, *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, *Othello* by William Shakespeare, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, *Hunger: A Novella and Other Stories* by Lan Samantha Chang, *The Memory of Fire Trilogy: Genesis, Faces and Masks, and Century of the Wind* by Eduardo Galeano, and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa.

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chosen text, students were expected to produce either a creative project or write another response paper. Students who submitted creative projects produced paintings, poems, songs, digital collages, podcasts, and a variety of other works as well as a detailed overview of their project and how it explored the assigned text. Students who submitted response papers explored themes of identity, home, and belonging.

Conclusion

In Fall 2020, sometimes via Zoom, occasionally in-person, often through writing assignments, and during their own reading processes, my students thought through ideas of identity, home, belonging, hybridity, and the human experience by exploring the theme of liminality in our English 203 class. I used this theme to tie texts together because I had several goals for my 203 class: 1) for students to reflect on what we were reading and why; 2) for students to consider not only what stories are told but how they are told; and 3) for students to look at a narrative from a different point of view. Perhaps most importantly, I also wanted to include readings in the classroom curriculum that would empower students to apply ideas discussed in class to their own experiences and daily lives. This, then, was the ultimate goal—for students to take away from the course a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. At the end of the semester, students responded in writing to questions asking them to reflect on their learning experiences in my course. On this form, one student claimed,

History is usually regarded as concrete and fact, yet in this class we explored the idea that history can be told from many points of view. This concept allowed us to view stories from marginalized or liminal groups and understand that although not everyone has had an equal voice throughout history, their stories carry the same importance.

In the end, the English 203 class I chose to teach in the Fall of 2020 was about understanding—understanding the pandemic circumstances in which we all struggled to adjust as well as understanding that there are valuable lessons to be learned, rich stories waiting to be shared, and worthwhile ideas to be explored from a variety of people with a diversity of experiences.

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Queer Is a Verb and Noun: Navigating Essentialism in the Undergraduate Classroom

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What does it mean to be queer? During one of the 2020 Democratic presidential debates, then candidate Pete Buttigieg was asked why he believed he was struggling to win over Black primary voters. Buttigieg is white, a Harvard alumnus, and openly gay. Part of the reason he was asked this question is that an internal campaign memo from his team suggested that his sexuality was an obstacle for Black voters, particularly older men, which reinforced the acrimonious stereotype that Black Americans are homophobic. In a rehearsed response, Buttigieg curiously positioned his sexuality not as a dividing hindrance but as a potential resource for empathy and unity:

While I do not have the experience of ever having been discriminated against because of the color of my skin, I do have the experience of sometimes feeling like a stranger in my own country, turning on the news and seeing my own rights come up for debate . . . Wearing this wedding ring in a way that couldn't have happened two elections ago lets me know just how deep my obligation is to help those whose rights are on the line every day. (qtd. in Capehart, 2019)

Unsurprisingly, Buttigieg received pushback for his remarks from pundits, fellow politicians, and even students from my fall 2020 “LGBTQ Literatures” course. The main criticism was that his statement was a flattening, naïve overreach: that it was unfair and unproductive to seemingly equate Black Americans’ oppressions with (white) gay Americans’ oppressions.

Student Response in the Classroom

Although this criticism is cogent and remains salient to the current political landscape, I was more struck by some of my students' resistances during our discussion of this news to what I call queerness as a noun. Queerness as a noun diametrically opposes queerness as a verb. Queerness as a noun is deep, determining, and interior: I am queer. On the other hand, queerness as a verb refers to the desire to limit one's queerness, or more typically gayness, to the private space of the bedroom; that is, queerness essentially becomes a personal and trivial sex act as opposed to, say, a crucial aspect of one's identity, politics, and/or culture. Examples of resisting queerness as a noun include "I'm gay, but that does not define me," and "I'm just like you except for what I do in the bedroom. It doesn't really matter." The moment in my classroom in which some of my students were more offended by Buttigieg's insistence that being queer made him a more caring, empathetic, and responsible person than by the racial implications of his words was confusing, jarring, and honestly saddening to me on several levels. Nevertheless, it was also productive, causing me to examine more closely my students, classroom, and own experiences and reframe how I teach and discuss such concepts as essentialism, identity, and queerness.

The first step of unpacking this conundrum involved listening and trying to empathize, although Buttigieg just presented the limits and misuses of empathy. Part of the reason that this moment stuck with me à la Sara Ahmed's (2004) notion of sticky emotions—"emotions circulate between bodies . . . [and] 'stick' as well as move" (4)—was that, growing up queer in the Midwest and South, I had already heard versions of what my students were feeling and saying. As Ahmed (2004) notes, "Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others" (4). The emotions I was sensing from my students based on their posture, faces, and tones were defensiveness, vulnerability, and pain. When, during office hours, I was helping a student with makeup work, I told her about the discussion she had missed and asked her thoughts on what some of her peers might be thinking.

She answered almost immediately and confirmed part of what I was suspecting. She said that she got what they were putting down: that, being from a small conservative, religious town in Texas, she was taught that everything about the "gay lifestyle" was negative. Put another way, when all you hear about your sexuality is that it will hold you back, make you a terrible person, and so on, it is tempting and arguably empowering to tell yourself that queerness does not matter; that is, there is nothing essential, predisposing, or defining about being queer. Even if I disagreed with this

notion and found it problematic, I could see how to some living in a post-queer world would be liberating and preferable to their queerphobic realities. I then recalled one of my students who asked rhetorically, “Isn’t it kind of homophobic to think that having same-sex attraction and being victimized makes you empathetic?” to which a couple of my students nodded emphatically.

Complicating Queerness

It seems to not go without saying that the LGBTQ community is not a monolith. Certainly, not all queers are empathetic, and not all straight people are callous. Queer people are nuanced and unique, and there are prodigious queer subcultures. Reflecting on queerness as a noun versus as a verb, I realized that, at some point in time, I needed to hear all of this: that queerness was not a death sentence or pigeonhole from which I will never escape. For some of my students at Texas A&M University, which was removed from the *Princeton Review*’s annual list of “Top 20 LGBTQ+ Unfriendly” schools in 2016 (Colón), they also needed to hear a similar message, perhaps for the first time.

I am thankful for their defensive expressions insofar as they illuminated that we needed to go over fundamental concepts in LGBTQ literatures and studies that I defined at the start of the semester such as essentialism, social constructs, stereotyping, and queerness. Queerness is the most difficult to define for several reasons—it is purposefully nebulous; it is being reclaimed from a pejorative—but ultimately, queer is a noun, verb, and adjective. I reiterated a simplified definition of Lee Edelman’s (2004) definition of queer, which is “irreducibly linked to the ‘aberrant or atypical’” and “dispossess the social order of the ground on which it rests” (6). In other words, queerness means not heteronormative, and if heteronormativity encompasses more than simple sex acts, then queerness and gayness also cannot be reduced to simple, inconsequential sex acts.

Defining Queerness as a Noun

There are two texts I assigned in my course that demonstrated queerness as a noun and helped my students understand where I was coming from. The first is a 1981 interview conducted by J. Danet, R. de Ceccaty, and J. Le Bitoux with Michel Foucault (2010). In the interview, Foucault posits that what makes homosexuality “disturbing” to heteronormative society is “the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself.” In terms of the homosexual mode of life, Foucault leaves it rather

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abstract, but says it “can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics.” I placed my students into small groups and asked them to imagine queerness as a noun: to think of specific politics, ethical principles, cultural artifacts, and forms of relationships that would all challenge heteronormative institutions. Secondly, after reading *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, I asked students to write about how the protagonist’s spirituality can be considered queer. Doing so, I wanted to provide students with examples of queer ways of being so that they could hopefully materialize. If there is such a thing as an empowered, progressive queer noun, I hope they become it.

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