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

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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.

“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.

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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).

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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.

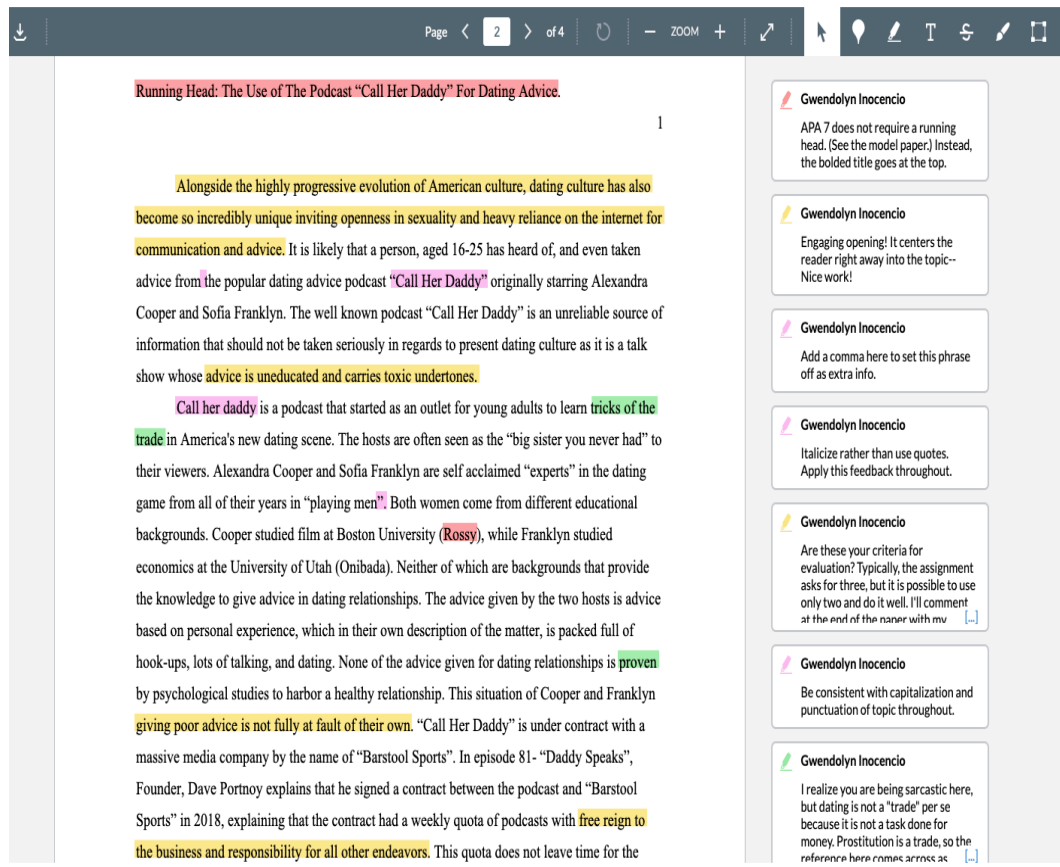


Figure 2: An Anonymized Example of a Student’s Draft with Color-Coded Feedback. Note: student work used here with permission.

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).

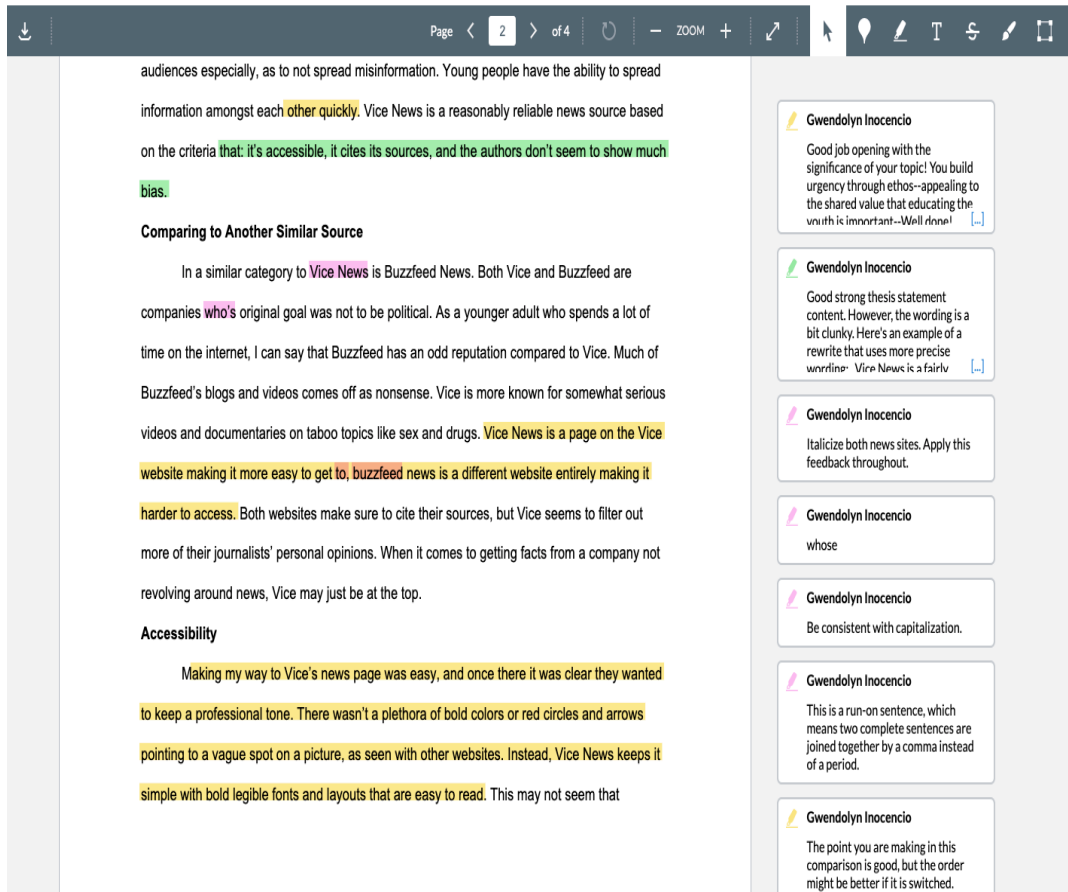


Figure 3: Anonymized Example of Praise in Color-Coded Feedback

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

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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

Allison Estrada-Carpenter
Texas A&M University

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

Edudzi David Sallah
Texas A&M University

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.

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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

Janet Eunjin Cho
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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 TikTtok—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

C. Anneke Snyder
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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,

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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.

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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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Allison Estrada-Carpenter is a PhD Candidate at Texas A&M University. Her work focuses on representations of class, school, and young adults in contemporary American popular culture.

Edudzi David Sallah is a PhD student in English at Texas A&M University, where he also earned his MA in Performance Studies. His MA thesis examined the grim spectacle of a now defunct pre-nineteenth-century Anlo-Ewe (an ethnolinguistic community of Ghana) form of capital punishment called *toko atolia*, which won him a number of research grants and a research fellowship. He is currently interested in the study of black transnationalism, especially connections between indigenous African and African American cultures/literatures.

Janet Eunjin Cho is a doctoral candidate in English. She specializes in modern and contemporary Asian American literature, with an emphasis on food, form, language, and corporeality.

C. Anneke Snyder is a Ph.D. student in English at Texas A&M University. She is formerly a Fulbright Taiwan grantee and currently an Avilés Johnson Fellow as well as a member of the Southern Regional Educational Board Doctoral Scholars Program. Her research interests include Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Transnational Literature, Multi-Ethnic American Literature, and Latinx Literature with a focus in Latina Literature and Chicana Feminism.

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.

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