

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction Teaching for Justice

by Sarah Chinn and Michael Bennett



PHOTO BY MELANY ROCHESTER ON UNSPLASH

*some of you have been blessed
or cursed
to see beyond yourselves*

*into the scattered wrongful dead
into the disappeared
the despised*

*none of you has seen
everything
none of you has said
everything*

*what you have noticed
we have noticed
what you have ignored
we have not*

*Lucille Clifton, from "the message from The Ones
(received in the late 70s)"*

*Justice, justice you shall pursue.
(Deuteronomy 16:20)*

What is justice but the blessing (or curse) to see beyond oneself, as Lucille Clifton puts it? Justice requires that we see "into the scattered wrongful dead/into the disappeared/the despised." But it also requires that we take action beyond that vision, that we move from noticing to doing, to creating. That transition from recognizing injustice to taking action to counter it is the focus of the articles in this issue of *Radical Teacher*.

We did not plan for this thematic confluence in choosing these articles for publication. Indeed, this issue is nominally themeless, a gathering of essays that were not submitted for any specific cluster, in response to no particular call for papers. And they come from both the United States and the UK, from college professors and teachers working in K-12 schools. The fact that they speak to closely overlapping concerns might tell us something about what radical teachers are thinking about these days.

While these articles vary in topic from a high school "world literature" class to teaching first-year college composition through hip hop to a group of British female academics responding to workplace speed-up in the context of neoliberal structures of higher education, all the pieces in this issue take on the difficult work of building just educational environments. Sometimes the injustice they face is structural, such as the colonial legacies of

development studies that Andrea Cornwall takes on in "Decolonizing Development Studies." Sometimes it is mostly unrecognized and unspoken, like the effects of corporatization and the inhumane expectations of workers that Sara Ashcaen Crabtree and her co-authors take on in "Donning the 'Slow Professor.'"

Often, trying to teach for justice requires that the authors look hard at their own unrecognized biases ("what you have noticed/we have noticed/what you have ignored/we have not") or the unintended consequences of what they assumed were politically radical teaching practices and materials. Most poignant in this regard are the contributions by Sarah Trembath and Andrea Serine Avery. The subtitle of Avery's essay speaks for itself: "If I'm Trying to Teach for Social Justice, Why Do all the Black Men and Boys on My Syllabus Die?" In reworking a hidebound "world literatures" class for upper-level high school students, Avery consciously put black experiences at the center of her syllabus, from *Othello* to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to *Things Fall Apart* and beyond. But on reflection she saw a disturbing trend in the texts she was teaching: none of the black male characters survived, all dying by murder or suicide. Looking closer, she recognized that in one way or another the black male characters were dehumanized, blamed for their own demise, and/or "overwritten" by dominant white narratives. Whether these phenomena were part and parcel of the ideology of the text (as in *Othello*) or used by the authors to highlight the injustices the characters themselves suffered (in *Things Fall Apart*, for example), they transcended each individual text to tell a story of inevitable – and even sometimes deserved – black male death.

Sarah Trembath found herself in a similar quandary. In "Teaching Black Lives in College When Black Lives Didn't Matter That Much K Through 12," she describes her experiences teaching college composition through the vehicle of hip hop. As a black woman teaching predominantly black material, she assumed that she could counter the anti-blackness of the dominant culture, but found that backfiring, as her (mostly white) students took literally the performances of certain kinds of black urban masculinity and ended up rearticulating the racist tropes she abhorred. Like Avery, Trembath realized how difficult it is to counter anti-black racism while dealing with her students' paucity of personal experience of non-dominant cultures.

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despised."***

Part of Trembath's response to this conundrum is her embrace of *sankofa*, a worldview that uses knowledge of the past to construct a meaningful and just present and future. Implicitly, Shane McCoy shares this ethos, drawing upon feminist and critical pedagogy traditions to help his first-year composition students "write for justice." In large part, this pedagogical approach entails drawing upon the venerable Freirean principle of enlisting students as knowledge producers rather than just consumers. But it is more than that. Many of McCoy's students have academic orientations

that are pre-professional, in accounting or engineering or pre-health. How, then, does one make connections between advocating for social justice and these fields that see themselves as apolitical and anti-ideological? McCoy's technique is deceptively simple and takes advantage of students' favorite research tool: Google. By having them google basic phrases like "engineering and social justice," he launches them on a journey that they must navigate for themselves, and then has them map out what social justice could mean for their chosen professional paths.

In "Decolonizing Development Studies," Andrea Cornwall faces a very different set of professional expectations. Cornwall entered the academic field of development studies through the back door, and found herself teaching in a discipline she saw herself as opposed to. Certainly, she had plenty to object to: with its roots in European colonial and neo-colonial power and its commitment to "helping" – too often by disrupting functioning cultural structures and/or imposing economic schemes that undercut self-determination – the development-industrial complex has much with which radical politics could find fault. In her fascinating account, however, Cornwall found that non-hierarchical teaching methods opened up space for her to rethink development studies and reframe "international development as a global quest for social, gender, racial, and ecological justice."

Cornwall's concerns about international development and the ways it is studied and taught speak to larger issues of structural injustice. When we try to teach for justice, any number of phantoms haunt the classroom, ghosts that take on various levels of materiality for differently gendered, raced, sexed, classed, and otherwise embodied subjectivities within the space we share. Sarah Trembath's impatience with having to teach "Black Men Are People Too through Hip Hop lyricism" hints at the stubbornness of structural injustices and inequalities that occupy pedagogical locations. Radical pedagogy has attempted to reveal how inequities that seem systemically baked in might be dislodged, however slightly, with mixed results.

Shadia Siliman and Katherine Kearns analyze one such attempt, the so-called "privilege walk." This exercise, which is rooted in feminist standpoint theory, asks participants (usually students) to stand in a line and take steps forward or back depending on different indicators of social privilege. While this seems like a fairly tame and potentially effective way to illustrate how privilege operates in propelling some kinds of people forwards and holding others back, Siliman and Kearns identify the intrusive and artificial elements of the exercise. It demands that participants come out about parts of their identity about which they might (in many cases justifiably) feel vulnerable or unsafe; its educational benefits are primarily for those who have had the good fortune not to have to recognize their own privilege while simply reminding marginalized participants of the obstacles they know they face every day; it reduces students to objects of their advantages or disenfranchisement rather than complex beings; it ignores the dynamic relationships of power and marginalization.

Rather than relying on a single technique to magically teach about privilege, Siliman and Kearns insist that we

value "humility and vulnerability" in talking about structural injustice. They offer a number of alternative exercises, rooting their theorizing about pedagogy in praxis, but ultimately they reorient readers towards exploring the complexities of privilege. Privilege and marginalization are not simply additive or subtractive, after all. Rather, they operate in multiple registers at the same time, conferring and restricting power in interlayered ways. Quantifying injustice is itself a product of a corporatized approach to social justice work, one that looks to metrics of oppression rather than dynamic strategies to both comprehend and address inequity.

A symptom of a neoliberal ethos, the privilege walk ends up undermining the kind of intersectional thinking it seems to support. Indeed, processes of quantification themselves can be a form of injustice, in that they streamline and flatten out lived experience. But, as Sara Ashcaen Crabtree and her co-authors would argue, this is part and parcel of the new orientation of higher education more generally, one that insists on deliverables, metrics, and outcomes; one that regards students and faculty as "stakeholders" rather than producers of knowledge. For Crabtree et al., this attitude is especially pronounced in the UK, where the centralized oversight of higher education has allowed for neoliberal mechanisms of organization and assessment to dominate the discourse.

For faculty, this has meant a seemingly relentless speed-up of work, since they are not only teaching, researching, and writing, but also expected to generate reports about their teaching, research, and writing. In their participatory-action research project to study the effects of the acceleration of workload, they found that people of color and women of all kinds were especially plagued by guilt and anxiety about not doing enough and not doing it quickly. The autonomy that was once an important factor of academic life has given way to a feeling of surveillance and hurry that, as the authors say, "result[s] in demoralizing concomitant decisions of prioritization...which tasks to skimp and who to let down."

In response to this hurry-up culture and the language of "output efficiency," the authors turned to Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber's book *The Slow Professor*, which advocates resistance to the relentless stream of email and the shortening of deadlines (as well as the fiction that online teaching is somehow infinitely "scalable"). As Crabtree and her coauthors argue, the busyness generated by the corporate university is not simple a feeling of being overworked, but rather a "deliberately accelerated conveyor belt enveloping the work culture." Get off email, resist the push towards increased "outcomes assessment," and get a clear sense of the priorities of academic life.

It feels like we're a long way from black lives mattering, however. Are Crabtree et al. really talking about justice here, or simply about the discomfort that any kind of change generates? I'd argue that academic workplace issues – especially those that disadvantage already marginalized populations – are inextricable from questions of social justice. After all, it is difficult to quantify teaching justice in a course learning outcome, especially since the process of political education is accretive and requires a robust culture

of questioning, listening, and rethinking. Moreover, the speed-up that Crabtree and her coauthors identify has been concomitant with the massive growth in the proportion of contingent and at-will faculty in the teaching ranks in the United States. The contraction in the number of secure jobs in academia has distributed more administrative work among fewer full-time faculty, creating a two (or more) tier system in which adjunct faculty are increasingly surveilled and assessed.

Because Nick Hengen Fox's "More than a Slogan: Or, how we built a Social Justice Program that made our campus more Just" is about not just an individual class or series of classes but building a whole program, he and his co-workers had to build a relationship between curriculum, labor, recruitment, assessment, and the campus community. Each of these components had to be developed justly because a Social Justice program is about means as well as ends. In keeping this holistic view in mind, Fox and others built their program at Portland Community College around three traits: (1) centering on projects that are student-led, class-defined, and campus-based; (2) involving collective action; (3) developing a pedagogy that was explicitly *not* neutral. Though this "approach doesn't align with traditional academic norms or common practices," Fox argues that it does "align with commitments of radical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching." This approach rejects the traditional liberal focus on an abstract and ideal model of "justice as fairness" (Rawls 190) for a more radical and pragmatic focus on "enhancing justice and removing injustice" at the exact points of its impact (Sen 5).

This distinction between formal and substantive justice is the dividing line between conservative/liberal and radical perspectives. Radical theories of social justice ask, "What meaning can be given to the liberal state's promise of 'equal justice' between individuals when there are massive social, economic, and political inequalities?" (Held 105). In their own ways, each of the authors of the articles included in this issue of *Radical Teacher* asks this question, and their attempts to answer it seriously take them beyond a commitment to justice as it is defined by the status quo. Like Shane McCoy, they create microcosms within the classroom of the world they would like to see in a larger context. Or, like Sara Trembath and Andrea Serine Avery, they take on the difficult work of self-critique and change. Together, these writers challenge narrow conceptions of social justice and chart radical paths forward, allowing us, their readers, the welcome task of coming along with them.

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#BlackCharactersMatter: If I'm Trying to Teach for Social Justice, Why Do All the Black Men and Boys on my Syllabus Die?

by Andrea Serine Avery



PHOTO BY [SINCERELY MEDIA](#) ON UNSPLASH

A Teacher's Phantasm I

The school, empty of children, sits baking in late-August heat. Inside my cool, clean classroom, I am getting ready—hanging posters, sharpening pencils, finalizing the syllabus. I glance back and forth between the empty seats, to be filled with students I don't yet know, and the reading list, populated with characters I know well and love.

As I staple and straighten, the room fills—but not with students, not yet: the characters from the year's assigned reading appear, milling about the classroom in mid-book scenes and vignettes, as eager to get on with it as I am. There's Maribel, from *The Book of Unknown Americans*, meditatively tracing a finger along the students' composition notebooks, her own purple journal tucked under her arm while *The Namesake's* Gogol, not yet the architect he will become, inspects the view of the desert mountain from my window. Edmund Perry, of *Best Intentions*—though frozen in time like the others by literature but not, like the others, a fiction—is shooting rubber bands across the room and smiling, amusing shy Maribel.

There's eponymous Othello, spearing an errant sheet of loose-leaf with his sword and flinging it into the recycling bin. Iago is perched on my desk, sneering, picking his teeth. Matthew Harrison Brady and Henry Drummond are pacing small circles in opposite corners of the room, muttering under their breath their opening statements. Things have not yet fallen apart: Okonkwo is instructing young Ikemefuna in how to handle a seed-yam. Nwoye, uninterested in the seed-yam demonstration, is instead listening, enraptured, at Desdemona's knee as she sings "willow, willow." Tea Cake has gotten my checkerboard off the shelf of board games; he and Janie are not yet praying to survive their hurricane; they are playing. They are making eyes; their eyes are not yet watching God. The room is humming and happy, and I am filled with anticipatory joy—my own joy at rereading these books, and the secondhand joy I will derive as I watch young people encounter them for the first time.

But I am newly aware of a cloud over this teacher's phantasm. In June, when I close up shop for the summer, many of these characters will lay dead and dying on my classroom floor. Notably, the literary death toll will include every Black male main character.

That is to say: Black characters do not survive my class.

That is to say: If my students read only books I assigned them, they might conclude that the Black male body is a problem that needs to be resolved—through destruction or disappearance—in order for literature to end satisfyingly and well.

Best Intentions

The course I am describing is an English class I taught that was, at the time, required of all sophomores at the secular independent school where I have worked for the last 11 years. Though this particular course is no longer offered to students, my awareness of the way my syllabus

systematically disposed of Black bodies—and the dangers of such a syllabus—has remained with me. I now work in an all-school administrative role at that same school—I teach a single senior elective in the English department—and so I have many fewer opportunities to craft reading lists. On the other hand, as a director of curriculum and instruction, I have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to invite my colleagues to interrogate their own syllabuses and reading lists.

When I took my first job at this school as a teacher, I inherited a "world literature" curriculum for sophomores that I thought over-emphasized Europe and European colonialism. For example, students were reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, lyric poems by Sappho, the funeral speech of Pericles, and a handful of haiku. Supported by my administration and fellow faculty, I endeavored to revise the curriculum. Eventually, the course I built for sophomores was no longer "world literature" per se. Instead, it was called (with credit for its name and central tenets due to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) "The Danger of the Single Story: Marginality and the Other in Literature."

I chose my texts, per my published course description, to reflect the experiences of: individuals who fall outside of socially constructed concepts and expectations of values and behavior or whose experiences render them in a middle space between groups. With an emphasis on literary works from voices not traditionally emphasized in the Western canon, students will explore how literature serves to both challenge and reinforce these social constructs. (Upper School Course Catalog, p. 10)

In that same course description, I also promised that students would "introspectively examine their own experiences, identities and positions in relation to socially dominant in-groups." Big promises.

In addition to the aforementioned texts, I assigned Sophocles' *Antigone* (441 B.C.), Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's *Inherit the Wind* (1955), Cristina Henriquez's *The Book of Unknown Americans* (2014), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), and a collection of nine one-act plays called *Rowing to America: The Immigrant Project* (1999). We began the year by watching Adichie's TED Talk, "The Danger of the Single Story," which I came to think of as the tuning note for the year. I also periodically assigned essays by Nancy Mairs, Mike Rose, and Richard Rodriguez, among others. My students read work in a wide variety of genres and styles, and they navigated many kinds of challenging language. My students read work by women, disabled people, people of color, immigrants. My students engaged with work that included woman characters, disabled characters, characters of color, immigrant characters (Henriquez's Maribel is all of the above, though I argue that she is hardly the model of agentic disabled person I would have liked to provide for my students). I am not shy about saying that I felt good about many of the changes I made to the course. I was proud of that course for the years I taught it. I made tweaks and adjustments, as I think good teachers do, based on current events; my own tastes; and the interests, talents, and predilections of my students.

But choosing a text for class, as enjoyable as it may be, is also an action fraught with meaning. In fact, a teacher's text-selection for her students is, inherently, a gesture informed by power—and as such, it has the potential to replicate or dismantle dominant discourses. Johnson (2013), operating on Butler's (1999) positioning of whiteness as an "occasion for agency, an opportunity to choose or fail to perform as expected" (p. 15), points out that a teacher's selection of texts for her class can constitute one of the "daily, tiny, ritualistic actions" (p. 16) that maintain whiteness. Of course, the inverse is also possible: might a daily, tiny, ritualistic selection of a *different* text be an opportunity to chip away at the hegemonic whiteness of one's classroom? Even for a white teacher?

If I honestly interrogate my well-intentioned reading list for its potential to "subvert or maintain [my, my students', my school's] white identity," (Johnson, 2013, p. 18), I must acknowledge not only the disproportionate number of deaths of Black protagonists, but also the segregated nature of the texts themselves: I must note that the texts with Black main characters also have non-Black characters in them, however peripherally (*Things Fall Apart*, *Best Intentions*, *Othello*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*), but the books with non-Black main characters don't have Black characters in them at all (*The Namesake*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Antigone*, *The Book of Unknown Americans*). Of course, if a character's race is undisclosed (or even when an author falls short of outright declaring the character Black or otherwise "diverse"), white readers and moviegoers tend to assume the character is white—hence the racist outrage when Black actress Amandla Stenberg was cast as Rue in the movie adaptation of *The Hunger Games*.

My reading list, then, is a curated reflection of whiteness as the (objectionable, and phony) default—a "given... natural... simply a site of being human" (Yancy, 2008, p. 45). Of course, as a woman, I recognize this dynamic in the study of literature: even though she was writing more than 40 years ago, Showalter (1971) names a problem that persists, specifically that "the masculine viewpoint is considered normative, and the feminine viewpoint divergent" (p. 856). I have never had a female student tell me she can't relate to Gogol, or Othello, or Bertram Cates, on the basis of his gender—but I have had multiple male students chafe at the supposedly boring or inaccessible *Antigone* because she is a girl. Being a woman disqualifies her from being universal. As a woman with chronic illness and some degree of disability, I doubly recognize this dynamic: don't most readers simply assume that characters in literature are healthy and able-bodied unless the author instructs them otherwise—usually by rendering the character either saintly or monstrous? Or by making the plot of the book the disabled's quest for able-bodiedness?

I'm ashamed to admit that I should have caught on to this oppressively white-normalizing pattern in the books that I assigned. In my assigned reading list, if a character was non-white, he was announced as such, and his race was what the book is about. Meanwhile, we (mostly, at my school) white readers sat around and read the books through supposedly unraced, white eyes. Yancy (2008), reflecting on his own experience among white students in an African American literature class, argues that white readers

reading Black texts "without auto-critique, without thematizing their own whiteness ... completely sidestep the opportunity to identify and call into question the inertial 'business as usual' performance of racism" (p. 53).

So, in addition to killing off all the Black protagonists in my assigned reading, I was also failing to provide my students with any Black characters who just *are*—characters who do anything other than be Black and then die.

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Dead Men Walking

There were many ways that non-Black characters ended up in the books we read—including death (Desdemona, Roderigo, Ashoke, Arturo, Brady), but also vindication and wrongful domination (Cassio, Drummond, the District Commissioner), damnation (Iago), relocation and reinvention (Alma, Ashima, Rachel Brown), and maturation (Gogol, Mayor). These characters had presumed futures my students and I found satisfaction and pleasure in imagining taking place after the book's ending. In fact, my students sometimes wrote creative and compelling "next chapters" for the books we read, imagining Iago's ultimate punishment, or Gogol himself becoming a father, or Maribel and Mayor reuniting as young adults and making a life together.

My students didn't write "next chapters" for *Othello*, *Okonkwo*, *Edmund Perry*, or *Tea Cake*. They couldn't. Despite my intentional effort to provide my students with "a balance of stories" (Achebe, 79), I presented my students with a decidedly unbalanced set of stories. It was impossible to write next chapters for the Black male characters; for the Black male characters in the books I assign, all storylines lead to death.

Is this silliness? A manufactured problem? A guilty, gasping outrage at the sad and tragic fates of imaginary characters in books? Aren't there real-people problems that deserve my serious attention and self-critical outrage? To all but the last of these questions, I say no. To the last, I say yes, undoubtedly. To explain both of my answers, let me present my dead-Black-characters problem, which I argue *is* a pressing, real-people problem, a problem related to *other* real-people problems in which I am complicit, this way: my students, who were very much alive, impressionable, and mostly white and affluent, received, by virtue of reading assigned to them by a white teacher, an unrelenting literary imagery of the Black male body as violable, disposable. My assignment of these fictional Black male deaths was set against—no, embedded in—a larger culture that legitimizes the often-bloody destruction of decidedly nonfictional Black male bodies.

I am not trying to get credit for being “woke” (Hess, A., 2016). I understand the eye-rolling at prolific Tweeter and ultra-self-aware white actor Matt McGorry (Davis, A., 2016) or at white rapper Macklemore, criticized for using his own white privilege to secure a platform for (and profit from) his track “White Privilege II” (Horn, L., 2016). Yancy (2008) asks, “When whites take it upon themselves to define what is and what is not a racist act, is this not tied into the very power of whiteness?” (p. 50). It is, and I know that I risk “re-centering” (Yancy, 2008) my whiteness here, in a semi-academic discussion of imaginary Black characters’ deaths, even as “tomorrow, a Black body will be murdered as it innocently reaches for its wallet” (p. 229).

Nevertheless, I am sincerely attempting to “name my whiteness” (Yancy, 2008)—that is, to acknowledge the lie of which I have been a beneficiary since (and before) my own birth: that my whiteness is a depoliticized default permitting me to ignore or transcend race and simply be myself, individual and unraced. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge my own classroom as a “site of/for performing whiteness ... a racialized social formation shaped by the dynamics of whiteness to remain invisible through its normative hegemony” (Yancy, 2008, p. 43-44). The uniform deaths of my Black characters look quite troubling to me if I refuse, as Yancy (2008) calls on me to refuse, to “talk about racism as it [is] performed within the body of the texts without any attention paid to [my] own white privilege” (p. 44). To this point: I led my students in discussions of these characters’ Blackness—in every case, to some extent, the characters’ Blackness was central to the text, and to our discussions—without acknowledging my/our whiteness, a performance that “signifies the very real power to ‘remove’ [ourselves] from the complicity involved in maintaining the normative structure of whiteness” (p. 44).

The class is behind me; the students who were enrolled in it are off at college somewhere. The problem of my reading list is, on the surface, resolved—that course is some other teacher’s responsibility now. But the necessity of interrogating my teaching—and the ways I am complicit in maintaining the normative structure of whiteness—remains. Here, I will examine the deaths of my Black male protagonists as well as, in generalized terms, my students’ discussions of those deaths in that context.

Doing (and Undoing?) Whiteness

Elisabeth Johnson (2013) offers a two-year case study of a white 10th-grade English teacher she calls Nicole Phagan that she argues disrupts and counters prevailing portrayals of white teachers as “deficient, resistant, naïve, and ignorant” (6). Johnson (2013) uses performance theories of identity to frame Phagan’s performances of whiteness in and beyond her classroom as both obscuring and revealing “possibilities for educators doing and working to undo whiteness and racism in schools” (p. 6). I want to examine these characters’ deaths—and the patterns of imagery, circumstance, and narration associated with the deaths—in order to examine how this self-selected reading list may constitute, however unintentional, a case of my “doing” whiteness in my classroom. Furthermore, I want to examine, and open myself up for others to opine, what changes are

called for in assigned texts and/or approaches to texts so as to begin, even if imperfectly, to “undo whiteness and racism” in the classroom.

The four literary deaths I will examine here are those of Edmund Perry, of Robert Sam Anson’s nonfiction book *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry* (1988); Okonkwo, of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958); Tea Cake, of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937); and Shakespeare’s eponymous Othello (1622). I thought initially that I would present the deaths in the order in which my students encountered them (Edmund Perry, Okonkwo, Tea Cake, Othello). Next, I considered grouping the deaths by type (two by suicide, two arguably in self-defense) or literary genre (three fiction, one nonfiction) or by their authors (two by Black authors, two by white).

However, as I examined the texts, I recognized another chilling pattern. Taken as a set, the deaths of the Black male characters in my assigned texts constituted the final stage of a brutal, altogether recognizable process enacted on Black (not just male) bodies in America throughout centuries, a process by which they are dehumanized, blamed for their own demise, and then overwritten by an official or dominant narrative that erases the violence. This process is a part of American history—indeed, as Coates (2016) explains so clearly, it is the very premise of American history. This process is our history, but it is not historical if that word is taken to mean “in the past, not the present.” I will review how this ongoing three-step pattern was present in the texts I assigned, and I will demonstrate how each step was currently being enacted in the world outside my classroom walls, giving particular heft to the presence of the pattern within. As I discuss each text, I will employ the present tense not only because the present tense is a convention of literary analysis but also because my responsibility to interrogate my teaching is ongoing and never complete.

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Dehumanize Him

Three of the four deaths (Othello, Okonkwo, and Tea Cake) are accompanied by animal imagery, mostly canine, in the death or the circumstances preceding it. In Othello’s case, the animal imagery, deployed by Shakespeare mostly via Iago, is pervasive and overtly racist. In Act I, Iago likens the Moor to an “old Black ram” (Shakespeare, trans. 1987, 1.1.86) and a “Barbary horse” (Shakespeare, trans. 1987,

1.1.109) to arouse Brabantio's protective ire over his precious daughter, a "white ewe" (Shakespeare, trans. 1987, 1.1.87) —if Brabantio doesn't act to interrupt the coupling, Othello will "make a grandsire" (Shakespeare, trans. 1987, 1.1.88) of him, providing him with "courser for cousins and gennets for germans" (Shakespeare, trans. 1987, 1.1.111). At the end of the tragedy, having discovered the extent to which he'd been "wrought" by Iago, Othello slips into the third person to preface his suicide and instruct the survivors on how to relay his fate: "And say besides that in Aleppo once/Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk/Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,/I took by th' throat the circumcised dog/And smote him—thus" (Shakespeare, trans. 1987, 5.2.351-355).

Okonkwo, too, is likened to a dog upon his death. Having committed suicide after discovering that his fellow Umuofians would not mount a resistance to colonization, Okonkwo has committed an "offense against the Earth" (Achebe, 1994, p. 207) and cannot be buried by his clansmen. His loyal, and brokenhearted, friend Obierika indicts the white colonial District Commissioner, saying, "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog" (Achebe, 1994, p. 208).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Tea Cake isn't just likened to a dog, he becomes one. Bitten by a rabid dog while attempting to rescue Janie from hurricane flooding, Tea Cake gradually descends into madness following the classic phases of rabies: fever, loss of appetite, hydrophobia, paranoia, violence, madness. Finally, in the space of one page of text, Tea Cake goes from being "like a child" rocked in Janie's arms (Hurston, 1990, p. 180) to being "gone. Something else was looking out of his face. ... He almost snarled" (Hurston, 1990, p. 181). He becomes a "fiend" (Hurston, 1990, p. 184) and bites his beloved Janie, forcing her to commit a wrenching act of mercy. Janie knows that "Tea Cake couldn't come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog that was in him and he couldn't get rid of the dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog" (Hurston, 1990, p. 187).

Likening Black people to animals is most certainly not limited to literature or even history, and that is why I am particularly horrified by my presentation of a suite of Black characters who, nearly to a one, are dehumanized in this way. Taylor (2016), in her analysis of the urban rebellions that punctuated the late 1960s, describes a conservative author's characterization of these rebellions as "outbreaks of animal spirits and of stealing by slum dwellers" (p. 72). Lest one protest that 40 years ago was ancient history, it should be recalled how Ferguson (Mo.) police officer Darren Wilson characterized unarmed shooting victim Michael Brown as a "demon" with "superhuman strength" who made "grunting noises" (Taylor, 2016, p. 4). That was in 2015. If one is inclined to forgive Wilson's dehumanizing rhetoric on account of his fear or adrenalin, then I offer instead a whole docket of text messages exchanged among San Francisco police officers in 2015 in which Black people are described as "savages" and "buffalo ... and not human"; it is suggested that all Black people should be "spayed"; and one police officer advises another to have a gun handy while a Black man pays a social visit to his home—after all, "it's not

against the law to put an animal down" (*United States of America v. Ian Furringer*, 2015).

Blame Him for His Own Demise

In all four of the literary deaths under discussion here, no person other than the Black male character himself is technically or legally responsible for the death. Janie's jury finds "the death of Vergible Woods to be entirely accidental and justifiable, and that no blame should rest upon the defendant Janie Woods" (Hurston, 1990, p. 188). In all three of the remaining instances, larger (white) forces or other (white) individuals undoubtedly drive the Black male character to a state of suicidal desperation, but the (white) hands of these who "wrought" the characters remain, technically, clean. Two of these deaths (Othello and Okonkwo) are certain suicides; as discussed previously, Okonkwo hangs himself and Othello impales himself. The reader can assume that the District Commissioner and his colonial cohorts will suffer no consequences for having driven one of the greatest men of Umuofia to a tragic and disgraceful end; as for Iago, the play ends with his fate in the balance. Cassio will enjoy the pleasure of selecting Iago's punishment—though it should be noted that Iago is guilty of more direct crimes than working over Othello, having murdered both his wife and the stooge Roderigo and having implicated and embarrassed the upright Cassio. I am not certain that the punishment that awaits him is as much (or more) for these crimes as for what he did to Othello.

The third of these deaths is that of Edmund Perry, the subject of Robert Sam Anson's 1988 nonfiction work *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry*. Edmund Perry was a talented and charismatic young man who left Harlem under the auspices of A Better Chance foundation to complete his education at Phillips Exeter Academy. Stanford-bound, Edmund Perry died after being shot by a white undercover police officer whom Edmund and his brother were attempting to mug. Though the book begins with an account of the death that exonerates the police officer, Anson spends 200 pages examining not the events of that July night in Harlem but rather the circumstances of Edmund's life and education that preceded it—including the racism, institutional and interpersonal, subtle and overt, that Edmund experienced as one of a handful of Black students at the New Hampshire prep school.

By the end of the book, Anson has briefly examined counter-narratives (Edmund was murdered, Edmund was framed, the police covered up the truth) and rejected them. Nevertheless, one of the last lengthy interviews he includes is with one of his own friends, a Black man who followed an educational trajectory not unlike Eddie's, and who knew Eddie personally. This friend concludes his long discussion of Eddie's life and death thus: "Eddie didn't get killed. He committed suicide. That's what it was, you know. Suicide" (Anson, 1988, p. 207). Anson does not probe this statement further, so we do not know if the man believes that Eddie intended to commit "suicide by cop" or whether he was just so "wrought ... Perplexed in the extreme" (Shakespeare, 1987, 5.2.345) that he committed a dangerous act with no regard for whether he could lose his life in the process—

though I believe there is a world of difference between actively wanting to die and not caring whether you live.

This is a deft maneuver. The book leaves readers with little question that Eddie was the aggressor and that the police officer discharged his weapon appropriately, not intending to kill Eddie but to defend himself. Nevertheless, to posit the “suicide” argument so late in the book, with no discussion, hanging there at the end of a chapter surrounded by white space on the page, turns Eddie’s action, no matter how reckless or illegal, into a wish to die. While I am persuaded that the police officer’s killing of Eddie was defensible, I am uncomfortable with the unexplained shift to suicide.

I believe Eddie, at 17, could both *want* to mug the cop and *want* to live to go on to Stanford and beyond—but that seems to be a contradictory Eddie that the book, at least, can’t tolerate. His marginality is so profound that he must choose: Is he the Eddie of Harlem or the Eddie of Exeter/Stanford? If one views the mugging as the final act of his Harlem self, a kind of recidivism, which the book encourages us to do, reframing his assault on the police officer as a suicide turns it into a choice with inevitable consequences. Eddie chooses his Harlem self, and must die for it. “Bad” Harlem Eddie cannot live—only “good” Exeter Eddie can live.

Taylor (2016) describes the manner in which responsibility for the impoverishment, incarceration, marginalization, and even deaths of Black people has consistently been shifted to Black people themselves, implicating even President Obama in perpetuating the belief that “the various problems that pervade Black communities are ... of Black people’s own making” (p. 9). According to Taylor (2016), throughout the 1970s, a “Black man’s chance of being murdered was six to eight times greater than that of a white man” (p. 69), and even today, “Black people are incarcerated at a rate six times that of whites” (p. 3). Of course, many people respond to such statistics by invoking “Black on Black crime,” seeming to emphasize the first of those “Blacks”—the Black perpetrator—over the second—the Black victim. Miller (2014) argues that the very phrase “Black on Black crime”:

Implies an agentless government and society, mere spectators to an incomprehensible phenomenon carried out by some distinct foreign entity. But virtually all of the correlates of homicide—unemployment, poverty and concentrated disadvantage, trust and legitimacy, access to firearms, or even, as some have more recently claimed, abortion availability or lead in the water—are social risks which the state itself shapes, limits, expands, or diminished. The American state has successfully *limited* these very same social risks for much of the white population (para. 7).

Set against a social context in which Black men are more likely than others to be murdered, and in which it is generally acceptable to blame even unarmed teenage Black men for their murders, it strikes me as unconscionable to present only Black deaths in literature that are self-inflicted.

Overwrite His History

A third disturbing pattern surrounding the deaths of my Black male characters is the manner in which their lives, fictional or otherwise, are subsumed, eclipsed, and overwritten by dominant white narratives at the end of the book. Three of the texts under examination here—*Things Fall Apart*, *Othello*, and *Best Intentions*—end with a white character describing, summarizing, or characterizing the black character’s death. Of course, these ending passages—and the outrageously reductive summations of the dead characters’ lives and deaths—are quite intentional on the part of the authors. Nevertheless, the pattern is striking: when a Black character dies in my class, a fellow Black character doesn’t get the last word. A white person does.

Othello ends with the tragic hero’s suicide, prefaced by a monologue in which he instructs his survivors in how they should record and retell the facts of his life and death. The play could end there, really, but it does not. Lodovico speaks: there is the matter of Othello’s assets, to be inherited by Gratiano; the censure of Iago, to be carried out by Cassio; and the relaying of the news to Venice, to be carried out by Lodovico himself (Shakespeare, trans. 1987).

A more compelling example of this phenomenon is, of course, the District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart*. Though readers have been privy to a complex, and often wrenching, view of Okonkwo’s life and demise, the District Commissioner reduces him to a “man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself” (Achebe, 1994, p. 208). The story of Okonkwo is the stuff of legend—but the District Commissioner thinks maybe he could eke out a “reasonable paragraph.” Furthermore, he plans to call his book “*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.” Achebe, I think, intends for this to land on our ears just the way it does—as a brutally reductive last word.

Best Intentions ends, perhaps surprisingly, in a quite similar fashion, despite the fact that it is nonfiction about a boy from Harlem, not a novel about a man from Nigeria. The reader of this text, after spending more than 200 pages learning about the nuances of oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and psychic distress, much of it experienced at Exeter, that informed Eddie’s thoughts and behavior to disastrous ends, learns that (at the time of writing, at least), Exeter has implemented a program intended to prevent the same things from happening to Black students at the elite prep school. Not unlike the District Commissioner’s book, the name of this plan is also tone-deaf and reductive: According to Anson (1988), the program is informally known as “Help for People from Distant Places” (p. 221). Harlem is 250 miles from Exeter—hardly a “distant place.” But this euphemistic title, it could be argued, lets Exonians off the hook. They need not worry themselves about the ways that the world as they experience it (and, in fact, construct it, as Exeter was and is a breeding ground for presidents) is linked to the fates of those in Harlem. Furthermore, the informal name of this program suggests that these people from distant places come to Exeter needing help, not that their experiences at Exeter render them in need of help.

As with the other patterns observed here, I take issue not with any single text but with the uniform presentation of, in this case, a white erasure of Black suffering. In 1980, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights set out to complete a comprehensive review of school textbook literature to examine the portrayals therein of members of a few, in the parlance of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “protected classes”: specifically racial minorities, older people, and women.

Among the Commission’s findings from its review of textbooks’ depictions of Black people were five prominent patterns: *Romanticism*, which encompasses a revisionist, gentle depiction of slavery and slaveholders; *avoidance*, which refers to a redaction of adversity, unfairness, violence, and oppression in Blacks’ lives; *bootstrap*, describing a near-exclusive celebration of the qualities of self-determination, grit, and ambition as Blacks’ keys to success; *oasis*, or tokenism; and *ostrich-in-the-sand*, the name given to distortion, oversimplification, and concerted refusal to acknowledge discriminatory acts and systems. The report does not specifically discuss portrayals of violence to Blacks; in fact, due to the aforementioned five patterns, violence to Black bodies was likely to be understated or ignored altogether by school textbooks.

The second half of the Commission’s review examines the effects of textbook depictions of racial minorities, older people, and women on students’ attitudes, behavior, and values. Among the Commission’s finding in this second chapter is a positive correlation between students’ exposure to diversity in textbooks and their development of positive racial attitudes. Notably, and perhaps disappointingly, the report makes only glancing reference to the effect on non-white students of textbook depictions, distorted or otherwise, of non-white people. The Commission’s report seems to presume an us-them perspective, where the students consuming the textbooks are assumed to be young, white males—*us*—and that the people being presented in those textbooks, in various states of distortion or erasure, are non-white, non-male, non-young people—*them*.

It might be easy to feel superior outrage at the narrow scope of this report—there is no mention of other groups that are protected classes: gay people, people with physical or mental disabilities, people of various faiths. Furthermore, my recollection of school textbooks, of which I was a consumer in suburban Maryland public schools between 1982 and 1995, suggests that the Commission’s having noted these patterns in 1980 didn’t result in offending texts’ being yanked from circulation. I remember a decidedly whitewashed presentation of American history, heavy on the George Washington refusing to cut down a cherry tree and light on lynching. I remember my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. D’Aiutolo, sighing and wearily rubbing her temples when I went off the approved list (George Washington Carver, Harriet Tubman, etc.) and chose Jimi Hendrix for my Black History Month project.

But, having had my recent epiphany about the uniform fate of Black male characters in the books I assigned, I must restrain my haughty outrage, or at least redirect it—at myself. I work at an independent (that is, private) school, and I am therefore afforded an immense amount of

curricular freedom and autonomy. I do not teach to high-stakes, mandatory tests, for example. Though I’ve cringed at the cliché of the Black man getting killed off first in horror movies, I fear I’ve created the literary equivalent for my students. And I cannot blame a textbook publisher or a school board. It is no one’s fault but my own that I presented my students with a pattern one could imagine being appended to the list of patterns in the Commission’s textbook review: this one might be called (if the review tolerated a slightly longer name for its patterns) *Destruction, or How to Solve the Problem of the Black Male Body in Your Syllabus: Dehumanize Him, Blame Him for His Own Demise, and Overwrite his History to Erase Your Violence*.

Stereotypical Black Men Or Full-Fledged Souls (in Trouble)?

Of course, the four texts—and four deaths—I have examined here were written by four very different authors from four vastly different temporal, geographic, and cultural locations. William Shakespeare wrote *Othello* in Elizabethan England from 16th-century source material courtesy of Cinthio, and Robert Sam Anson penned *Best Intentions* in 20th-century America from real-life source material. Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s in Nigeria, 20 years after Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, reportedly in just seven weeks, while doing research in Haiti. Furthermore, despite the similarities I have identified in the three “beats” discussed here, I would be remiss if I did not explicitly acknowledge that the four authors had expressly different intentions and rhetorical goals in depicting—and dispatching—Black male bodies the ways they did in their work. Though there are numerous ways to group or ungroup these texts for such an analysis, I will examine them here in chronological order.

Despite having almost five hundred years to think about it, critics and scholars remain divided on a central question about Shakespeare’s *Othello*—that is, “whether it is a racist play or a play about racism” (Kaul, x). Like their academic counterparts, Black actors have grappled with the implications of playing *Othello*. Just as Nigerian scholar S.E. Ogude argues that *Othello* the character is “preeminently a caricature of the [B]lack man” and that a Black actor in the role is “an obscenity” (p. 163), the acclaimed actor Hugh Quarshie in 1998 delivered a lecture in which he argued that a Black actor in the role of *Othello* “[runs] the risk of reinforcing racist attitudes toward [B]lack people” (Quarshie, n.p.). In 2015, Quarshie went on to play the role, though it is notable that the production also included a Black Iago, potentially changing the racial dynamic of the play as originally written.

But what was the racial dynamic of the original play? What of that central question Kaul poses in his preface to *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*? Though I won’t presume to resolve decades of scholarly debate here, certain facts are incontrovertible: Shakespeare took his inspiration from Cinthio’s tale and—notably—added to the original story an Other at its tragic center: “While the character of ‘Disdemona’ is mentioned in the original, there is no reference to *Othello*, and Shakespeare’s source for the name

remains obscure" (Shaw and Shaw, 84). Indeed, well into the 20th century, writers persisted in questioning whether Shakespeare had truly written a Black man at all, arguing that the epithet "Moor" was applied in Shakespeare's time to "Arabs, Berbers, Syrians, and Negroes without regard for their wide racial differences" (Butcher, 243).

By the time of Quarshie's public consideration of the implications of a Black man's fulfilling the role, consensus seemed to have been reached that Shakespeare had indeed written an Othello as a Black—yes, like, actually Black—man. Of course, consensus on that point does not resolve the question of why Shakespeare wrote Othello as a Black tragic hero, what rhetorical or artistic aims he might have sought to fulfill in doing so. The viewpoint that the play is a play about racism, and not a racist play, is held by the likes of Shaw and Shaw (1995), who argue that Shakespeare:

uses the presence of the Moor as a tragic hero to confront the conscience of his countrymen. The play undoubtedly caused Elizabethans to reconsider their genetic place in the global structure, and their attitudes in the area of race relations. Shakespeare used the background of racial stereotypes and the social structure of Elizabethan England sensitively ... In the end, the character of Othello emerges as a distinct individual and not a particular type of Moor. (90)

I will return to Ogude to articulate the opposing viewpoint, which I find more compelling: that the play is fundamentally racist, that "Shakespeare was acutely aware of and indeed shared some of the deep-seated fears of his contemporaries about [B]lack people" (164); furthermore, the play "expresses as well as confirms the prejudices" of his time, including those that inspired Elizabeth's 1601 edict ordering "negars and blackmoores" out of the country (Shaw and Shaw, 87). As to whether Shakespeare pulls off rendering Othello as a "distinct individual," Ogude argues:

Othello suffers from an overwhelming inferiority complex, which is seen as part of his racial heritage, his lack of social refinement, the absence in him of the fine balance of reason and emotion that comes with true "education." Iago's suggestions have a tremendous effect on him because of his social and racial inadequacies. Shakespeare starts out with the proposition that the [B]lack man, even when favored with the hand of a white woman, feels inferior and undeserving. (163)

In her loving introduction to the 75th anniversary edition of Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the writer Edwidge Danticat calls the book a "masterpiece" and a "brilliant novel about a woman's search for her authentic self and real love. "For many decades and, hopefully, centuries to come, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will probably be at the center of Zora Neale Hurston's legacy as a novelist" (xv). It may surprise some readers new to the book or to Hurston herself to learn that her "legacy as a novelist"—especially as a Black novelist—is hardly unanimous. Even as Hurston was rescued from obscurity by adoring luminaries like Alice Walker, Henry Louis Gates, biographer Robert Hemenway, and Danticat herself, there

remain in Hurston's legacy as a novelist traces of tension surrounding her depiction of Black characters.

Indeed, no less than Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison accused her of minstrelry, of creating Black characters designed to "humor a patronizing white audience" (Cobb-Moore, 26). Spencer describes Wright as Hurston's harshest critic, citing his charge that Hurston's characters were caught "in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro life: between laughter and tears" (19). This charge is ultimately not so different from Ogude's assertion of what Shakespeare was giving Elizabethan audiences with his stereotypical Black man, Othello—minus, of course, the charge of minstrelry, which can be leveled only at a Black artist.

There is here the altogether familiar pattern of a woman's writing being dismissed by her male peers as lacking "any claim to seriousness" (Spencer, 18). Story (1989) points out that "relative judgment in the case of Hurston seems to be determined by the gender of the scholar or writer; [B]lack male scholars hold one view of her and [B]lack female writers hold another" (25). More relevant to this discussion, however, than the gendered dimension to criticism of Hurston is that the "expressed aim of the literari of the Harlem Renaissance was to uplift the race by exposing [B]lacks, and whites as well, to great [B]lack art that would prove to be as good and aesthetically beautiful as its white counterpart" (Spencer, 19). In this aim, Hurston was out of step with her peers who wanted not images of "common folks working in the field" and "entertaining pseudo-primitives" bullshitting on the porch but a literature that would "dispel the stereotypes of [B]lacks as inferior" (Spencer, 18).

However, whereas some leaders of the Harlem Renaissance had come to view Black folk culture with "nostalgia or disdain" (Spencer, 20)—both of which imply distance—Hurston was immersed in it. She lived it. Simply put, she knew what she was talking, and writing, about in a way her critics—" [B]lack men who functioned as gatekeepers" (Story, 27) —did not. Perhaps, then, the gendered dimension is unavoidable. Per Story (1989), Hurston:

dared to see herself as a writer with talent equal to if not greater than her peers at representing the "folk" orally in writing. She was, essentially, more "downhome" than all the other Negro artists who 'were' the [Harlem Renaissance] and was not afraid to flaunt it. (27)

Further, Hurston knew that depicting the southern Black folk tradition with fidelity had its own redemptive potential, its own power to dispel stereotypes and lift a people. As Hurston collected folklore throughout the 1920s, Spencer explains, "she began to realize the potential of southern [B]lack folk to present a sympathetic picture of a cultural milieu that had been distorted by the neurotic racism of dominant culture into stereotypes of ignorance, superstition, sexuality, and laziness" (21).

As to the particular Black male body I have discussed here—Tea Cake—Danticat argues that he is a perfect example of the kind of rich, complex, realistic characters

that serve to counter those distorted stereotypes presented by the dominant culture. Tea Cake is, like other of Hurston's characters, "neither too holy nor too evil [but rather] extremely nuanced, reflecting human strengths as well as frailties" (xiv). Those descriptors sound like the ones that charitable readers of Shakespeare (like Shaw and Shaw) might claim he accomplished in Othello, even as they simultaneously assert that his "race and colour contributed to his downfall" (87) and that the play doesn't really work unless Othello is Black. That is, Shakespeare may give us in Othello a character who is nuanced and complex, but at least some of that nuance and complexity derives from his being racially Other. Tea Cake is, like Othello, nuanced and complex and Black; he isn't, like Othello, nuanced and complex *because* he's Black. That difference makes the three-beat treatment of the Black male body I have described here—dehumanize him, blame him for his own demise, overwrite his history—radically different between these two texts. So different, in fact, that I have come to believe that the biggest problem in the way I have taught them in classes like the one I describe here is twofold. The trouble as I understand it comes not from any text alone but rather that I have presented a suite of texts in which a repeating pattern is enacted on Black male bodies *and* that I have failed to properly contextualize the texts. I have failed to explore with my students the differences and similarities between the circumstances of their creation.

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Like Hurston, Chinua Achebe sought to "help his people rediscover their cultural heritage lost under the traumatic impact of colonization" (Madubuike, 142). Achebe did not attempt to do that via a perfect character. Per Achebe, Okonkwo is imperfect and contributes to his own undoing (Achebe and Bowen, 49). But his imperfectness—and his ultimate demise by way of the three beats I have described here—is not at odds with Achebe's desire to help Nigerians see themselves out from under the Western colonial gaze. Addressing the popularity of *Things Fall Apart* among Nigerian readers, Achebe says;

[M]y people are seeing themselves virtually for the first time in the story. The story of our position in the world had been told by others. But somehow that story was not anything like the way it seemed to us from where we stood. So this was the first time we were seeing ourselves, as autonomous individuals, rather than half-people, or as Conrad would say, 'rudimentary souls.' We are not rudimentary at all, we are full-fledged souls. In trouble, in trouble. There's no question about that. Life is full of trouble. (25).

Like Tea Cake, like Othello—and in the tradition of the ideal Aristotelian tragic hero—Okonkwo is neither too holy

nor too evil "[but rather] extremely nuanced, reflecting human strengths as well as frailties" (Danticat, xiv). Unlike Othello, though, Okonkwo's vulnerability and eventual downfall derive not at all from his Blackness. Though the students in my class read Okonkwo as Black—in fact, ever careful, they sometimes take pains to call him African American—"Blackness" doesn't and can't mean the same thing in Nigeria at the beginning of the 20th century as it does in the United States now. Per Achebe, even in 1991, "it does not occur to Nigerians to describe anybody as non-[B]lack!" (Achebe and Morrow, 21). Achebe explicitly aims to counter the prevailing image of Africa as "a gloomy landscape without human beings, an impenetrable jungle of forests with wild primitive customs and throbbing, crazy drums" with images of people like Okonkwo, people whose "ways of life do not need questioning or justifying ... real human beings" (Madubuike, 143).

Whereas Hurston is attempting to reclaim depictions of Blackness, Achebe is endeavoring to reclaim not Blackness but Africanness, and any teaching of Achebe's work requires that students understand that the terms are not interchangeable, that one is not a euphemism for the other. And yet, pointing out the similarities in these authors' acts of reclamation through fiction—and connecting the dots between African colonization, exploitation of African bodies and resources in Africa, the Atlantic slave trade, the exploitation of African-now-read-as-Black bodies in the creation of the United States and its economy, and the Jim Crow south—is likewise necessary to properly contextualize these texts.

The fourth text in my analysis is Robert Sam Anson's 1987 nonfiction text, *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry*. Of the four, it is in some ways both the easiest and the most difficult to discuss in terms of what the author set out to do. After all, Anson was bound to the "truth" of the story as he understood it, whereas the other texts are works of fiction. Furthermore, much less has been written about this text or its author than the others. However, Anson did explicitly address why he chose to write this book in a *New York Times* review contemporary to the book's publication. Anson had a personal connection to Exeter, as well as a history of participation in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s (Coles). But beyond that, Anson is clear that what drew him to Edmund Perry was less the complexity of Eddie than the race angle:

I had wanted to do a book about race for a long time ... I've thought there's an enormous problem in race relations that's getting larger, and everyone was really pretending it didn't exist, and every publisher said it wasn't a commercial idea. So this story was a hook into it. (Coles)

In Anson's explanation, we see his desire to write about racism, which he doesn't call racism but rather "a problem in race relations," and which he claims "everyone" is ignoring, even as the very same *New York Times* that year reported that 3,000 people assembled to march through Manhattan to protest the death of a 23-year-old man who'd been chased by a group of white attackers into the path of a car that killed him (Smothers). It seems safe to assume that demonstrators, which included the family of the dead

man; members of the Black Veterans for Social Justice; and another, surviving victim of the attack and his lawyer were not ignoring a problem in race relations (Smothers). It seems safe to assume that the 70 people who, the *Times* reported, assembled that same day for a teach-in in the basement of Medgar Evers College and recited the names of Black people who had been killed in incidents of racially motivated violence in the previous ten years, including at the hands of police officers, were not ignoring a problem in race relations (Smothers). We can also see in Anson's words that in order to write the race book he wanted to write, he needed an angle that was satisfactorily marketable. Whatever else drew Anson to Eddie's story, the motivations he talked about when asked were intellectual and commercial.

Anson does go on to discuss Eddie himself in his remarks to the *Times* reviewer, though he (repeatedly) refers to Eddie not by name but as "this kid": "I don't want this one kid to stand as a totem for race relations, but there certainly was a lot going on in his life that is emblematic of the situation" (Coles). This brings us back to Shakespeare, to the idea that a Black man is inseparable from his Blackness—here, in fact, Anson talks about "this kid" not as a complex individual—though I must say that complexity is depicted in the book itself—but as an emblem for what he refuses to call racism.

Though I discussed these four texts chronologically in this section, I may as well have grouped them by the race of their authors. And if I had done so, I might have more expediently arrived at this insight: In my reading, despite the similarity of what I have described as a three-beat treatment of the Black male body in these texts, the Black authors sought to elevate a people by way of realistic depiction of an individual, whereas the white authors seem to explain a specific man's downfall by way of his Blackness. A twin insight: Certainly, when I was teaching this course, I did a wholly inadequate job of contextualizing these texts for—and with—my students the way I have done for myself here, in this writing.

If a Soul Is Left in Darkness

One of the first assignments I gave the students in this course when we began reading *Best Intentions* was to ask them to reflect on, and write about, the epigraph in the book, a quote from Victor Hugo repurposed by Martin Luther King, Jr.: "If a soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness." Their responses showed me that they had large holes in their understanding of race in America and also were eager to talk about it.

For one thing, many of my students were eager to relegate racism to the past. One Asian male student, responding to this quote, wrote about "men in the 1800s who trained their dogs to attack African Americans." I wondered if this student had seen the same photograph I have seen, which shows Black people running from police dogs. In 1963. Similarly, a white male student declared that "before the civil rights movement, many white people oppressed African Americans, and this oppression led to bad

living conditions, crime, and fear." In this student's understanding, "The African Americans rose up and fought their oppressors with civil disobedience, and occasionally violence." A third male student, also white, echoed the same understanding, one that fixes problematic "race relations" in the past: "An example of someone being put in a situation where they might be inclined to commit a crime is the way that most of America viewed African Americans for a very long time. African Americans were not given equal opportunities, and they were discriminated against, so they acted out." This understanding of racial injustice as history in the United States is not limited to male students. A white female student wrote about "racism in the 60s," during which time "people weren't raised to accept other races and it isn't fully their fault because somebody started the idea of hating people of color."

Not all students were so comfortable relegating racism and racial injustice to the past, like the white male student who asserted that "Blacks typically grow up in worse neighborhoods with more crime and are likely to be more impoverished." One white male student wrote about:

the large population of low-income African Americans who produce a near-endless cycle of teenage pregnancies and deadbeat dads which produce lower income for these mothers with multiple responsibilities, providing less tax overall to fund the district's schools, thereby holding back the potential education said teenage mother's children could receive and keeping them in the slums where they are likely to follow the same path as their parents.

A Black female student also wrote about cycles, albeit with more grace and knowledge:

One's location and upbringing normally play a large role in how he or she lives. The school-to-prison pipeline is one example of this phenomenon. The school-to-prison pipeline is when students are discouraged and pushed out of public schools only to lead lives of crime and end up in prison. This is due to a number of factors such as parental abuse or neglect, racism, and poverty. One will find that the school-to-prison pipeline is most acute in impoverished Black and Latino communities in major cities such as Chicago and New York. Because of the heavy crime, policing, and poverty in these areas, many children in these areas are gang members, drug dealers, and high school dropouts among other things. These factors, or the "darkness," are a result of the institutionalized racism that affects socioeconomic status, unemployment rates, and prison rates of people of color. While one's own conscience does play a part in his or her life, it is systems of privilege and hierarchies of power that are ultimately to blame.

Another female student, this one white, was also eager to connect the quote to specific, present-tense examples of "African Americans who have been weakened by the darkness of discrimination":

White people discriminate so strongly against African Americans and make them seem like criminals, when in reality the white men are far worse than the African

Americans. ... I think that racism is one of the worst things that has ever been created by white people, and that racism is a far worse sin than anything that an African American could do. However, there is a certain extent of which crimes committed could be worse than racism, such as murder. A situation that has recently happened that I think relates to [the quote] are the recent police killings involving [B]lack men, such as the events in Ferguson. Black men are given a stereotype of criminals and therefore policemen are led to shoot these men even when they could be unarmed and innocent. The real criminals in this case are the policemen who are clearly racist.

She was not the only student who wanted to write about what was going on right then. A white male student argued that "when we keep minorities in the lowest corner of society and use them as the foundation to the economic skyscraper, they cannot be forced to abide by the laws which suffocate their liberty." This student cited Henry Ward Beecher's quote that "liberty is the soul's right to breathe and when it cannot take a long breath the laws are girded too tightly around them," and then, fittingly, wrote about Eric Garner, "an unarmed man of color living in New York, [who] was choked by a police officer for the suspected selling of individual cigarettes," as being "the foundation of the skyscraper, which society needs to take responsibility for."

Many of my students were very committed to the ideas of meritocracy, reinvention, and self-reliance. Many students, replying to this quote, offered some version of the following: "Right now, many poor people become criminals because they think there's nothing else they can do. While I honestly can't blame them for thinking that, I don't see why it has to be told to them that they're just victims of bad circumstance, as if there's nothing they can do to climb out of the rabbit hole." Reflecting both his enthusiasm for the topic and his unsureness about me and our class, this white male student added, "I apologize if this paragraph is too political, but it's a topic that interests me very much."

Another student (female, white) refused the logic of the quote on the basis of free will by invoking Black men:

I don't agree with this quote. I think that a lot of people that have come from darkness have used that to fuel their fire and make their lives better. Look at the music industry for example. Jay-Z was born in Brooklyn, NY, and had a single parent. His father abandoned him and his three siblings and he grew up involved in selling drugs and in violence. Now he uses that to his advantage to make music and now has a net worth of \$520 million. There are similar stories of other music moguls like Kanye West and G-Eazy but their families are not guilty for the situations that they encounter. No one but themselves is to blame for the crimes they commit. Also, most people, who start in the darkness, have the opportunities to rise up.

I found it interesting that a Black male student in the class, one of two that year, also initially refused the logic of the quote on the basis of a specific example: a white prep-school kid who admitted to an armed robbery spree in Central Park. "There are many examples of fortunate people

not trapped in 'darkness' causing 'sin.' For example rich teenagers such as 17-year-old Jesse Wasserman who mug people in public places just because. ... These people do not need to be worried about paying next month's rent." By the end of his journal entry, though, this student had written himself into a compassionate stance available even to the Jesse Wassermans of the world: "The reason why I believe that this claim still holds truth is because the 'darkness' in the quote is not entirely defined. I automatically assumed the darkness was poverty and disadvantage but 'darkness' could very well be the need for attention from a hard-working mother or father."

What Now?

I don't have a conclusion; I am still becoming. According to Johnson (2013), "people live in a state of becoming, so we never arrive at a fixed location of whiteness or social awareness" (Johnson, p. 13). But I have inclinations and ideas. I have starts. And I have questions, which I pose here for myself but to which I eagerly solicit and will accept responses from others who read this.

As discussed here and elsewhere, the experience of being Black, particularly in America, means, a disproportionate risk of death. I refuse to populate my reading list with books that minimize or erase the systematic injustices that permit and carry out those deaths, putting me back where textbooks were in 1980. It is important for my students to confront the life-threatening nature of being Black in America. However, I would like to add texts to the mix that include Black characters, particularly significant Black male characters, who survive the end of the book—why couldn't my students read Adichie's *Americanah* as well as *Things Fall Apart*, especially given the literary genealogy that connects them? As it is, I frequently make spontaneous book recommendations, but I must acknowledge that texts carry a significant weight when they are assigned, not merely suggested, by teachers.

I need to rethink, constantly, how I approach all texts as a white reader and how I lead my students in their understanding of these texts as their white teacher. For example, in that sophomore course, when a white student told me that she thought the use of dialect in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was "exaggerated," I should have done more than demur, "Well, I suppose I would defer to Hurston, who lived in Eatonville and was a great writer and an anthropologist, as to how realistic or exaggerated the manner of speaking is." I should have invited that 16-year-old white girl to examine why she, having never been Black in the Everglades in the 1930s, or a proven anthropologist and author, felt qualified and inclined to set her tastes equal to Hurston's—and then find her own superior, just as a white student of Yancy's (2008) somewhat more coarsely "positioned herself as the discernor of bullshit" (p. 228). I needed to push back, to ask my students where they were getting their information about pregnancy and poverty in Black communities. Why the only Black men they bring up by name are victims of violence or rap stars.

I need to keep examining my own whiteness and the ways that I enact that whiteness in my classroom, which will

mean naming it aloud with my students, even though “talking about whiteness with white students is not easy. It generates uncomfortable silences, forms of resistance, degrees of hostility, and a host of other responses that most of us would prefer to avoid” (McIntyre, A., qtd. in Yancy, 2008, p. 45). Johnson (2013) argues that “racial identities are performed in constellation with other identities and subjectivities, that is, gender, class, age, profession, in inseparable, in/visible ways” (p. 13) and encourages teachers to consider the “possibilities that emerge when [they] make constellations visible, that is, envision themselves and their students inhabiting multiple identities and subjectivities” (p. 13). In this essay, I have discussed my whiteness but also my being a woman and being a (sometimes-)disabled person. Perhaps I should share this paper with my students, as revealing and potentially inflammatory as doing so might be.

I need to consider all the above in relation to the school and wider community to which I belong. Our school demographics are approximately the same as those of other independent schools, where “white students make up 76% of the independent school population, while African American students make up only 10% of the independent school population” (National Center for Education Statistics et al., 2004, qtd. in DeCuir-Gunby, J.T., 2007, p. 26)—a number that is not zero. I have taught at this school for 12 years now and, in that time, I have taught just six Black male students. Furthermore:

African Americans are enrolling in predominately white, elite, independent schools in growing numbers. ... Studies have found that African American students at predominately white, independent schools often ... feel unrepresented in the curriculum. (DeCuir-Gunby, J.T., 2007, p. 26-27)

I will leave the contentious debate whether private schools *should* exist for another day, or another author. For now, I work in one that I love dearly, and in my classroom, I have living, breathing students—some Black—whom I love dearly. I need to consider, as do my fellow teachers, not only how we are underrepresenting our Black students in our curriculum, but also how representations of Black people in our curriculum may snatch Black students’ bodies through a white gaze and then return these students’ bodies to them as lascivious monstrosities, criminals, problems, or simply absences (Yancy, 2008). Independent school faculty are even more homogenously white than the students they teach. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), private school teachers nationwide are approximately 88 percent white, 4 percent non-Hispanic Black, and 5 percent Hispanic. Our school currently has no full-time Black male teaching faculty members. While reluctant to use the somewhat problematic term “diversity,” I do believe that organizations, institutions, and communities are better when more different types of people populate them—so how can I authentically contribute to that goal?

A Teacher’s Phantasm II

Janie Woods is back “in her room, the place tasted fresh again. The wind through the open windows had broomed out all the fetid feeling of absence and nothingness. She closed in and sat down. Combing road-dust out of her hair. Thinking” (Hurston, 1990, p. 192).

I am in my classroom at the end of the school year in June. Thinking. My dead characters lay all about, but they begin “to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sing, singing and sobbing” (Hurston, 1990, p. 192-193).

The sobbing and the singing: This is the sound of the challenge that critic Wayne Booth once posed to a collection of fiction readers: “Name fictions that changed your character—or made you want to change your conduct” (Keen, 2007, p. 66). I must refute, and encourage my students to refute, that reading fiction is merely relaxation or escape. If these characters are going to continue to die for us, before us (and they will, as I cannot in good conscience jettison Zora Neale Hurston from my course on marginality and the Other in literature), we must face their deaths as more than plot points, even deeply moving plot points. It is my job, my mandate, to “connect the dots between reactions to fiction and options for action in the real world” (Keen, 2007, p. 146).

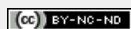
As Janie sits, Tea Cake is restored to her in her memory, and her love, and her thinking: “Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking” (Hurston, 1990, p. 193).

This is the promise I can make: not to undo all performances of damaging whiteness in my syllabus or my teaching, not to never assign another book with a dead Black male character, not to be a perfect teacher, but to never—*never*—finish feeling and thinking. And to point my feeling and thinking in the directions of justice, equity, and love.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Black Lives in College When Black Lives Didn't Matter that Much K through 12

by Sarah Trembath



PHOTO BY AIDEN MARPLES ON UNSPLASH

The Ivory Tower and the 'hood. The outside and the middle. Privilege and poverty. Knowledge and ignorance. The truth and a lie. Dichotomies as extreme as the colors black and white. Sometimes my profession has me both skating and crossing these lines, considering how to do so with my dignity and my students' needs simultaneously central in the decisions I make as a teacher.

Teaching Composition, Teaching Black Life

I teach composition and the occasional literature class to undergraduate students. My university's composition program is a rigorous and pedagogically driven one in which my colleagues and I draw our classroom and curricular practices from the rhetoric and composition scholarship and from each other's experiences. We design and teach writing-intensive, subject-based topics courses. We also design and teach courses in our university's core areas of required classes: *Complex Problems*, *Critical Thinking*, *Habits of Mind*, and *Diversity and Equity*. And we teach first-year writing. When we teach first-year writing, especially, we are readying students to do the work that will help them succeed throughout the rest of college. We are also helping our students think about things. If we are really doing our jobs well, it occurs to me often, our students come out on the other end of our courses thinking well about the things they write about, rather than just writing well. Sometimes those things relate to race and racism or, more specifically, to Black lives.

In the first class in the freshman series, students do a lot of that thinking about a community text. A committee in our department selects a book from among recent nonfiction publications that address current issues of importance. All incoming students read the book—which, more often than not has some relationship to race or class—and then they attend an author talk, discuss the book in class, research some topic related to it, and write about some aspect of that topic. From there, throughout the semester, students do other projects. In the process, they locate and evaluate sources, read critically, think critically about what they've read, and synthesize ideas, take positions and formulate complex theses, develop those theses with well-supported argumentation, make choices in the modes of persuasion they employ, organize and reorganize their work, incorporate source materials, cite properly the sources they've used, and so on. They continue this development of skills in their second-semester course, Writing 101.

For this latter course, professors select our own topics and themes. My colleagues and I get to share an aspect of our own research. We get to spread a personal passion or at least tap into an interest. Students, too, get to tap into their own preferences. Presumably, they choose their 101 classes based on which topic intrigues them the most. In any given semester, the range of choices is vast and may or may not touch upon race and class dynamics. Topics, for instance, include feminism and gender, monsters, science fiction and technology, intimacy in the digital age, criminality, illness, dystopian media, TaNehisi Coates, country music, service

learning, and Hip Hop scholarship. My offering has long been the Hip Hop course.

That course has had many versions—*Hip Hop Poetics*, *Hip Hop Scholarship*, *Golden Era Hip Hop*—but all treat the subculture as worthy of serious study and rich with areas of exploration for students' research-based writing. It's a popular class, with long waiting lists and people talking about it on and even off campus. After all, it has primary source material like Queen Latifah's "Ladies First" and Eric B. and Rakim's *Paid in Full* on the syllabus. It's got cool book titles like *Prophets of the Hood* and *Black Noise* on the required reading list. The first assignment on the schedule is often, "Watch Lupe Fiasco's 'Bitch Bad' and, using text support from the lyrics and the video imagery, take a position on Fiasco's charge against the modern music industry. Sustain an argument in support of your position for 5 pages." Students think it sounds like fun.

Of course, I'm engaging all this material toward the goal of developing good academic writers. I teach in a manner that meets the course objectives. But I'm also, in many ways, *teaching Black Lives*. That is, in my Writing 101 Hip Hop class, and at times when our first-semester material has anything to do with race, racism, or Blackness, I am essentially *teaching Black Life* in addition to teaching composition.

In my first-semester course, race and class figure in heavily: If the community text has a progressive race/class bias, I find myself in the role of teaching history to provide understanding for my young students. If the community text is problematic, I put it in conversation with texts from minority-group thinkers who can better explain their own situation. Because my own research area and advanced degree are in Black studies, more often than not, those thinkers are Black.

In Literature, too, race and class play big roles. For me, the canon is expansive, and I make sure I include writers who not only have a range of origins and identities, but also a plurality of perspectives. At the multiracial, predominately White elite university where I teach, the material is almost always unsettling to someone or is, even more problematically, beyond the life experience and worldview of those I ask to interpret it. My teaching style often has me feeling, then, like I'm straddling two worlds, trying to blend them, creating good anti-racist pedagogy (specific to both Black studies and college writing), but doing so by trial and error. In the Hip Hop Studies writing classes in particular, I feel like I have succeeded in helping my students meet the primary goals of the class, but only half succeeded at whatever it is that moves non-Black people forward in their thinking about Black lives. The challenges to this latter, unofficial objective are many.

In my Hip Hop Studies writing courses, the aesthetics of the primary source material has been primarily Black. Historical and cultural contexts have been primarily Black. The scholarship and documentary films to which I expose my students—most of whom are neither racially Black, culturally urban, nor multicultural in their communities of origin—were almost always created by Black scholars and filmmakers. But my students aren't always prepared to talk

or write about Black lives or about the lives of the Latinx and working-class White artists who were also instrumental in creating Hip Hop culture. And so I turn for pedagogy to the cultural critics of Hip Hop scholarship and the thinkers in my [Black literary] tradition who've helped me understand the racial moment in which I live by making America's racial, political, and cultural history clear. Though, for the most part, they predated Hip Hop, people like James Baldwin, the Black Arts Movement writers, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, David Walker, DuBois, Fanon, Césaire, Manning Marable, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Walter Rodney, and Barbara Smith, among others, prepared me in many ways for the problem of teaching Hip Hop outside of Hip Hop's predominately Black urban context. For when one teaches Hip Hop on Hip Hop's own terms, one is teaching the history of the oppressed people of the world. One is teaching how those oppressed people express their genius in forms and with language instantly recognizable to their cultural kindred but usually foreign to outsiders. In the face of all that may oppress them in their communities of origin, Hip Hop artists are, to a larger degree than was intended for them, the agents of their own destinies and the tellers of their own stories. They create out of their own culture and arise out of their own history—a history that the Southern Poverty Law Center would call “hard history.” That is, their narratives contain things that are often hard for outsiders to stomach.

Hip Hop in its purest forms represents the periphery in a world with other things and other people at its center. But Hip Hop Studies—that brief semester or two in which students in the academy can study primary sources that were tagged on city walls, rapped over beats, and worked out on the dance floor—puts Black urban life at the center. Students writing on it must interpret it on its own terms if they are to be basically accurate about what they say, let alone astute and insightful in their analysis and argumentation. Thus, the periphery becomes the core, and its narrative escapes. Stark, often unspoken truths about the world in which we live come to light.

Hip Hop in its purest forms represents the periphery in a world with other things and other people at its center. But Hip Hop Studies—that brief semester or two in which students in the academy can study primary sources that were tagged on city walls, rapped over beats, and worked out on the dance floor—puts Black urban life at the center.

Hip Hop, as Black socialist historian Manning Marable said of other things, speaks truth “that reveals the true roots of massive exploitation and human degradation upon which the current world order rests” (Marable 3). “The word ‘periphery’ and capitalist ‘core’ share a common history,” he writes. Thus, the voiceovers in Brand Nubian’s “Meaning of the 5%” can make students of privilege at an elite university uncomfortable: “The poor have been made into slaves by those who teach lies,” the voice says. “They are witnessing conditions in the world that are produced by real men, but

they don’t see the real cause of the effect of their own suffering,” the song begins (Brand Nubian).

Race/class-privileged students of Hip Hop learn about the housing projects where the dances began and the rows of abandoned buildings where the visual art flourished. They also learn about the exploitative practices of record companies in their sky-high towers who courted young rappers and gave them shady record deals. And if they listen closely, perhaps to the opening track by Yasiin Bey (formerly known as Mos Def) on his acclaimed *Black on Both Sides* LP, students hear the echoes of the past from which the obvious wealth binaries arose:

My grandmomma was raised on a reservation
 my great-grandmama was, from a plantation
 They sang, songs for inspiration
 They sang, songs for relaxation
 They sang, songs, to take their minds up off that
 Fucked up situation
 I am, yes I am, the descendant
 Of those folks whose, backs got broke
 Who, fell down inside the gun smoke
 chains on their ankles and feet
 I am descendants, of the builders of your street
 tenders to your cotton money
 I am hip-hop
 I am rock and roll
 Been here forever
 They just ain't let you know
 I said, Elvis Presley ain't got no soul
 Chuck Berry is rock and roll
 You may dig on the rolling stones
 But they ain't come up with that style on they own
 Elvis Presley ain't got no soul
 Little Richard is rock and roll
 You may dig on the Rolling Stones
 But they ain't come up with that shit on they own

Students hear the song’s bare rhythm that evokes the chain gangs of yore, and they study the lyrics that assail White heroes and claim the birthright of a music tradition accurately, but rarely, attributed to Black genius. “Elvis was a hero to most, but he never meant shit to me,” as Public Enemy says.

Not surprisingly, I get mixed reactions to this material when I teach it. But I keep on teaching it. Entire worldviews, and their ancestral and immediate origins, express themselves through Hip Hop artists, and I insist that students know as much about such things as they can before they begin writing about them. Whether it’s Lupe Fiasco teaching the ugly history of Blackface minstrelsy or the new trap rappers actually “dancing the jig,” as it were; whether it’s Queen Latifah rhyming in front of video clips of South African freedom fighter Winnie Mandela or any number of more recent artists dripping in the bling mined by South Africa’s underclass, artistic genius and hard history are there side by side.

It’s not uncommon for students to enter my Hip Hop Studies writing class without a solid K-12 education on any of the things Fiasco, Latifah, and other nation-conscious

rappers like Bey describe. If their primary and secondary teachers used commercially produced textbooks without presenting counter-texts, they likely know a national history of near-perfect patriarchs and neatly resolved national crises. (See James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and other textbook bias analyses cited in Trembath 2020.) But this is not the history of the periphery, which becomes core in a Hip Hop Studies class. The details of the physical abuse that kept Bey's ancestors in chains, the apartheid of the first nation reservations to which he alludes, the conscripted labor and early prison-industrial conspiracy that replaced enslavement, and the flowering of Black genius—despite all the rest—in the roots of rock and roll, rap, and other artistic genres are often brand new to my students.

It is common for them to enter with a fondness for today's commercial rap music, with its propensity toward embarrassingly degrading representations of Black life, and a feeling as if those images explain and accurately represent Black people. As Black lesbian feminist socialist literary critic Barbara Smith once wrote about the outsider's gaze on Black women, many of my students have "a specialized lack of knowledge" (Smith 20) concerning Black urban life. When they write from that vacuum, they write stereotypes: *Black people equate with urban poor. "Urban poor" equates with criminality. Braggadocio and battle lyricism equate with arrogant hypermasculinity and violent aggression. And violent aggression is innate and never performative*—like it is in cowboy movies, mafia shows, war flicks, and heavy metal videos. In rap, according to those of my students who have been fooled by the performative identities of so many thugged-out rappers, rap-star posturing arises from the real-life criminality of performing artists. As a result of my students operating from positions of "not knowing" (Smith 20), they sometimes write their freshman papers based on stereotypes and misunderstandings. "Men in the black community don't stay with their families or treat women well," I sometimes read. "Black men can't show their feelings," I've read once or twice. Student-writers sometimes bind themselves to those not-knowing stances and indulge labelling fallacies, circular logic, and in-group biases to support those stances. "Black men die violent, unnatural deaths because they come from a culture of murder," according to one student who appeared to be White but later confessed that he *is* Black and spent his time on campus passing for White.

It's a lot sometimes. I find myself letting a tiny bit of "not knowing" go but mostly working hard to correct it, pedagogically preempt it, address it in some way as if, by correcting the paper, I am correcting the real-life problem of anti-Blackness in all its many forms.

Smith, in her essay "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" that first appeared in a 1978 issue of *Radical Teacher*, demonstrates how, as Black academics in the trenches among Others, we must create and adapt pedagogy to bring humanity, truth, and dimension to Black life. Hers was a scathing critique of the White feminist and general male disregard for and misinterpretation of the work of Black women writers and a call for Black feminist critique of Black women's work that even four decades later serves to remind me why this otherwise joyous work of mine is so fraught. "For whites," she says harshly but not mistakenly,

their specialized lack of knowledge is inextricably connected to their not knowing in any concrete or politically transforming way that Black women of any description dwell in this place. Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are, in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness, beneath consideration, invisible, unknown. (Smith 20)

Most of my students don't know us. They don't know our men. How do I teach the material? How do I get them to write from a position of understanding?

Like urban Black men in my Hip Hop classroom context, Black women, for Smith, had long been "double nonentities" (21) under the gaze of the White male Other. It was obvious to her that a "Black women have been viewed critically by outsiders" and so there was a "necessity" for a Black feminist criticism to correctly interpret the "state of Black women's culture and the intensity of *all* Black women's oppression" (Smith 20). Our lives needed *us* to interpret them. Smith made that the standard. She rejected the margins, moved herself and her folk to the center, and demanded that anyone speaking of her kind—i.e., viable, skilled, Black female literary writers who rendered their lives on their own terms—be competent to interpret the material. In this spirit, I too stand in the gap, and I offer my students the work of all those who have stood in the gap for Black lives. In Hip Hop Studies, that may be Tricia Rose, Imani Perry, Robin D.G. Kelly, Crystal Belle, KRS-One, or any of the many others whose scholarship on our art form provides a proper lens. And my students devour it. Lightbulbs go on.

So why do I still read so many stereotypes?

"Hip Hop is important because African Americans never had a voice or any writers to say what they think," I read in a paper. "Black men rape more," I read in another. I describe the literary history. I provide the crime stats. *Am I scaffolding a skill—teaching research-based writing—or trying to scaffold worldviews? Is it even possible to teach Black Life well to Others outside the community or the experience? Is anyone doing this work well? This feels like shit.*

The problem of teaching Black life, especially Black urban male life in my experience in predominately White comp and lit classrooms, is that it feels urgent but somewhat impossible at the same time. It sometimes feels like a downright Sisyphean task to open their minds to the complexity and three-dimensionality of Black urban men. The men who populate Hip Hop are often "viewed very critically by outsiders" in the academy. They are odd "nonentities" that are somehow simultaneously mythical, revered, mistrusted, and despised. The students who stereotype them the most in their writing resist lessons that contradict the notions they hold. They often appear hesitant to learn about the "brutally complex systems of oppression" that many in the Black urban male identity dramatize in their art. These men's real lives must be "beneath consideration, invisible" to students entering my classrooms with anti-Black, often subconscious biases. Thus, my classroom becomes the "space needed for exploration" of truth. I open it up for that purpose as I move things along toward the

official college comp goals. *But am I asking too much of my students? Am I taking too much on?*

As I redefine those goals and search for strategies in meeting both sets of objectives, my successes become pedagogy, and my failures become frustration and reason for better pedagogy. Smith’s work in pioneering a viable literary criticism for Black women writers illuminates obstacles in my own attempts to sustain a dignified, focused, and true comp class that draws its reading, viewing, and listening material from Black life. Smith’s work makes me feel less alone. It sets precedent for going back to the drawing board again and again and building the principle that Black life matters enough to be interpreted with accuracy. Students must be challenged to know when they know something and enter the rest with inquiry instead of certainty. Professors teaching Black lives in communities where Black life may not have mattered before our classroom, then, must take the time to provide historical and cultural context for students, must teach critical thinking, and must devote ourselves to finding and honing our own best anti-racist practices as they arise in our classrooms. We should also make time for self-care, take breaks from the work, and tune into how others are doing similar work.

The *Sankofa* Ethic and Critical Thinking

When I teach the literature and/or lyricism of people of color, I approach each subtopic with the *sankofa ethic* central in my thinking. *Sankofa* is an Akan/Ghanaian ethic emphasizing the “wisdom of learning from the past to build for the future” (Willis 188). People invoking this ethic understand the importance of going “back to the past” (Willis 189); they understand the danger of forgetting. The Western notion most closely associated with *sankofa* is *historicity*, which could be described as (a) an awareness that everything is situated in time and history and (b) an expressed appreciation of origins and influences in anything that one might study. Historicity is philosophical and intellectual, and *sankofa* is spiritual and cultural. I doubt that it matters which concept an educator holds in mind; it matters only that s/he contextualizes lessons in the history that grounds them.

Even though compositionists like myself concern ourselves with theses and text support and citation, we also concern ourselves with factual accuracy and insightful analyses. We can’t assume our students know what we need them to know in order to research and write with accuracy and empathy on traditions other than their own. It could be tempting to put aside the historical contextualization—after all, that duty should fall on teachers of subjects like history and sociology. But many—if not most—US students emerge from Eurocentric secondary educations with deep biases (Trembath 2018), and *sankofa* is an ethic; as such, it requires all non-history teachers to go above and beyond what we may ordinarily do.

In order to assess what my students already know about topics central to our first-year text series or a given literary text, and therefore what I may need to reach back for in order to teach them, I have them access their prior knowledge about a given racially significant topic. In my first-semester course, for example, before selecting counterbalancing material to this or that first-year text, I’ve had to ask them to free-write about the labor history of the American South; about certain countries in Africa and Asia; and about the history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. When it comes to the Hip Hop class, I have asked what they know about Black history, the Black vernacular, Black art, and even about the drug trade so often referenced in Hip Hop songs. In all but a very few cases, students knew next to nothing about any of those topics before they approached their first-year texts. (Interestingly, students educated abroad knew more on all of these subjects.) The *sankofa* ethic requires that these stereotypes and gaps in knowledge be acknowledged and addressed.

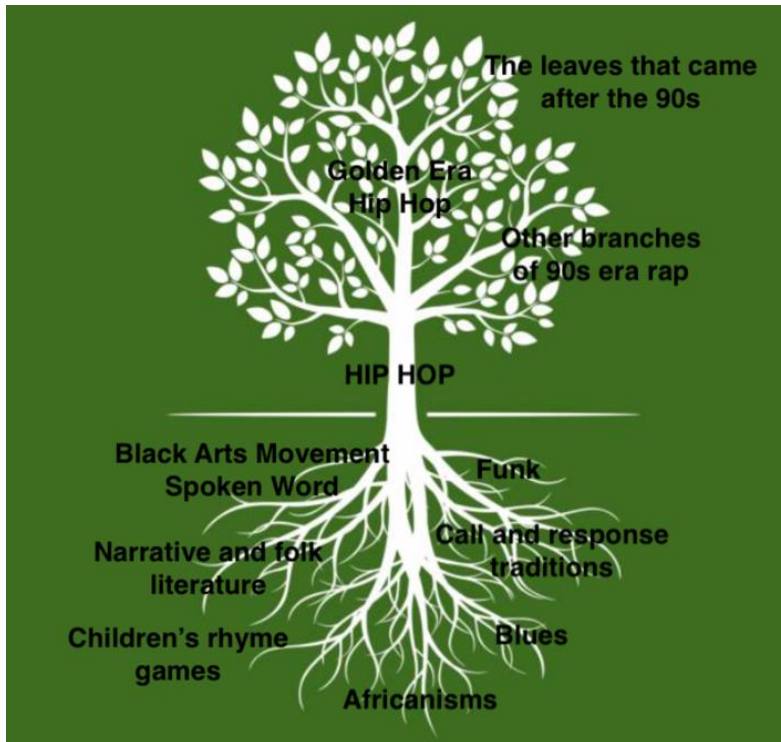
It can feel like this practice takes time away from course objectives. But, as Smith wrote, for texts to be understood, “they have to be talked about [and] examined in such a way that the basic intentions of the writers are at least considered” (Smith 20). This is as true for graffiti painters, dancers, emcees, deejays, producers, and fashion designers as it is for literary writers. And so in Hip Hop, I may teach LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka’s entire *Blues People* in order to enable my students to understand the basics of Black art: how jazz improvisation predates freestyling, how blues narratives and bad-man folk tales evolved into rap narratives and gangsta rap posturing, what Africanisms remain in Black American culture, and so on.

Sometimes, in the interest of time, I make very simple graphics to compress enormous amounts of material into a one-class teachable back-lesson. Here’s one on all of Black American History:

These elements of Hip-Hop culture (and Hip-Hop culture itself) arise out of the history and culture that came before it.

AMERICAN SLAVERY	RECONSTRUCTION	"JIM CROW"	CIVIL RIGHTS	BLACK POWER	HIP HOP
1619 to 1865	ABOLITION	1870s to 1965	50s & 60s	60s & 70s	1970s TO...

Here's another I used to contextualize today's Hip Hop in its root forms.



I also began requiring a midterm exam with basic concepts on which a student is required to score a B or higher in order to be allowed to write the paper at all. Bad scholarship can take the form of “barely disguised cultural imperialism,” according to Smith (21). It constitutes what she might’ve called a “racist flaw” (22), and I don’t want my students writing it. So my midterm contains those things that one must know to be competent to discuss the topic. Students start their research and writing projects much more informed than they did when I operated from my own misassumptions on what they already knew.

I also make sure that, in addition to historical and cultural foundations, I support non-Black/urban students in developing critical thinking skills as they approach Black life from the outside. I would like them to think analytically about race and class by getting them to question presumptions and ask questions that lead to better understandings and therefore more sophisticated writing. I pull ideas from the many works of Richard Elder and Linda Paul (2020) on critical thinking and apply them to faulty thinking about Black life in a way that enables me to discuss racist ideation without accusing the student of “being racist.” I introduce these ideas—critical questioning, egocentrism, and sociocentrism—on the first or second day of class, and then I refer back to them when students present misassumptions as certainties or interpret aspects of a culture foreign to them from their own cultural lens:

1. Critical thinkers ask questions. Students who are falling back on stereotypes are beginning with answers instead of inquiries. Studying questioning methods can help us lead students

away from certainties based in unexamined racial biases (Elder and Paul 2005).

2. Critical thinkers examine their own thinking for egocentric and sociocentric biases After I teach some of Elder and Paul’s basic ideas on metacognition and good thinking (as a precursor to good writing), I can challenge students without confrontation when I encounter racism in their work. I can point to one of Elder and Paul’s charts and engage students in questioning about egocentric and sociocentric thinking. I might then ask, “How much of this came from your life experience (or culture) instead of the material? What might you find that challenges your own assertion if you research this idea?” and encourage them to develop what Elder and Paul call “open-minded inquiry,” “valuable intellectual traits,” and “universal intellectual standards” (Elder and Paul 2020).

I feel I made good progress with these basic practices and a few others that arose organically out of my trial and error over the semesters.. And most students learned how to write for college. Their critical thinking and analytical skills often improved as well. And many came away with a body of knowledge about an important subculture that they hadn’t known much about before my class. After these lectures and the history lessons, some non-Black students tell me things like, “I had no idea Hip Hop was this deep.” Others, especially Latinx and Eastern European students, tell me of the origins of the folk traditions in their communities and how those have similar roots in resistance. I realize I’ve built some bridges. But others continue to resist and retain stereotypes: A 19-year-old former boarding school student from suburban Connecticut once told me that KRS-One was “exaggerating” about police brutality in one of his anthems about police violence, “Sound of Da Police.”

“Can we give him the benefit of the doubt of knowing what’s going on in his community?” I asked. I explained then about emcees as griots and writers as eyewitnesses. But the student remained unconvinced.

I couldn’t get the conversation out of my mind, even when I went home. I wondered what this kid would be in life, how he would treat us when he encountered us in his life.

Conversations like this grew increasingly tiring over the years, and they started staying with me when I went home. I found it emotionally exhausting to keep correcting and preempting. “We refuse social justice projects which require us to frontload a lot of learning or consciousness-raising,” write Tuck and Yang (qtd in Rodriguez 6). Looking back, I can see why they would.

Sometimes I got close to veering too far from my job description in attempts to keep meeting their strange assertions with learned and heartfelt counters. I found

myself surprised to realize that it exhausts and saddens me when I, in my own unchecked thinking, failed to transmit a culture, a history, the lived experience of others into each young mind that sat in my classrooms. Those times when the racism continued to flow through the papers I graded wearied me. It began to feel “overwhelming to break such a massive silence” (Smith 20) on the full humanity of Black urban men. And so, in April of 2018, I decided it would be my last Hip Hop studies freshman writing class. “I am filled with rage,” Smith wrote (20). “They have yet to struggle with the deep racism in themselves that is at the source of this blindness.”

A New Practice

Early in my teaching career, the Black and anti-imperialist world literature I’d studied at my HBCU alma mater was energizing and inspiring to my students. But they were Black, Latinx, and working-class White high schoolers. What I taught felt validating to them. When I transitioned to academia and began to teach Black lives in predominately White and very expensive schools, it was also exciting sharing this material, opening minds, and getting great work from engaged students. The stereotypes came through from time to time, but they felt occasional. Helping students correct flawed thinking in their writing (for all racism is, at the very least, flawed thinking) felt like a challenge that I enjoyed rising to meet.

But as the years wore on and the political climate of the country changed, it began to feel far more difficult and stressful. A few times I shed tears of frustration. When I taught Hip Hop, I was sharing a love of mine from a culture that I adore and belong to, and so those sentences equating Black men with criminals and using terms like *Black* interchangeably with *poor* and, from there, *violent* and so on, just started to feel like daggers. Sometimes it felt like the lens on lives of people of color was unbearably constant, and the floodlight was harsh. It felt clear, as cultural activist and Black writer Toni Cade Bambara once said, that I was a soldier in “the war... being fought *over the truth*” (17). But I felt like I was losing: *Why couldn’t I dislodge the stereotypes, interrupt the faulty thinking, and protect myself from the harm that came when I read papers prejudiced against my own kind?*

In the midst of emotional exhaustion, I was experiencing, I attended a few faculty meetings on campus in which people in administrative positions shared illuminating data that taught me something about my students’ lives, something which helped me hold on to the affection I have for them while struggling through the muck. In one, an administrator shared with faculty data demonstrating that an overwhelming number of our incoming students report growing up in communities that they referred to as populated “entirely or almost entirely by people of my same culture.” For non-Black students, how much *could* Black lives have mattered in their communities and educations?

I learned in another meeting—in which the same data from that first-year student survey was also presented—that students who reported feeling like they “belonged” on

campus were far more likely to be White. Many Black students reported feeling like they “don’t belong” on our campus. A lot of this tension about the ownership of academic space, academia, and knowledge itself was playing out in the papers I received, and I was trying to set it all right—all in time for that big paper at the end of the semester.

A lot of this tension about the ownership of academic space, academia, and knowledge itself was playing out in the papers I received, and I was trying to set it all right—all in time for that big paper at the end of the semester.

I attended yet another meeting in which my colleagues in the School of International Studies spoke of their classes on cross cultural communication, and I thought, *for many of my students this is a skill they do not yet have*. There was an unspoken competency that I was expecting or trying desperately to provide, though they simply weren’t ready. They, and I too, needed reeducation before meeting one another on the borderland of race in higher education.

I’ve read quite a bit of antiracist educational scholarship in the last year—A. Suresh Canagarajah, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Anneeth Kaur Hundle, Asao Inoue, Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young, and others—and I’ve grown. But the portion of it that I found most convicting is that which has shone light on the nature of the *insistence* that was driving the emotional energy of my teaching. Diab et al. (31) note that antiracist “self-work with others [needs] to be reflective, dialogic, and affective, as well as ongoing.” Their description of this work invokes pacing and patience and interchange and acceptance. “This work cannot be a one-time deal,” they write. It requires “ongoing self-work, courageous dialogue, and the willingness to be disturbed” (Diab et al. 31).

Marsellas, whose “Off Scaffolding and Into the Deep End” I discovered recently in *Radical Teacher 115*, unsettles me further. He writes that the multicultural model of university teaching promotes “coexistence and understanding” (14) and treats empathy as if it “follows from identification and similarity” (14). But he claims that full knowledge of such a complex topic as those explored in the literature of marginalized writers is impossible for many students, and socially just ends are better served by what he calls “deep-end teaching” (14), which “dismisses the supposed need for common ground.” It instead “asks students to establish a certain level of comfort with radical difference” (14).

“Within a multicultural scaffolding model,” on the other hand, “a professor’s invitation for students to speak on volatile subjects without mastery [may look like] we have set an elaborate ideological trap” or are feeding insecurity “about [students’] ability to master knowledge of a subject position they don’t occupy” (Marsellas 16; emphasis mine). This latter expectation is so clearly what I was doing, was so hard for me to see, and has been so long in coming that it’s

utterly “meta,” as my students would say: a teacher takes a long time to see something problematic in her approach to mastering a skill working with other people taking long times to see what is problematic in their approach to mastering their skill.

I find, in approaching this likely solution, that I don’t want to be a teacher of “Black Men are People Too” through Hip Hop lyricism. I’m equipped to “frontload a lot of learning or consciousness-raising” on Racism 101, which Marsellas eschews, but I’m not sure I’m temperamentally equipped for deep-end teaching. If I was, I’d have to study Marsellas very closely, as he was onto something with me. But the adjustments I made last year likely brought me right back to my professional center, a place where I won’t likely find myself teaching much “Basic Black Life”. My life is already filled with the obstacles and frustrations racism presents.

In my classrooms, I continue to put texts in conversation with one another—problematic Eurocentric texts with Black and other minority perspectives, Black texts with historicizing material—and still approach my lesson planning with the *sankofa* ethic and critical thinking principles at the fore. But I have a new home for my Hip Hop Studies class and a new topic for my freshman topics course. That is, I now teach an upper-level literature class on just two Hip Hop emcees, instead of a first-year writing class on the whole genre, and I now lead my second-semester freshmen in a high school history book rhetorical analysis intensive.

Because Black Lives truly do matter, Hip Hop Studies is worthy of higher-level classes in which I can require prerequisites and expect certain competencies. In this new incarnation of my class, I can slow down the pace and make the whole course about the material instead of using the material as a springboard for research and writing projects. The students and I have room to breathe, discuss, ruminate, question, explore. The students—and the real lives under scrutiny—deserve it.

My first-year students, on the other hand, are now exploring bias in educational materials like the ones they had in high school. They study actual high school textbooks and read James Loewen, Howard Zinn, Carter G. Woodson, and other pioneers in questioning foundations of knowledge and bias in education. I lead them in rhetorical reading strategies, and they choose a “traditionally marginalized community” (e.g., women, LGBTQ, Indigenous, Latinx, working-class White, and Black people) and make their own discoveries with the reading methods. I’m about to enter my second semester of teaching it, as the pilot class went well enough. There was a bit of what students called “freaking out,” as they uncovered the rampant spin doctoring of history. But it wasn’t *my* freaking out, and I found myself leading students through the muck with a greater degree of comfort. It seems they feel well led, and I feel better suited for this method.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Writing for Justice in First-Year Composition (FYC)

by Shane A. McCoy

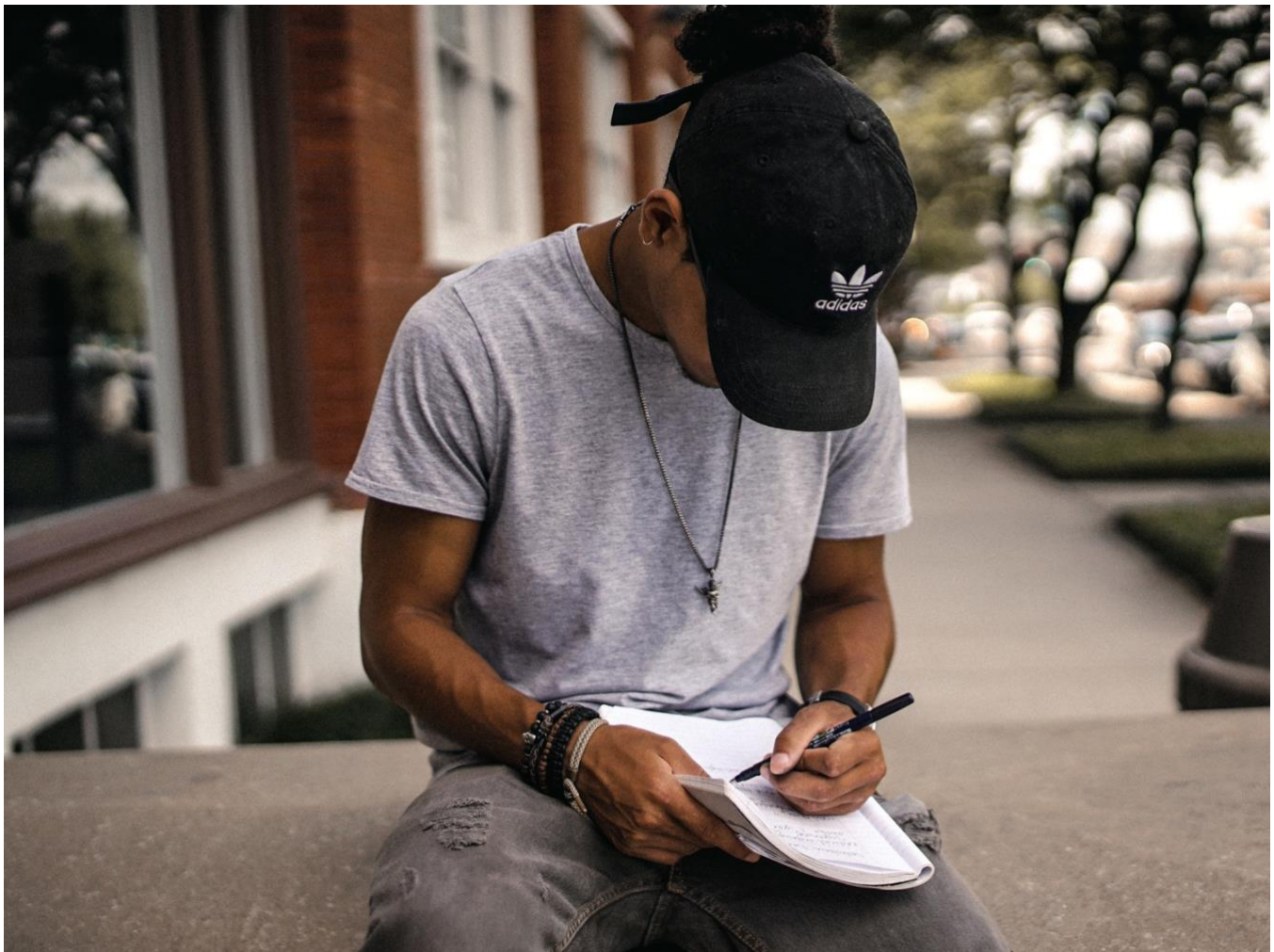


PHOTO BY BRAD NEATHERY ON UNSPLASH

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an education methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and mark the beginning of a new era in Western history.

—Richard Shaull, preface to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Professional women and men of any specialty...are individuals who have been "determined from above" by a culture of domination which has constituted them as dual beings...These professionals, however, are necessary to the reorganization of the new society. And since many among them—even though "afraid of freedom" and reluctant to engage in humanizing action—are in truth more misguided than anything else, they not only could be, but ought to be, reclaimed by the revolution.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

I. Introduction

In August 2014, the deaths of unarmed black men in the United States sparked a renewed debate about "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva 2010, 1-4) and the implicit (as well as explicit) policing and surveillance of non-white bodies. After Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri, one trending topic that gained widespread appeal was #FergusonSyllabus created by Marcia Chatelain, an associate professor of history at Georgetown University. Chatelain created #FergusonSyllabus as a call to educators to develop curricula that spoke to the contemporary moment regarding race relations in the U.S. In "Teaching the #FergusonSyllabus" (2014), she explains that what she desired most from the Ferguson event was a dialogue between the academy and the public: "I asked professors who used Twitter to talk about Ferguson and to use #FergusonSyllabus to recommend texts, collaborate on conversation starters, and inspire dialogue about some aspect of the Ferguson crisis" (*DissentMagazine.org*).

The dialogue initiated by Chatelain's hash tag prompted educators in primary schools to also seek advice for how to teach students about this event and contextualize such tragedies within an intelligible framework for young minds. Indeed, what captured Chatelain's attention in the chaos of

Ferguson were not the scenes of civil unrest broadcasted across the nation; rather, her interest was in what students in Ferguson might face as they return to a new school year. With #FergusonSyllabus, Chatelain "wanted other educators to think about how painful the introduction to a new school year would be for this town. I hoped to challenge my colleagues on campuses across the country to devote the first day of classes to a conversation about Ferguson" (*DissentMagazine.com*). She ends with a call to action for all: "Whether you find yourself teaching in a schoolhouse, in your living room with your children, at a community meeting filled with movement members, in a church basement with others who seek racial reconciliation, or in a detention center common room," #FergusonSyllabus provides an abundant amount of resources for initiating a conversation for "what is being taught, what is being felt, and what is being created each day."

While Chatelain's call to action, for teachers to teach in ways that offer students a historically-contextualized curriculum that reflects and responds to the social, cultural, and political realities of the current moment, speaks to the realities of racial injustice in the U.S., her remarks do not address the importance of writing as a vehicle for facilitating such discussions about social justice and enabling students with the critical capacities to transfer social justice knowledge from the classroom to the street. Specifically, this call to action does not consider the affective dimensions of social justice and how the general public and students, in particular, might process these emotions both within the classroom and beyond it. Thus, my article advances a theoretical apparatus for advancing social justice in FYC and serves as a pedagogical apparatus for facilitating students' emotional and cognitive awareness of events related to social justice issues, such as those captured in Ferguson, Missouri. I coined *writing for justice*, and I offer readers close-scrutiny and analyses of teaching artifacts that animate my course syllabi in order to understand how FYC functions as a vehicle for advancing social justice.

Specifically, this framework for *writing for justice* must entail 1) affective approaches to learning; 2) demystifying of the effects of Empire, colonialism, and imperialism; 3) developing students' consciousness oriented towards action; 4) creating pathways for successful knowledge transfer, from the learning environment of the classroom to the learning environment of the street; 5) privileging interrogative approaches to learning material rather than prescriptive approaches to learning material; and 6) privileging the importance of empirical research to support and advocate for social justice pedagogies. Throughout this essay, I offer close readings of my curricula and bridge the theoretical framework of *writing for justice* to a practice of *writing for justice* in curriculum design and development. Employed through critical writing practices, *writing for justice* functions as a vehicle for reading and interrogating social injustices, and, as I argue here, this aspect of the curriculum provides the framework for crafting a FYC curriculum that aims to transform undergraduate students' cognitive schemas by forming new "*impressions*" (Ahmed 2004) of social justice. I investigate how to *teach for social justice* (Alexander 2005) vis-à-vis writing pedagogy in FYC by engaging undergraduates in the study of social justice at

a time when the neoliberal nation-state privileges and rewards those who pursue prestigious degrees and lucrative careers in science, engineering, technology, and mathematics.¹ Since the 1970s, neoliberalism has re-shaped how nation-states craft economic policies that purposefully manipulate the free-market in favor of wealthy elites. Neoliberalism has also “become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on *ways of thought* to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way *many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world*” (Harvey 3, emphases added). Indeed, neoliberalism’s emphasis on competitive hyper-individualism, entrepreneurship, capital accumulation, and privatization impact the worldviews of many undergraduates who aspire to prestigious careers. These students, however, are not to blame, as the current atmosphere on many university campuses condition undergraduates to desire such positions (Binder et al. 2015).

To disrupt the ethos of the neoliberal university, I turn to critical pedagogy, curriculum theory, and feminist affect studies in order to understand how social justice pedagogy impacts composition students’ learning about social justice within the neoliberal era of expanding social inequalities and imperial sprawl. The theoretical depth and understanding offered in critical and feminist pedagogies inform my concept of *writing for justice* for the classroom (Alexander 2005; Dua & Trotz 2002; Freire 2000; Giroux 1994 & 2006; Hong 2006; hooks 1989 & 1994; McLaren 1994; Melamed 2011; Mohanty 2003; Sheth 2013; Stitzlein 2012). Here, I outline how I teach students to *write for justice* in the design and development of my curricula. Specifically, I describe how the curriculum, course content, and other scaffolding procedures serve as catalysts for advancing social justice in FYC.

To explain further, *writing for justice* is indebted to critical pedagogy, in general, and feminist pedagogy, in particular. As an instructional method, feminist pedagogy aims to reform the relationship between the teacher and the student; to promote student empowerment, build community, privilege voice, and respect personal experience; and, finally, feminist pedagogy challenges traditional pedagogical notions (Allen, Walker, and Webb 2002). These commitments translate to pedagogical commitments in the classroom in the forms of participatory learning/ “dialogic” learning, the validation of personal experience for academic inquiry in the classroom, social understanding and activism, critical thinking, and fostering open-mindedness to diverse perspectives (Hoffman and Stake 1998). Simply put, a critical feminist pedagogy aims to enable students with a better understanding of social justice and promote an active student citizenry (Mohanty 2003). As a “pedagogical cartography” (Giroux 1994), *writing for justice* demystifies the effects of Empire, colonialism, and imperialism; *writing for justice* functions as an intellectual and practical framework for teaching writing oriented towards advancing social justice. I construct this critical pedagogical apparatus from curriculum theory, feminist affect studies, and critical and feminist pedagogy in

order to examine the affective dimensions of writing in FYC, which includes the cognitive and emotional aspects of writing and how this practice conditions students’ affective relationship to social justice. *Writing for justice* therefore cultivates an engaged skepticism regarding education as a solution to social inequalities and injustices.

I offer *writing for justice* as a philosophy of composition pedagogy, a composition pedagogy that is rooted in an intersectional feminist praxis that makes central critiques of culture—national culture, academic culture, institutional culture, and classroom culture. *Writing for justice* fosters what Chela Sandoval coins as “oppositional consciousness.” In *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Sandoval develops “oppositional consciousness” from the counter-hegemonic political movement of U.S. Third World feminism and Louis Althusser’s theory of “ideology and the ideological state apparatuses” (2). For her, this concept employs “oppositional practices” that developed from “the Civil Rights movement, the women’s movement, and ethnic, race, and gender liberation movements” (2). Simply put, “oppositional consciousness” is commensurate with other thinkers’ and intellectuals’ theorizing types of critical consciousness that are counter-hegemonic; notable among them are W. E. B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness” (*The Souls of Black Folk* 7), Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestizo consciousness” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 102), and Paulo Freire’s “*conscientizacao*” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 159). What they have in common is that opposition to hegemony is enabled by critical consciousness; through writing in FYC, I aim to cultivate a student’s critical consciousness, one that is invested in opposing social injustices.

Critical pedagogy’s lack of focus on students’ experiences motivates me to inquire how writing pedagogy might function as a vehicle for motivating students to take up social justice in their coursework and everyday lives. While critical pedagogy neglects in-depth research into students’ experiences, the field of composition studies affords me valuable insight into research methodologies that measure the transfer of student learning (Bawarshi & Reiff 2011; Beaufort 2007; Yancey 2011). Specifically, transfer research in composition has begun to shed light on the transferability of writing skills, but we still do not know enough about the transferability of critical and feminist pedagogies in writing about literature courses, in general, and to what extent critical and feminist pedagogies transform students’ attitudes towards social justice, in particular. Despite the theoretical depth and understanding in feminist pedagogy (Allen, Walker, & Webb 2002; Hoffman & Stake 1998; Mohanty 2003), what we do not know is *how* intersectional feminist pedagogies affect the kinds of change we hope to see in students’ understanding of social justice. Specifically, what we don’t know is *how* students transfer knowledge acquired from a writing about literature curriculum that aims to transform students’ critical capacities to read and intervene in social injustices. Indeed, the dominant framing of scholarship in critical and feminist pedagogies is largely constructed from critical theory, the realm of abstractions, rather than extrapolated from critical

practice in the classroom, the arena of teacher and student experiences and understanding. In other words, critical pedagogy as a field would benefit greatly by adopting qualitative research approaches in order to understand the extent to which students experience the curriculum for better or for worse. Kathy Charmaz's (2000, 2006, & 2016) constructivist grounded theory approach is one particular qualitative method that comes to mind as an effective tool in amplifying student voices in research practices. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest that qualitative research be the dominant approach in critical pedagogy; rather, I intend to suggest that both theoretical and qualitative approaches should be placed in a symbiotic relationship with one informing the other, much like I demonstrate in this essay.

As such, critical pedagogy's failure to measure the efficacy of critical pedagogical practices through empirical approaches drives my interest in conducting qualitative research that measures the impact of critical pedagogy on student learning. Thus, for me, bridging social justice pedagogies with composition studies offers a new possibility for rethinking our pedagogical commitments and engaging students' curiosities about the larger world around them. If we wish to impress upon our students a desire for affecting social change, then understanding how students participate in alternative world-making projects that advance social justice is necessary for measuring the efficacy of critical pedagogy in composition courses.

Finally, I do not intend for *writing for justice* to be prescriptive, but, rather, interrogative. Arlo Kempf (2006) explains that to be "interrogative" is not to prescribe a certain way of teaching as much as it is concerned with interrogating particular types of knowledge production and intellectual projects that undergird Empire ("Anti-Colonial Education Historiography: Interrogating Colonial Education" 129). Although I do not espouse my pedagogy as prescriptive, I do believe that this pedagogical apparatus might be helpful for other teacher-scholars who are committed to social justice and remaking the university in the image of *public* education. My aim is also not to romanticize the classroom experience; rather, my hope is that critical pedagogy wedded to intersectionality as a teaching practice can be viewed as a productive methodology for intervening in unjust social practices at the university. This work begins with transforming how we teach our fields of expertise to our students.

II. *From the Classroom to the Street:* Creating Pathways for Knowledge Transfer by Activating Metacognition and Engaging Research and Revision

In this section, I discuss how *writing for justice* employs critical writing as a vehicle for students to learn about social justice in FYC. Specifically, I illustrate how *writing for justice* operates as a pedagogical tool for students to explore the fundamental skills needed to participate in knowledge transfer, in particular, through the "mindful abstraction"

(Perkins & Salomon 1988) of activating metacognition, performing research, and engaging the revision process. This section outlines the practical and theoretical elements behind my scaffolding procedures for writing assignments and how I teach students to navigate writing and revision processes.

My approach to writing for justice extends Shari Stenberg's understanding of the kinds of subversive research that can be performed in the neoliberal university vis-à-vis a "repurposing" of the composition classroom.

My approach to *writing for justice* extends Shari Stenberg's understanding of the kinds of subversive research that can be performed in the neoliberal university vis-à-vis a "repurposing" of the composition classroom. In *Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age* (2015), Stenberg argues that neoliberal values frame education "as job training" where "writing becomes a masterable, commodified skill whose purpose is deployment in the workplace." Within the neoliberal logic of the contemporary university, writing that serves the purpose of "civic engagement, personal inquiry, exploration of unfamiliar perspectives" all "become ancillary to more 'profitable' ends" (8). By explicitly focusing on process inquiry development, collaborative learning environments that employ dialogic learning, and critical reflection among diverse learners, Stenberg suggests that we undermine the logic of the neoliberal university whose sole aim is "predetermined outcomes or competencies" that can be quickly replicated and artificially implemented (8). In essence I aim to subvert free market ideology and hyper-competitiveness by training students to produce subversive research that works in the service of dismantling neoliberal agendas rather than reinforcing them. In other words, *writing for justice* is a pedagogical approach that aims to enlist students as knowledge producers of social justice, as they learn to explore their personal stakes in the issues and topics brought to bear in my classroom.

To explain further, metacognition and the real-world relevance are two central features that animate my sequencing protocol. As a concept, metacognition is "thinking about thinking."² Metacognition enables students to participate in the "deliberate mindful abstraction" that Perkins and Salomon (1988) suggest is necessary for high-road transfer, the type of transfer where higher-order critical thinking skills are developed (25).³ Metacognition is a primary feature of *writing for justice*, as I believe that metacognition and high-road transfer allow students to cultivate and transfer the higher-order thinking skills that are necessary for success in and beyond the university classroom. Moreover, metacognition allows students to be introspective and self-reflective about the new skills and knowledges they are acquiring in the classroom while, at the

same time, cultivating critical capacities to read and intervene into social injustices. Metacognition also encourages students to thoughtfully access their own belief systems and unveil unacknowledged worldviews. Thus, I train students in all of my classes to develop the ability to use metacognition, which when strategically activated enables students to build self-assessment skills through critical reflection about reading, writing, and general learning processes. In this way, *writing for justice* privileges metacognition as a tool for transferring knowledge from the classroom to the street, as I believe that the use of metacognition vis-à-vis the explicit framing of transfer opportunities may transform how students engage with the course content beyond classroom engagement and interaction.

I encourage students to activate transfer opportunities through metacognitive awareness and higher-order thinking skills by crafting assignments that allow them to assess the rhetorical effects of their writing choices and how their writing choices affect potential audiences. For example, in one short assignment for Racing 'America,' students composed a brief 110-word blurb for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. In the prompt, I explain to students that "[t]his assignment is two-fold: the first involves challenging your ability to write succinctly and make particular choices. The second fold requires you to critically analyze your own writing choices and how your writing might affect a potential reader of the book." I also pose guiding questions for students in the assignment: "What did you include in your blurb and why? What did you decide to omit and why? Who is the audience for your blurb and why? What trigger words did you use in order to generate audience interest and why?" These questions serve as entry-points into crafting a metacognitive response that attends to the emphases of the assignment—metacognitive awareness, rhetorical sensitivity, and audience reception.

Another assignment that requires students to participate in metacognitive awareness is a short assignment that asks students to choose a passage from the novel *Americanah* that they find to be of interest and close-read the passage. I ask them to consider "what stood out to you as important or significant in this passage?" and to "[d]evelop a claim on the purpose of this passage. How does the passage function in the novel? In other words, what might be the purpose (significance) of the passage?" Finally, students must "explain why you chose this particular passage. What did you find interesting? What in the passage appealed to you as a reader? Refer to your annotations to track your own thoughts about the passage." While this exercise might ask students to demonstrate an elementary skill, I find that this assignment is particularly significant for gauging students' interest in the novel and the context in which it is being presented—race, racism, and immigration laws and policies. So, while the genre of the assignment might be generic in form, structure, and requirements, the course content offers students an opportunity to work through their affective relationship to the course content by analyzing the novel through close-reading practices and articulate *why* they chose the passage based on their personal interests.

A third example is a free-write activity that asks students to consider how social justice links to their fields of study. To give readers an idea of what this looks like in practice, I ask students to free-write about social justice and discuss to what extent social justice is relevant to their majors. After five minutes of critical reflection, many students are not able to find explicit ways to link social justice to their concentrations. So, I prompt students to use their laptops or their smartphones to Google the keyword "social justice" and their major. For instance, an engineering major would Google "social justice and engineering." Or a chemistry student would Google "social justice and chemistry" or "social justice and physics." What students often discover is the extent to which social justice does, indeed, apply to their fields of study. What many students also discover is the vast amount of research on social justice as it applies to specific concentrations, such as science, engineering, technology, and mathematics. In turn, students learn the real-world relevance of social justice for their majors and *how* they might apply what they are learning in my classes to their majors. Edward, one of my most recent students from English 111 in Winter 2016, instantiates why this activity was impactful:

As an engineering major, my first thought was my connection to social justice was that I had no connection, and this was something I had never particularly thought about. Sure enough, after some googling, I came upon a book about how some people in STEM fields don't feel the need to join the conversation about social justice, and I was slightly shocked to see how accurately this described myself. After this exercise, I kind of brushed it off, but through reading *Abeng*, *Lucy*, and watching *Chelsea Does* I started to consider this. The final nail in the coffin was Bonilla-Silva's *Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation*, and his novel *Racism without Racists*. (Portfolio, Introduction)

As his introduction to his final portfolio for English 111 illustrates, Edward recognizes first, his initial disinterest in social justice as an engineering student, and second, how the sustained engagement with key texts from the course transformed his way of thinking about social justice for the better. By "bridging" (Perkins and Salomon 1988) the gap between STEM and social justice, I was able to facilitate Edward's intellectual understanding of the course's real-world relevance. Moreover, Edward's response reveals that I was able to create a sustained engagement with social justice from the beginning of the quarter to the end. As my data shows, many students must be cued in order to develop the critical capacities to read and intervene into social injustices. Indeed, motivating engineering students and other STEM majors to "buy in" to social justice might take much more work, especially given the fact that so many students view prestige and monetary gain as more important than advancing social justice principles. Universities and campus culture participate in the funneling of students into high power and high earning career fields, such as the technology industry, as students often feel pressured to obtain 'prestigious' jobs (Binder et al. 2015, 12). What is valuable for the implications of my research is

how the university can “transform students’ orientations in the world” (Binder et al 3).

The Google activity inspired the fourth example I wish to highlight—the final in-class reflection essay and the keywords utilized in the prompt. Like previous examples, the final reflection essay encourages high-road transfer between students’ critical thinking capacities and their everyday lives by asking students to “tell me the story of their experience taking this course.” I frame the assignment with explicit keywords such as “race,” “class,” “gender,” “sexuality,” “colonialism,” “immigration,” and “international and domestic human rights laws and policies.” The reflection essay provides students with an opportunity to reflect on the course content and provide substantial feedback on the course curriculum. Below, Artifact 1.1 represents the reflection essay prompt disseminated in my classes. The essay prompt also explicitly cues students to focus on both content and writing. I remind them of specific concepts we had discussed throughout the quarter and how they might relate those concepts to the essay. For instance, I remind students about course texts such as Patricia Hill Collins’s “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought” (1986), Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng*, and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*. I also remind them of key take-aways discussed for each of the course texts. The preliminary data offers valuable insight into how we might design and revise a social justice-oriented curriculum that attends to teaching for transfer.

In this final essay, you will tell me the story of your experience taking this course.

This essay positions you as the *insider*—you know what you have done in the class, what you have learned, and how you’ve overcome obstacles in your own learning throughout the quarter. This is also an opportunity to reflect on what you still need to work on for your own intellectual development. As the outsider to your intellectual progress, I’ll know more about you and the progress you have made than I did when we began the course—but I won’t know it as you know it.

Prompt: As you look back on all the work you have done these past 10 weeks (feel free to consult your notes), think about what kinds of difference this class has *or* has not made for you as a reader and writer. Think carefully in regard to the course material and content. What are the most important aspects that you have learned? To what extent have you improved upon your reading and writing strategies? Do you envision these aspects that you have learned to transfer to other learning environments, both formal and informal? To what extent will you look at literature and texts differently, and how will you approach writing about literature moving forward? How has the “outsider within” impacted your own intellectual development in regard to race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, immigration, and/or international and domestic human rights laws and policies? To what extent have the texts impacted your knowledge of social justice? If so, *how so?* If not, *why not?*

This essay is scaffolding for self-reflection in your final portfolio project and an opportunity for you to practice

metacognition and discuss the course content. The more honest, thoughtful and convincing you are about the course content and the challenges you will still be facing as you leave this class, the better positioned you will be to practice self-efficacy throughout the academic year.

Artifact 1.1—Reflection Essay Prompt

Despite this initial qualitative data, I remain mindful that students will make the connection to social justice in their own ways despite (rather than because of) my scaffolding procedures. This does not, however, usurp the power of scaffolding and cueing students to focus on social justice as a critical lens for analysis. In fact, I would argue that explicit cueing may simply cultivate students’ critical capacities more effectively and perhaps might make it easier for some to make the cognitive leap to understanding the sociocultural implications of advancing social justice. Students are not individual actors but, rather, are *products of particular organizational structures and institutions* (Binder 2013; Binder et al. 2015). With contributions to our curricula such as the ones I have described throughout this article, we may become more effective in transforming students’ mind-sets beginning at the micro-level of the curriculum and the keywords featured in our writing assignments.

Engaging Research and Revision

In addition to activating students’ use of metacognition through reflective writing assignments that enable them to transfer knowledge of social justice beyond FYC, I engage students in the research and revision process by instructing them in how to author original texts and how to make connections to real world contexts, both of which are fundamental aspects of *writing for justice*, enlisting students as knowledge producers in the classroom, and emphasizing the importance of transfer opportunities. For me, both research and revision are pedagogies of empowerment; in other words, teaching a writing course that emphasizes both research and revision teaches students how to manipulate library research to generate novel ideas and to implement revision as a process of self-assessment and becoming more critical of one’s own writing. Earlier, I explained how an “expansive framing” (Engle et al 2012) of course content motivates students to author original work and connect this work to prior learning experiences. When authoring knowledge, she “transfers-in” prior knowledge and understands how “[a]uthoring knowledge as a practice involves generating and adapting knowledge” (Engle et al 2012, 220). She adapts the content from prior contexts to new situations and makes generalizations based upon prior knowledge experience. This process makes her “accountable for continuing to share that content” and “[w]hen faced with a new problem that prior knowledge cannot directly answer, the student adapts his/her knowledge rather than say ‘Don’t know’ or giving up.” This intricate process of creating original work and making relevant the course content increases the possibility

that the student will transfer knowledge and “recontextualize” (Nowacek 2011) it from one context to the next.

Of this process theorized by Engle et al, two features are important for *writing for justice* and its impact on my curriculum design and development: first, how I encourage students to “connect settings”; and, second, how I encourage students to experience “authorship” of original work. One way that I actively promote students’ abilities to make connections to other contexts is the genre of the response paper from English 111. As a genre, the response paper gauges both student interest and close-reading skills. The response paper also allows students license to explore topics of interest to them, as they are free to choose their topic for the essay each week. In the prompt, I ask students to compose a “line of inquiry” and to “begin with a central question or concern you have about the course texts for that week.” I offer examples of how to begin their lines of inquiry with a “how,” “what,” or “why” question or set of questions. I frame the response papers as:

an opportunity to develop independent critical thinking skills, talking points for class discussions, and a way to facilitate your thinking about an upcoming paper. Therefore, you should treat these papers as formal academic assignments in which you pursue your line of inquiry in conjunction with close readings of a text and/or theoretical essay(s).

I remind students that I am not looking for whether or not “you provided the ‘right’ answer”; rather, I am looking for the “level of engagement you demonstrate in your assignment.” As a result, students view response papers as an opportunity to explore topics either mentioned in class or not mentioned in class. Additionally, students view the response papers as catalysts for conversation in future classes, as they are able to use their essays as points of reference during small and large group discussions.

In addition to the generic response paper prompt described above, two specific response paper prompts that instantiate the process of “connecting settings” in particular include Response Papers 4 and 5 prompts. While the genre of the response paper is inherently reader response criticism, my prompts for Response Papers 4 and 5 are more directive in their approach to enabling students with the critical skillset needed to assess their learning processes in the classroom. In Response Paper 4, students are asked to reflect on their reading practices for Piper Kerman’s *Orange is the New Black*. In the prompt, I explain to students that I want them “to trace (in writing) the trajectory of your reading habits. Start with how you began reading the book and end with what impression the book leaves with you.” By including “impression” (Ahmed 2004) in the prompt, I wish for students to provide memorable moments from the memoir and how these memorable moments might shape their intellectual development in regard to reading practices and habits of mind. In charting the “impressions” (Ahmed 2004) left by the text, I explain to students that they might also focus “on reading strategies, character development, and/or anything that resonated with you as the reader. For

instance, you might discuss what components of the text you focused on the most and/or whether or not you found the main character likeable or unlikable.” These components, however, are not the only aspects of the text which students might reflect upon for their essay, as I explain that they “might discuss what you *did not* notice in the beginning of the book, but upon reflection, are able to gain a deeper understanding of the text.” The goal for this essay is to allow students “ample reflective time to not only think about how you’ve read this particular text, but also how you might read future texts both inside and outside of this course.” I also pose questions to guide their inquiries: “What reading strategies have you developed over the course of the past week? What impression does the main character leave with you as the reader?” While these questions are not meant to be definitive questions for their essays, I pose them as a helpful guide, especially for those students who may find difficulty in approaching the assignment.

Response Paper 5 for English 111 works similarly, except with the addition of documentary film rather than a printed text. In Response Paper 5, students were asked to reflect upon their “viewing habits” of Jennifer Siebel Newsom’s documentary *Miss Representation* (2011) and take into consideration “what components of the film you focused on the most and/or whether or not you found the film appealing.” Unlike Response Paper 4, I include a more explicit connection to the course’s “expansive framing” (Engle et al 2012): viewing the film for both a deeper understanding of the film “and the bigger picture.” While “bigger picture” was not included in the prompt for Response Paper 4, I decided to make this small change for Response Paper 5 in order to explicitly cue students to think about the film’s real-world relevance.

In addition to supporting students’ abilities to make connections between their reading and viewing practices with *Orange is the New Black* and *Miss Representation*, I encourage students to find voice in authoring original work as modeled in English 111’s Major Paper 2 assignment entitled “Feminism Now.” Engle et al (2012) argue that “promoting student authorship” is important because this pedagogical approach positions

[S]tudents as authors through the use of expansive framing [which] may...promote accountability in ways that lead to transfer. If a student shares particular content knowledge, that student can be framed as the author of that content and be publicly recognized as such. The student then becomes expected to be able to use that content during transfer opportunities. (224-225)

Students embody the role of “author,” which is crucial for pedagogies of empowerment, and orient their reading and viewing practices towards reflecting on the potential sociopolitical implications of various genres for Sequence 2.4 For instance, in the assignment prompt, I pose rhetorical questions to spark students’ ideas: “why do these texts matter for feminist inquiries?...Furthermore, how does genre mediate feminist political commitments?” I also

remind them in the “Content” section of the prompt that they should discuss what their topic has “to do with the broader picture? Why does it matter that we should notice this issue?” And although I do not incorporate assignments that require students to share their work on a public forum, I envision the genre of the academic essay as one way to promote student authorship in my courses. The genre of the academic essay encourages students to enlist as knowledge producers in writing about literary and non-literary texts presented in the course. This writing genre also allows students to explore multiple perspectives and ideas on a given topic in the course. While my classes provide students with a range of options in secondary research, students are always required to incorporate research from outside of the course into their essays, as I believe that only through secondary research do students discover their own set of commitments and values.

My approach to writing and revision as fundamental steps in a student’s development of intellectual independence exemplify how both are integral to pedagogies of empowerment, in general, and writing for justice, in particular.

My approach to writing and revision as fundamental steps in a student’s development of intellectual independence exemplify how both are integral to pedagogies of empowerment, in general, and *writing for justice*, in particular. In *Reading as Rhetorical Invention* (1992), Doug Brent argues that research in a composition class is imperative for students to become engaged and successful learners at the university: “Like us, students develop their familiarity with a discipline by reading the discourse of that discipline and then committing to paper the knowledge that they have developed with the help of their reading” (xiv). Brent’s argument lends itself to the way in which FYC and second-year literature courses at the university condition students to view research and writing as a *dynamic conversation*, one where research supports the writing process.

Brent’s gloss on “research” is important for my focus on social justice, in general, and pedagogies of empowerment, in particular. For me, research skills are essential for any undergraduate student. To teach research skills to students is to empower them with a toolkit that is vital to being successful at the university. As novice writers participate in the research process and contribute to a scholarly conversation, they are able to make “contact with other human beings by reading the texts they have produced, and then updating one’s own system of beliefs with reference to those texts” (Brent xiv). This “social form of inquiry” (Brent xiv) allows students to discover relevant and effective sources that bolster their arguments in writing assignments.⁵ Moreover, as I argue throughout this section, engaging in research through the writing process allows for

students to become empowered agents at the university, as they cultivate the skill-set needed to navigate research and writing in courses beyond my classroom.

The assignment that best models this approach to teaching research-based writing skills is the second major paper assignment for English 111. For instance, Major Paper 2 for Racing “America” explicitly requires that students participate in gathering research and information needed to execute their active research agendas into the texts brought to bear in the course—the “promoting student authorship” of Engle et al’s framework (220). To stage the context of this assignment, I emphasize to students that “[t]he goals for this major paper is for you to be able to hone your skills in Outcome 2 (Intertextuality) and Outcome 3 (Stakes). You, the writer, will determine the ways in which you approach this assignment and define what you believe are the ‘stakes’ in [sic] our course, Racing ‘America.’” In guiding students to consider the stakes, I pose questions: “Why does defining ‘America,’ and by extension...‘American,’ matter? Why does your topic matter? How does the genre you’ve chosen allow you to launch a critique? How do you plan to explain the significance of your topic and line of inquiry in relation to your primary source?” I require students to use three additional secondary sources to help support their arguments, which should be “a mix of both academic and popular sources that have not been used in the course.” While students may resist having to use research in their essays, I argue that research in student writing is integral to providing audiences with well-informed arguments that have been widely researched for the purposes of advancing a complex claim. Moreover, the well-informed academic essay allows for some students who descend from overly privileged positions to understand that conversations about race, class, gender, and other social justice topics are not especial to our class. Rather, these conversations are often national conversations. And, for disenfranchised students whose backgrounds do not descend from comfortable locations of power and privilege, they are able to harness their personal experiences for critical academic inquiry. My research requirement signals to students that their research contributes to a conversation that extends beyond my classroom and the wider university campus and helps limn what Engle et al call “intercontextuality,” when students view “learned knowledge as having ongoing relevance across settings” (Engle et al 2012, 224).

In this way, *writing for justice’s* emphasis on teaching students how to *write for justice* includes aspects of the curriculum that activates students’ metacognitive awareness and engages them in fundamental research and revision processes that are imperative for academic success. Moreover, through Engle et al’s “expansive framing,” students are encouraged to find relevance for what they are learning beyond my classroom—the “intercontextuality” (Engle et al 2012, 224) of successful transfer situations. Thus, *writing for justice* functions as a vehicle for social justice inquiries and is an essential feature in scaffolding my curriculum for FYC courses. While all FYC courses use writing extensively, framing this aspect of the curriculum as a vehicle for advancing social justice might enable students to

make new and unexpected connections, ones that reinforce the relevance of course content and motivate students to orient their worldviews towards (re)imagining a more just world.

III. Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have discussed how my instructional protocols of various course curricula demonstrate what I call *writing for justice*, a pedagogical apparatus that trains students to become knowledge producers in the first-year composition classroom and supports the cultivation of students' critically-edged capacities to read and intervene into social injustices. More importantly, my essay emphasizes the significance of teaching for the transfer of social justice knowledge, from the classroom to the street. Each section exemplifies how *writing for justice* is first and foremost a pedagogy of empowerment and attempts to instill in students comprehensive schemas of social justice (Bracher 2013) while, at the same time, motivating them to become effective learners at the university. To do this effectively, I foster students' acquisition of new knowledge about social justice and equip them with the necessary skillset to become successful learners at the university and beyond it. While my pedagogy of insurgency encourages students to hone the necessary tools to become empowered agents at the university, I also re-condition students' affective relationship to both reading and writing and how both become vehicles for advancing social justice principles. As modeled by the explicit cueing in several of my teaching artifacts, I aim to educate students about the significance of social justice, especially why it is important for us to understand the sociopolitical implications of writing assignments that link to social justice. With these types of writing assignments, I aim to educate students about how they, too, are stakeholders in social justice issues and can affect social change that betters the livelihoods of all, not just the professional class.

Finally, I make a case for *how* I utilize the contents of my curriculum and perhaps just as important, *why* I have made those pedagogical choices. I concede though that instilling in students a genuine desire for advancing social justice is a rather difficult enterprise, one that might not be easily accomplished by the completion of only one course. What is perhaps more pragmatic is imparting knowledge about social justice issues to students and why these issues matter. What undergraduates *do* with the information after the class has ended is determined by the individual student. Indeed, moving students to action is even more difficult, as we know that consciousness-raising and creating awareness are not enough to mobilize social change. Despite this concession, I do believe it is important for us to evaluate the scaffolding of our curriculum and to what extent it conforms to the principles and values we hold as educators who wish to affect social change beginning in our classrooms. What might be the effects of *writing for justice* and to what extent does pedagogy of insurgency affect student learning in first-year composition? Indeed, what *effect* might pedagogy of insurgency have on transforming students' "*impressions*" (Ahmed 2004) of social justice, in both formal and informal

contexts? These are questions that continue to guide my investigation into the impact of *writing for justice*.

Notes

¹ In *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2006), M. Jacqui Alexander defines "teaching for justice" as a teaching practice invested in demystifying violence caused by Empire's expansion. This type of critical pedagogy exposes "dominant knowledge frameworks" (124) and the regimes of power constituted by those frameworks.

² For more, see Linda Darling-Hammond's "Thinking about Thinking: Metacognition" (www.learner.org/courses/learningclassroom/support/09_metacog.pdf).

³ In "Teaching for Transfer" (1988), Perkins and Salomon divide metacognition into two categories— low-road transfer and high-road transfer. Low-road transfer "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context. Opening a chemistry book for the first time triggers reading habits acquired elsewhere, trying out a new video game activates reflexes honed on another one..." (25). On the other hand, high-road transfer "depends on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" (25). In summary, low-road transfer consists of an "automatic triggering" while high-road transfer is "deliberate" and intentional.

⁴ See, for instance, Gail Stygall's "Resisting Privilege: Basic Writing and Foucault's Author Function" (1994).

⁵ Brent's "social form of inquiry" is largely drawn from Charles Bazerman's "A Relationship Between Reading and Writing: The Conversational Model" (1980).

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Decolonizing Development Studies: Pedagogic Reflections

by Andrea Cornwall



OPENING SLIDE WITH FAMILIAR TROPES FROM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY "POVERTY PORN". IMAGE COURTESY AUTHOR.

Development Studies has been taught in British universities for at least as long as the countries that feature in its curricula have been independent of colonial rule. And yet, for all that decolonisation marked a very different approach to development taken by national governments across the global south, the continued coloniality of the development industry is often reflected in what and how students of Development Studies are taught. In *The White Woman's Burden: From Colonial Civilisation to Third World Development*, Jawad Syed and Faisa Ali explore what they call "the white appetite for stories of victimage" (2011:352) and point to the "unceremonious role of white women as willing agents in promoting and furthering the colonial agenda of a white elite across the globe" (p356). Tracing an unbroken continuity between colonialism and contemporary development policies in the post-colonial era, they call for a "more holistic and realistic understanding of development [that] would put all forms and colours of knowledge at the centre, producing other understandings based on contextual and empowering ideas emanating from indigenous cultures" (p. 362).

What would it take to bring this "more holistic and realistic understanding of development" into the classroom and decolonise the way development studies is conceived of and taught? This article reflects on my attempts to decolonise my teaching of an introductory first year, first term module to students enrolled for single or joint honours undergraduate degrees in International Development at the University of Sussex, and how it changed me in the process. Founded in the 1960s to challenge the status quo in British higher education, the University of Sussex is known for its interdisciplinary and critical ethos. It is also famous for the world-renowned thinktank on its campus, the Institute of Development Studies. Together, Sussex and IDS pip Harvard to the top of the QS World Rankings for Development Studies. My colleagues and I were interested in alternatives to the neo-colonial, neoliberal development industry. We prided ourselves on our critical interrogation of the political economy of international development. But we were faced with a contradiction.

In growing numbers, we were recruiting students who wanted study international development so that they could get a job in what Teju Cole so memorably dubbed the "white saviour industrial complex".¹ What were we to do with this desire to "help"? I was at first convinced that such was international development's inherent coloniality, the most useful role I could play would be to disrupt and discourage those who wanted to go into the development industry. I would count my success, I thought, in the numbers of students who woke up and switched courses, went into activism, or took up careers in domains like community and youth work in the UK. But I changed my mind. In this article I share what made that happen.

Stuart Hall writes:

The "post-colonial" signals the proliferation of histories and temporalities, the intrusion of difference and specificity into the generalising and Eurocentric post-Enlightenment grand narratives, the multiplicity of lateral and decentred cultural connections, movements

and migrations which make up the world today. (1996:248)

Hall's words inspired the design of the module, called "International Development: Ideas and Actors." I wanted it to have within it something of the pluriversal in Walter Dignolo's terms:² plural, located, histories, temporalities, positionalities, narratives and possibilities. With this, I would, I thought, explore and reveal the plurality of connections weaving through the lives of those taking and teaching the module and those distant others evoked by the word "development." My ultimate aim was to bring the international development enterprise so into question that my students could not go into it with their eyes shut. In what follows, I locate those strands of my own story that brought me to a dis-enchantment with international development and, with that, to the genesis of this module. I go on to narrate how I took this into the classroom, how that experience changed me, and what I learnt from it. In doing so, I reflect on some of the wider challenges of decolonising the teaching of development studies.

Close Encounters with Coloniality

Like many of the white undergraduate students who come to the University of Sussex to study International Development, "Africa" was a place I first came to know as somewhere in need to which I had something to contribute. Born in the period in which one African country after the next was gaining independence, I'd grown up in post-colonial Britain with a sensibility shaped by an early awareness that my white working-class English grandparents were racist. They lived in Handsworth, in Birmingham. They'd seen more and more people from Britain's imperial past fill council houses like theirs. I knew their words about their black and brown neighbours, so full of prejudice and ignorance, to be utterly, badly, wrong. I'm not sure where I got this from. I'd grown up in the white expanse of the north east, knowing barely a single person of colour. But by the time I went to university, I considered myself anti-racist.

Whiteness and white privilege had not yet been part of my consciousness. My image of Africa was shaped by what I saw on TV. There were no books by African writers on our English literature curriculum, no facts about Africa in my history lessons. Africa was a place represented to me in the media as lacking, vulnerable to natural disaster and the ravages of war, with wide open skies and wild animals. I knew South Africa to be a Bad Place; like many of my generation, I'd marched against apartheid and protested against those who sustained it. But I had no real knowledge or understanding of the continent, or its history. I can't remember where I got the idea to go to Africa. I'd dropped out of university and set my mind on earning enough money from working in restaurants in London to get away from the grimness of Thatcher's Britain. I chose Ghana, but was put off by a flirtatious gaggle of men behind the counter at the embassy. The only other people I knew who had been to Africa had gone to Zimbabwe. So that's where I decided to go.

Arriving into the bright sunshine of the Zimbabwean summer, early in 1986, I looked around me and found an Africa very different from the place of my imagination. Harare's main streets were lined with buildings that looked like something out of an American Western, with their wooden balconies and long porches. Smooth tarred roads radiated out from the capital, through settlements that seemed like a chain of staging posts with the same shops and houses, dots on a landscape of balancing rocks in acres of iridescent green. Most Black Zimbabweans lived in what were euphemistically called "high density suburbs." Zimbabwe's whites lived in expansive bungalows, their interiors all chintz and little England. I wanted none of that. I met a white Irish volunteer teacher. She found me a job in the rural school where she taught, my whiteness enough of a qualification. I slept on a thin roll of foam on a cold concrete floor, cooked over a little paraffin stove and marked books by candlelight. In the early morning light, we'd gather outside the school and neat rows of gingham-clad children would sing the national anthem, *Ishe Komborera*, as the teachers stood straight-backed to attention.

Educating the nation was the way to make change happen in a country where my forebears had stolen chances of a better life from generations of Zimbabwean children. I was proud to be part of it. The word "development" wasn't part of my vocabulary. I worked tirelessly, marking hundreds of books every week, each stroke of my red pen an act of care. A powerful combination of guilt and fury would come over me as I came face to face with the privileges that were mine to enjoy by virtue of being born into whiteness in a country that held sway over as much as a quarter of the planet's land mass at the height of the British Empire. People from my country had shoved the forebears of these children off productive land. The masses were left without. Men's education was just enough to create a generation of low-level clerks to administer colonial governance. Hygiene and home-craft were administered to the thin stratum of women who had any access to the "benefits" of development. A world apart, we were connected by this history.

I moved south to a recently built school in a distant rural area where there had been no access to education, to a building with walls but no books, crowded with children seeking a better future. I used my classes as an opportunity to create spaces for creativity in a school setting where rote learning and regular beating were the norm. I learnt that parents were keeping girls at home, fearful of them becoming pregnant. Visiting their mothers, I found them worried about something else: the pills they'd been given by the community-based distribution agents were making some women have headaches, bloat, feel sick, miss periods. These pills were supposed to free women from the uncertainties of their bodies, not become a source of pains and worries. Women sought my help, assuming that as a white woman I must know. I was worried about these women. I was angry that they were not being given a choice of contraception. I'd experienced the capricious effects of these pills in my own body. I felt a deep sense of injury that these black women saw me as someone whose knowledge was superior to theirs, someone who would have the power to give them answers simply because of the colour of my skin.

Seeing me walk from the borehole trying to balance a bucket on my head with none of the effortless grace of the women around me, women would comment that they'd always thought white women were not strong enough to carry things for themselves. They'd only ever seen them with people carrying their bags and boxes for them. Long walks in the hot sun were observed with surprise. People told me that they'd always thought white people were not able to walk very far, as they'd only ever seen them being driven around in cars or trucks. And they told me that I was so lucky. Wasn't it true that white women didn't suffer from period pains or have any pain in labour? I began doing all I could to make my white privilege visible so as to repudiate it, and to demonstrate our shared humanity. Race and racism became part of my world in a way that they had never been before.

Race and racism became part of my world in a way that they had never been before.

Disruptions

My engagement with international development, and my understandings of the term, stem from these encounters. "Ah, *development!*" the young men in the compound where I lived in Zimbabwe would crow when someone appeared with a new purchase like a pair of shoes, a cap, a bicycle; to them, development meant something tangible. I came to understand development as reparative: trying to make good something that was broken or damaged, trying to make up for something that was bad or went bad. But I soon began to recognise that much of what is done in the name of international development is extractive and exploitative, whether pouring aid into countries that might otherwise spill over into situations that would generate a tidal wave of refugees, "stabilising" regimes that might otherwise threaten access to oil and other resources, or providing "assistance" in the form of a gift that can't easily be refused and that costs the receiver more than they might ever have imagined.

By the time I arrived at Sussex University in 2010, I had lost sight of anything positive that could be said of international development. I'd spent the best part of twenty years working on the margins of the international development industry. The first task I'd had in the place where I'd worked for most of that time, an independent thinktank located on Sussex University's campus called the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), was running a session on gender in a training course for Indian civil servants. The course was called something like "managing the public sector in a market economy." There I was, touted as white expert teaching brown elite administrators how to better manage their public services in a vast and powerful land that my tiny little country had brought into its dominion and had been repulsed from fifty years earlier. IDS had been set up in the mid-1960s in the era of decolonisation. When I joined, it had precisely fewer faculty members from the global south than I could count on one hand and subsisted on revenue derived largely from the British aid ministry. By

the time I left, I'd tried all manner of ways of reframing development as resistance, explored every avenue for subverting my engagement with it. I'd come to a cul-de-sac and I simply did not have the imagination to think my way out of it.

In the autumn of 2011, I delivered my first lecture in what was then one of the largest of the University of Sussex's lecture theatres. It was packed with almost 200 students, the vast majority of them white, with the tiniest presence of black British and international students. I asked how many of them wanted to work in development when they graduated. The answer was almost everyone. I came face to face with a generation of young people who had bought into the *assistentialism* peddled by British NGOs with their poverty porn, jamboree fundraisers, and collection boxes. If Sussex produced so many people seeking employment in the development industry every year, plus those on our expanding MA programmes, were we not guilty of feeding the rapacious coloniality of the development industry with new blood? And, if that was the case, what was there to be done?

I wanted, in the 10 brief weeks of my module, to put as many of them off careers in the development industry as possible. I took my mission very seriously. I'd been asked initially to do things in a manner in which I was neither familiar or comfortable: to give a fifty-minute lecture to almost 200 students, and for a team of doctoral student assistants to then take the students off in groups for hour-

long seminars. I found this way of working totally alienating. Students were the passive consumers of my edu-tainment. The *real* teaching – critical questioning, exploration, dialogue – took place out of my reach in those small seminar groups. After a year, I jumped at the opportunity to be part of an experiment with interactive lecturing. I used it to create giant two-hour workshops and to dispense with both lecture and seminar. I drew on more than a decade working as a facilitator of participatory methodologies, and on my experience in those Zimbabwean classrooms trying to infuse my pedagogic practice with ideas from bell hooks and Paulo Freire.

I wanted to get the students thinking critically about what the term "development" was used to signify. And I wanted them to interrogate the meanings that they and each other gave it. I began by giving them the work of two influential older white men, Gilbert Rist and Robert Chambers. Rist's (1997) history of development situates the industry as one overripe for its own demise. I chose not Chambers's bestsellers *Putting the Last First* (1983) or *Putting the First Last* (1997), but an article on what he called "responsible wellbeing" (Chambers 1997), a term he had tried – without much success – to mobilise as a development buzzword. Rist was relentlessly negative, with good reason; Chambers was relentlessly optimistic, also with good reason. For the first interactive workshop, I asked the students to bring newspaper articles with headlines that captured something that they thought of as a development issue. Already, some questioning was beginning: was



FIGURE 1: OPENING SLIDE WITH FAMILIAR TROPES FROM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY "POVERTY PORN"



FIGURE 3. MAKING A TIMELINE

be described as “aid” under the definition of OA. Another slide showing the relative balance of remittance income, private investment, and development aid prompted us all to think about where money from outside a country goes, to what and to whom. I downloaded the spreadsheet with the UK Department for International Development’s (DFID) aid spending for the previous year and crunched it on the big lecture theatre screen, highlighting the flows of resources to major consultancy consortia and the big global consultancy corporations. These pictures became artefacts for us to reflect on.

To facilitate reflection on what we as publics are told about the way our taxes are spent, I showed the class two YouTube clips produced by the British and American official aid institutions, DFID and USAID. One was an advert featuring ordinary people in London guessing how much money is spent on aid, discovering that it’s not as much as they thought and then being told it is being spent on vaccinating children and sending them to school. I contrasted this with the breakdown from the OECD database of where Britain spends its aid, noting the substantial sums being channelled into securitisation and private sector development, amidst shrinking social spending. I then dipped into a longer film about British investment in biofuels in India that shows how, in a manner grotesquely reminiscent of the occupation of land in Britain’s settler colonies, the private companies funded by the British government colonised arable lands with an inedible crop that strangled all else.⁴ The hungry, disenfranchised villagers had their own story of “development” to tell.

A week considering the role of governments as development actors reminded students that it wasn’t just foreign NGOs, donors, companies, and banks who did “development.” I took the students on a journey that started

with the white male political theorists – J.S. Mill, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Adam Smith, Kropotkin, Marx, Thomas Paine – who frame so much of the way in which the West has come to think about the state, unpeeling the assumptions associated with them and with representations of governments in previously colonised countries. I gave them readings from the “grey literature” on governance that constitutes an in-all-but-name continuation of colonial intervention. This allowed us to reflect on the role of colonialism in the creation of states as well as in the construction of governments, from the carving up of Africa by a bunch of white men in a late 19th century Berlin meeting room to the origins of the Panchayati Raj system in British colonial rule. This enabled us to locate development’s governance discourse historically and explore how much of today’s ways of doing government in the global south were direct results of their colonial past.

Sessions on NGOs, social movements, and the private sector completed the round of “actors.” The next step was to take a series of “development dilemmas” and look at them through a critical historical lens. We returned to themes raised earlier in the course about the nature of the aid relationship, the power of representations of development and their effects on racism and xenophobia in aid-giving countries, the ambiguities of the turn to “investing” in women’s empowerment, the role of multinational corporations and their employment practices at home and abroad. Perhaps the most pertinent dilemma of all was that of whether aid does harm or good. Bringing into view the very possibility that something that is well intentioned might be a source of negative outcomes is challenging. But to consider, alongside this, whether it might be better to advocate for an end to aid altogether unsettles the very impulse to “assist” that underpins some of the most colonial dynamics of the business of aid.



FIGURE 4. GROUP WORK, SITTING ON THE FLOOR IN THE AISLE OF THE LECTURE THEATRE

We tackled the debate full on. For all that her solutions might be seen as problematic, Dambisa Moyo’s (2010)

compelling diagnosis of the problem struck a chord with many of the students. I contrasted her vision of the role of business – with videos of her being flown in by Rwandan President Paul Kagame⁵ and appearing on TV debating with figures from the UK aid establishment – with a YouTube video of Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda⁶ talking about the positive role of taxation in creating a citizenry who would hold their own governments to account for corruption. This brought other representations of Africa into the frame as a vast diverse continent with abundant resources, including brains and vision. I introduced the students to other prominent African analysts, via TED Talks and YouTube, with their commentaries on economics, the role of the private sector and the state, and the stultifying effects of aid. I supplemented this with readings from the live domain of the internet rather than the mainly white authorities whose work remains trapped behind the paywalls of commercial journals.

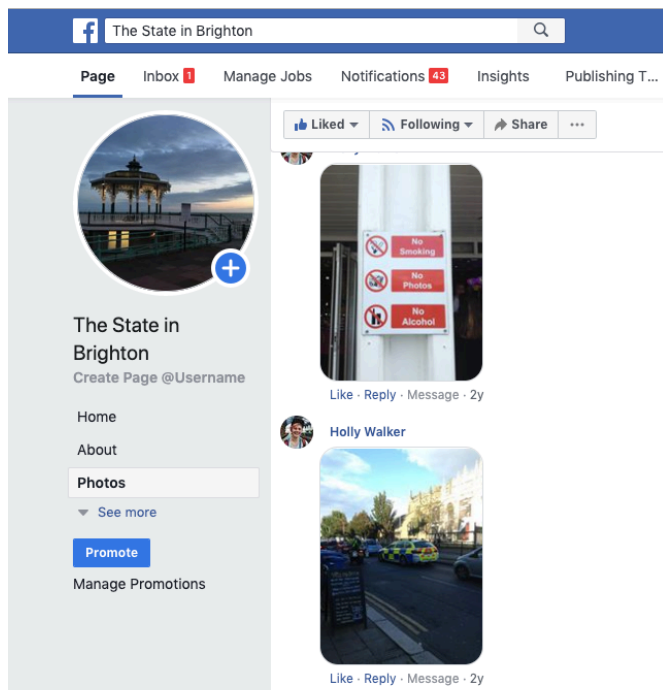


FIGURE 5. LOOKING FOR THE STATE IN BRIGHTON

I was assigned a doctoral teaching assistant each year because of the size of the cohort. I didn't want them to disappear off with students to run seminars, so I got them involved as facilitators. Each took a slot to do a session on a contemporary dilemma of their own choosing. Ana Porroche brought to the module her interest in the role of celebrities, Tom Chambers explored the migration crisis in Europe, and Althea Rivas brought a perspective on decolonising learning that transformed mine. My colleague Evan Killick ran several slots in the first couple of years, drawing on his work with indigenous social movements and NGOs in the Amazon to introduce these actors, and their dilemmas. I learnt a lot from working with them; they played an important role in contact with the students, running office hours to discuss students' questions and meet their technological needs, commenting on blogs, and reflecting with me on how it was all going as we drew on what was being written in the blogs to assess what and how the students were learning.

The very last assignment was to take what the students had learnt from the course and think forward thirty years to a time when they would be at the apex of their careers – and to imagine the world around them, one that they might have played a part in changing. Some students were completely thrown by this: it was a task with no readings, no references, just imagination. But then they got into it. And the writings they produced were a mix of the dystopian and the visionary. It was quite something to think of what we were learning not only contributing to understanding how the world might be different in future, but actually being *part of* making a difference.

Creating Understanding Together

I've come to see decolonial practice as not only about what is conveyed, but also about pedagogy and above all about decentering the academy as the only site for expert knowledge. The module was deliberately anti-academic in its approach to knowledge, something that would bring me much criticism from colleagues. They felt I was dumbing things down, not teaching the canon, and setting a bad example. I even was charged with raising expectations of the kind of engagement students might expect to have with their lecturer. My aim was to encourage the students to have their own opinions. I wanted them to feel able to be critical of everything, rather than slavishly copying out quotes and trailing through literatures that imprinted on their minds a correct way to think, know, and write. The worst thing I did, from my colleagues' point of view, was encourage students to write regular short public blogs rather than write essays at the end of term.

The idea for the blogs started with the idea of small, regular assignments throughout the course that students could revise and resubmit, with only the final version "counting" for their grade. I'd been chatting with my son Jake, then aged 14, about tech and asked him what platform I could use to do this on. He said, "why not get them to set up a WordPress site and write a blog." Genius. So that's what I did. I threw the students in at the deep end by getting them to write and publish for all the world to see their own take on the question "what is development" after the very first week of class. It was scary. The academy privatises assignments. The blogs broke with this. And students got into it. I told them that they did not only need to write. They also needed to find visuals, a photo or video clip, that spoke to what they were trying to convey in their blog posts. This led to an explosion of creativity on their WordPress sites with beautifully designed visuals: photos taken of artefacts the students had made for themselves, a face painted with development buzzwords, a distorted globe made of paper money.

Jake designed for me an online learning platform on a customised WordPress site, integrating social media (Facebook and Twitter), a collective Flickr site, an interactive FAQ where students could post and I could answer, resources pages, and pages for each of the weeks on which I posted a video of the class, videos to watch, readings, take-aways, and the materials produced by the class. With

Jake's help, I created an interactive open access spreadsheet with all the links to the blogs on it. I put the students into groups, encouraged them to read and peer review each other's blogs, leaving comments, suggesting improvements. I held writing clinics to which they could bring their blogs-in-the-making for peer critique. I found it remarkable how gripped they were as I narrated comments on the blogs I was passed one by one on students' laptops, and then realised how useful it was to the students to hear someone else's work critiqued and to think through what made a good piece of writing.

Their blogs were fascinating, a window into their worlds.⁷ I wrote my own blog posts to accompany those my class were writing. It got us thinking together. One of my blogs transposed reflections on whiteness, inequality, and dignity from my days in Zimbabwe onto a trip to the UN in New York at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement.⁸ Another was about the hypocrisy of the corporate NGO headquartered in an immaculate, extravagantly designer-chic building, with "poverty" and "suffering" etched into expensive glass room dividers, corporate touches like a table football table, and a map of their dominion charting their reach into previously colonised countries: all touches, in my view, of the pervasive coloniality of the entire enterprise.⁹ I lampooned those who benefited from the industry, confessing my own complicity and giving the students that damning poem "The Development Set" to read.¹⁰ I even produced my own little spoof film of Annabel the consultant jetting off to Tanzania to do a consultancy when snow closed the campus one week.

So often, marking is done in a perfunctory way at the end of what is being taught, rather than being regarded as a rich source of learning material for the teacher. By engaging with students' work throughout the module, my doctoral teaching assistants and I adjusted the way we worked in the space of the interactive lecture and the support we offered the students with their reading, writing, and reflection. Students got comments from their peers, from the public in some cases – and it was fun to see how many viewers from different countries their blogs attracted – and from the teaching team. Everyone could take those comments and revise their pieces as much as they wanted until they felt they were ready. Half way through the term, we gave them a provisional mark so they could get a sense of where they were. Some found themselves doing far better than they'd hoped. Others took it as a wake-up call; some completely re-wrote their blogs and one person, who'd been given a C+ for their work to date, completely revised their website and ended up with one of the highest grades. Student feedback on this part of the learning process provides insight into how this way of working helped build their confidence and skills:

Getting feedback throughout the term was really useful. Also, knowing that other people would be reading my work made me more conscious of how I was writing and thus was invaluable in teaching me about how to "write for an audience" rather than just writing within the traditional academic framework.

I enjoyed having regular small assignments, as opposed to all other modules that had long essays at the end of term

I would like to do blogs for all the assessments! Seeing what other people write is a great way of learning also seeing their mistakes makes you realise your own. I think it is the best format for constant learning, expanding, and a good exercise in not rambling as the word limit was quite small!

I was very anxious about writing the blogs in the beginning as I feared that they would not suit my strengths. However, after even the first one I really got into writing them and seeing the ways I could explore different topics. Also there is a real sense of achievement seeing the progress of your blog on the web, with views and comments also. I think they are a really good way to build confidence in your own writing.

Made me engage with what we were discussing each week and create my own opinions and views on the subject.

For me, being able to read my peers work and discuss topics together meant that this was much more effective than a seminar ever could've been. There is a tendency for seminars to be very quiet, with the online blogs your peers could comfortably express their opinions without feeling they had to speak in front of a class. A very worthwhile exercise.

Getting so much feedback was VERY helpful. Plus writing the blog made me learn a lot of skills such as referencing, which I was able to practice a lot and master in the end!

None of the development modules since have been delivered with such enthusiasm and energy so it has kind of put a downer on the rest of them. That's a compliment to Ideas and Actors though. It was vibrant and enjoyable and I still take more from that in terms of second year essays/exams than I do any other.

The module was not universally popular. Some students wanted a more conventional format, complaining that there were no seminars. Others didn't think the blog pieces were serious or academic enough. But if one test of whether a module is working or not is how many students attend the lectures deep into the dregs of the term, it did seem that something was working. Every week I expected numbers to fall away, and every week, the lecture theatre was filled with enthusiastic students, bringing the materials of that week's before-the-lecture assignment with them. And there was something levelling about the whole experience: I learnt as much or more from them as they did from me, and I saw those whose voices are so often eclipsed in class find their voice.

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

I'm in little doubt that the person who got the most out of

the module was me. It was one of the most powerful educational experiences of my life. Once we'd picked apart the development industry and its perverse effects, what we were left with was the same reality that had brought students, in their hundreds, to study International Development in the first place: an unfair, unequal world in which millions of people have no access to education, shelter, food, sanitation, health care, and the basic necessities of life. Development may be a word that is both overstuffed with meaning and full of empty promises. But it's also one that promises a better world than we live in now, and one that captures the imaginations of so many young people fired with passion for change. I had fallen prey to conflating international development with the international development industry, to lumping together every possible kind of external actor into a single problematized category, weaving them into a narrative of encroachment in which their promotion of international development became a predation on the dignity, integrity, and life-worlds of those they sought out as their subjects. But in doing so I lost sight myself of what had seduced me into my own engagement with international development.

With each year, I shuffled more and more of the international development industry sessions off the module. We stopped being mired in what was wrong, and started engaging more with what makes change happen. A leadership role got in the way of my teaching, and I was forced to wind up my engagement with the module. The very last time it ran, I focused an impromptu final session on a practical exercise of identifying solutions to global issues. I divided more than a hundred students into teams of 5-6 and sent them off with flip charts and marker pens to design an intervention that could change the world, promising rewards of chocolate and a small amount of funding to help make their idea happen if they came up with anything we could act on locally.

The creativity of the students was striking, and beautiful. None of their solutions resembled the coloniality of all we had rejected. They had left it completely behind. Most focused on ecological interventions we could make in our own campus. One group advocated a co-operative garden project that could provide vegetables to students on the campus, taking over the perimeter of the campus as an extended allotment. Another proposed a network of green spaces to run across the flat roofs of our 1960s campus. Another still came up with a decolonising cultural intervention, taking a narrative of pluriversality to youth across the nation to combat the myths propounded by the NGO pity industry.

Reframing international development in this way as a global quest for social, gender, racial, and ecological justice makes it as relevant to the people sleeping on the streets in Brighton as to the abject child portrayed in NGO marketing campaigns. From here it is possible to see what a decolonised development studies might look like. It would focus on understanding the makings of the modern world as a process deeply inflected by the colonisation of minds as well as lands, with indelible marks on world history, including in places that were never part of the colonial dominion or colonising project. It would seek out and situate attempts to change the world for the better, locating them

not in the narrative of intervention, but in one that includes insurrection.

Rather than be cynical about Britain's promise to "leave no-one behind" as it signed up to the global goals,¹¹ this generation of students could insist on taking it literally and using it to drive change in the way Britain treats its Black and Asian citizens, in Britain's immigration policy, in the mortal threat the government poses to our welfare state, in this time of Brexit and rising xenophobia, in the pursuit of climate justice. By expanding understandings of international development beyond planned intervention and subsuming within the very idea of it a constellation of processes of social change, students could then claim their own part in making the future without needing to attach themselves to perpetuating the colonial project. They could do this by stepping away from where they are currently positioned to explore the world of possibilities that *global* development offers, learning about how change happens and what can serve as impetus and as sustenance in that process. Then they could harvest that understanding, bring it back to their own neighbourhoods, their own cities, their own countries. If teaching development studies could be about transformative education that ignited a generation of global citizens who were unafraid to look deeply at the causes of injustice, come to terms with their own privilege, and learn how to listen and act with compassion and humility, I can't help thinking the world would be a better place.

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Notes

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>

² <http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/>

³ See, for example, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/acts/colonial-development-act-1929>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l6YZCuKM2Q>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ-CvQSsMF0>

⁶ <https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew-mwenda-takes-a-new-look-at-africa/discussion?c=162117>

⁷ For some examples, see Felicia Lomotey's <https://delusionaldemocracy.wordpress.com/>; Molly Scott's <https://internationaldevelopmentstudiesblog.wordpress.com/>; Jordan Isaac's

<https://jisaacblogs.wordpress.com/2017/07/18/why-are-we-losing-faith-in-development-aid/>; Anoush Rajabian's <https://internationaldevelopment379.wordpress.com/blog/>.

⁸ <https://developmentdissident.wordpress.com/2015/01/06/respect-solidarity-justice-humanity-end-white-supremacy-now/>

⁹ <https://developmentdissident.wordpress.com/2014/10/21/hello-world/>

¹⁰ <https://morenewsfromafar.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/the-development-set-by-ross-coggins-2/>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise>



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Intersectional Approaches to Teaching about Privileges

by Shadia Siliman and Katherine Kearns



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY EMILY BLOBAUM

Introduction

The privilege walk usually consists of asking students to stand up and align themselves on an invisible spectrum based on their experiences or positionality.¹ This usually takes the form of a "step forward-step back" activity. For example: if you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward; if you have ever experienced discrimination based on your race, take one step back. Eventually, students are (hypothetically) positioned relative to each other based on their privileges. The multiply-marginalized take many steps back, while the more privileged take many steps forward, further separating themselves from one another.

This activity can be deployed to provide a visual and concretely physical representation of the privileges of those present. Students ostensibly confront the privileges that they may have taken for granted in their own lives, by comparing their experiences to those who are physically positioned as more oppressed. Cooper (2017) writes, "The purpose of this identity-based sequenced activity was for students to discover the diversity within themselves, as well as to experience how preconceived notions and beliefs about people, particularly their friends, affected how they view them...Additionally, this activity gave definition to 'the me I am but don't want others to see'" (p. 247).

Few alternatives of the privilege walk can be found in any venue; not in scholarly publication, pedagogical venues, or blogs. Interestingly, most discussions focus on how the discomfort of it is crucial and generative (a point that we discuss below). Cooper, for example, explains that "although the 'Privilege Walk' was uncomfortable and even unsettling for some, completing this activity or a similar one was vital to prepare TFs [teaching fellows] for the community-based learning activities that followed" (p. 253).

We appreciate discomfort as potentially generative when it comes to understanding privilege and oppression. However, we are interested in re-imagining the activity in a way which lessens the risk of possibly shutting out participants by tokenizing and/or embarrassing them. Our goal here is to adapt the core concept of the activity -- challenging students to recognize their positionalities -- into adaptations which add intersectionality to its structure and learning outcomes.

In the remainder of this systematic reflection, we explain why we, as instructors, use adaptations to the privilege walk; what our adaptations aim to accomplish; and how our respective adaptations function. To be clear, neither of our activities has been formally assessed; instead, we are referring them on the basis of our personal experiences using them as pedagogues, and want to point to them as openings for conversations and future work. We aim to speak to any practitioner who is concerned with helping learners recognize their own identities, whether through a short activity or through a semester-long experience.

Our Observations of the Privilege Walk

A privilege walk can help to uncover how our different identities give us access -- and prevent our access -- to certain spaces, resources, and energies. Yet, we share concerns about whether the privilege walk leads to productive discomfort. Students of marginalized groups face the potential for exhaustion, vulnerability, and objectification as they are exposed and may feel that they have to explain their circumstances yet again. It is helpful here to refer to Standpoint Theory, particularly as it is articulated by Sandra Harding (1993) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990). Standpoint Theory reminds us that people of marginalized groups -- whether by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economic background, (dis)ability, or any other factor -- already understand oppression. They learn from their families, communities, and experiences how to survive in an environment that fails to support them. As Audre Lorde (1984) writes, "Survival is not an academic skill" (p. 112). Minoritized folks come to understand discrimination not from taking classes, but through experiences which force them to adapt and survive.

Minoritized folks come to understand discrimination not from taking classes, but through experiences which force them to adapt and survive.

At the same time, "non-belonging" and de-centering can be reified when people of marginalized groups are moved to the edge of a privilege walk, just as they are in the "real world." For students of majority groups, this activity may lead to a discomfort that is more like shame, humiliation, or embarrassment--blaming or at least gazing harshly at students "in the center." For many students of dominant or majority positionality groups, their membership among privileged groups is an accident of birth and not through willful acts. Similarly, a student might not feel comfortable sharing their sexuality, (dis)ability, gender identity, socio-economic background, or any other quality, with the class, and might lie or cover up the truth when provided a prompt asking them to reveal themselves. These intense negative emotions might be more likely to shut down their abilities to interrogate their contemporary role in multi-generational oppression, center the experiences of people of marginalized groups, and create and engage in situations of empathy and understanding (van der Kolk, 2014). We want to allow students the opportunity to share information about their positionality as they find necessary. Both of us sought activities which included private ways for students to express their authentic selves.

Patricia Hill Collins explains that privilege involves *voyeurism*, or being able to "watch" and observe those who are minoritized from the outside (1993). Some privilege walks may be anonymized by having participants write down privileges and oppressions and then swapping; participants take steps forward and backwards based on others' profiles. However, the activity still encourages voyeurism, as those

in front “look back” at those behind them, serving as a voyeur to their stacked marginalizations.²

Bertram and Crowley (2012) explain how, in higher education, instructors often encourage students to feel sympathy for others' experiences. Students become focused on feeling sympathy for those “less fortunate” than themselves, and circumvent the task of examining their own role in these systems, or thinking about how to dismantle said structures. Intersectional scholar Daniela Gutiérrez López supports this concern, as she explains that the privilege walk is made to benefit the education of more privileged students, and to do so, “uses marginalized people as props.”³ In response, we wanted to think about how adaptations to the privilege walk could move students past sympathy for other participants' experiences and into a deeper interrogation of one's complicity in systems of oppression.

We also share concerns around activities which seek to quantify privilege in a two-dimensional space, moving forward and back. Based on where they stand in line, students associate their identities with fixed positions of “more” or “less” privilege in everyday society, instead of understanding the dynamic nature of privilege. In this way, we want to avoid indulging the “double jeopardy” model of oppression (Carbado, 2013). This model suggests that, the more “minority” qualities a person has, the more oppressed they are. The queer woman of color with a (dis)ability, for example, is positioned farthest back in the line of the privilege walk, because their life experience is the most difficult. Oppression is experienced differently based on the various combinations of a person's positionality factors. In other words, being a black woman is not like being a black man, nor is being a black woman with a (dis)ability the same as being a non (dis)able-bodied and -minded black woman. None is necessarily worse or better, but simply, different. This variability and nuance may not be captured by the simple visual representation of one person standing ahead of, or behind, another. Similarly, we do not want to teach participants that axes of difference are “parallel” or comparable to each other. For example, they may leave thinking that being a person of color is “like” being queer. As Siobhan B. Somerville (2000) explains in *Queering the Color Line*, we want to be careful not to position facets of positionality as similar or parallel, but intersecting and interlocking.

Experiences of privilege are contingent not only on factors like race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic standing but also on location and situation.

Experiences of privilege are contingent not only on factors like race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic standing but also on location and situation. Our privileges shift as we move from one space to another, and as we change as people over time. For example, as a mixed-race queer woman, I (Shadia) might be the minority in a room full of white men; but I am in a relative position of privilege

when I am surrounded by fellow graduate students of Gender Studies. The privilege walk also condenses experiences of privilege and oppression to the “macro” level (Sue et al., 2007). Instead, we are each interested in teaching students to learn about how privilege and oppression manifest in subtle, everyday ways. Prompts such as “if you have experienced discrimination, step forward” collapse privilege and discrimination into “headline” events-for discrimination, events like genocide or segregation come to mind. In asking themselves, “what constitutes a moment of privilege or discrimination?” students might talk themselves out of understanding events like microaggressions as forms of discrimination. This effectively makes privilege and discrimination seem like exceptional moments.

We should also take care that any single activity is not considered sufficient education around privilege and positionality. If practiced alone, without context, debriefing, or intersectional nuance, one educational experience risks invoking what Sara Ahmed calls non-performativity: that is, saying something in order to make it *not* so (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed points to how statements like “diversity is important” can allow institutions to avoid having to take meaningful action towards establishing diversity. In teaching about privilege, it might be tempting to think performing an activity is sufficient or that feeling bad is all the work that we need to do. We aim to avoid limiting our education of privilege down to bouts of guilt and/or sympathy, and instead inspire deeper interrogation and reflection.

Finally, we are concerned that activities requiring physical movement can be ableist. Whether we can “see” it or not, some students have (dis)abilities that will affect their mobility in the classroom. Asking students to move and stand for a sustained period is an unfair expectation, and risks outing some students as being unable to physically participate.

Shadia's Example

As a mixed-race, queer femme woman, I occupy many “in-betweens.” Categories of race, ethnicity, and sexuality aren't either/or for me; I am white-passing, perhaps appear as heterosexual to folks, but still deeply identify with minority positions. This personal experience has helped me understand the need for flexible, nuanced, and intersectional activities for recognizing positionality.

As a teacher of Gender Studies, my courses revolve around conversations of privilege and oppression. I want to ensure that, early in the semester, my students recognize their positionalities in an intersectional and sustainable way, so they can understand their relationship to each topic or issue that comes up throughout the rest of the semester. I developed this lesson to provoke students to start thinking about the privilege and oppression they experience, to acknowledge how their privilege manifests in their daily lives, and to imagine how each facet of their positionality relates to the others. There are two parts. The first part asks students to think about their own identities; the second asks students to think about how society is subtly structured around accommodating certain identities.

intersectional mapping

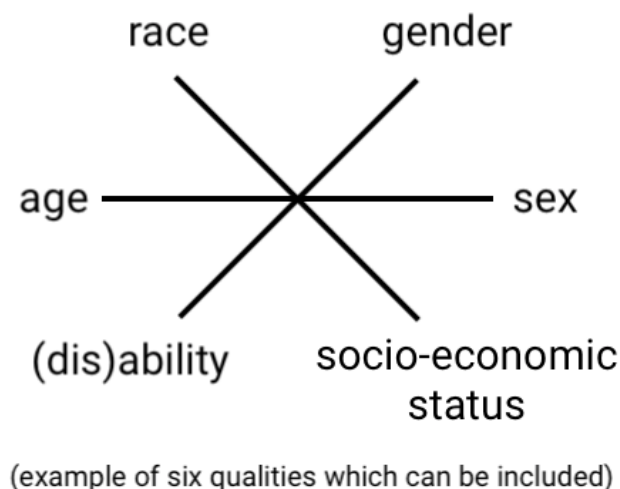


FIGURE 1. INTERSECTIONAL MAP TEMPLATE. THIS FIGURE SERVES AS A TEMPLATE FOR HOW TO CONSTRUCT ONE'S OWN MAP OF THE VARIOUS FACETS OF THEIR POSITIONALITY.

First, I introduce intersectional mapping to my students. On the board, I draw a "wheel" of two or three intersecting lines, creating a set of spokes (*Figure 1*). Versions of the positionality or identity "wheel" can be found in Morgan (1996) and Shaw & Lee (2015, p. 52) as well as the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center at the University of Michigan ("Social Identity Wheel," 2017). We pick a few famous people whose positionality we want to map, and detail one positionality quality on each spoke: their gender, race, class, education, and so forth. Often, I try to include examples of people who seem very different in their identities; students often suggest Beyoncé and Donald Trump. This way, students will not be left thinking that only those who are multiply marginalized have intersectional identities. All individuals have intersectional identities, composed of a race, a class, a gender, and so forth; some folks just have different combinations that allow them more or less privilege in certain locations.

Students then make intersectional maps of their own identities. I draw my own intersectional map on the board as a model for the students (*Figure 2*). I ask them to include at least five or six qualities. The visual representation of each of these spokes, intersecting, helps illustrate their interlocking nature. None of the qualities are more or less important; they are all interlocked.

Second, using the computer that is projected through the room, I use Google image search with the class. I search for a series of terms, and ask the class to explain how the most popular images to appear tell a story about privilege. Here are three examples:

Shadia

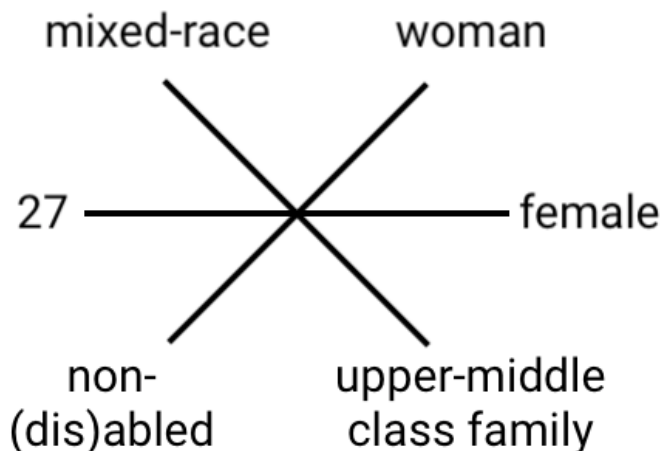


FIGURE 2. INTERSECTIONAL MAP (COMPLETED). AN EXAMPLE OF THE INTERSECTIONAL MAP TEMPLATE, FILLED OUT WITH SIX POSITIONALITY FACTORS OF ONE OF THE AUTHORS.

Example 1: Band-Aids

The "standard" Caucasian-toned Band-Aids appear as the most common image. When I ask students, "are these the color of everyone's skin?" students begin thinking about how racial privilege can translate into such small factors as being able to use a bandage that blends into a person's skin.

Example 2: Bathroom signs

The typical bathroom sign of a stick figure "man" and "woman" appears. Students detail these signs as gender-essentializing: the "man" does not have clothing detail, but the "woman" wears a skirt/dress. By presenting only two options, the signs also reinforce the gender binary, as well as androcentrism and "othering" of women: the "man" figure is the standard, and the "woman" figure appears to be the "man" wearing a skirt. These signs communicate standards of gender performance, and those who do not adhere (trans folks, gender non-conforming, those who do not fit into the gender binary) are shamed for not participating, and may even be left feeling unsafe in both or either bathroom. Students are also able to think about (dis)ability in these signs when we look at the "handicapped" bathroom sign: the figure on this sign does not wear a skirt, implying that the quintessential person with (dis)ability is either male, or perhaps even genderless.

Example 3: Engagement photo ideas

Upon doing this search, I ask students, "what do these images teach us about couples who are engaged?" Most couples are white-presenting, appear to be a man and woman, and do not present with any (dis)abilities. Students observe that the woman is almost always smaller and shorter, is femme-presenting, while the man is larger, masculine-presenting, and often is pictured picking the

woman up. Few pictures include people of color, and those that do usually contain phenotypically-similar couples. Finally, the images are heavily classed, as evidenced in the clothes, jewelry, and props which appear, in addition to the fact that engagement photos in themselves is a classed activity. Students learn that, if they seek images of couples who are not man/woman, who are mixed-race, who present with a (dis)ability, and so forth, they must specify their image search to those terms. In other words, those couples are “special” searches, outside the norm of the “regular” couples that appear. This image search serves as the pinnacle of the activity, since students can apply their intersectional thinking to pull out several positionality factors and their overlaps: race, class, gender, (dis)ability, and so forth, all interacting to produce a “normal” couple in these photos.

Through this activity, students learn to recognize how privilege and oppression might be effected through minor, everyday images and arrangements, and in what they might take for granted as “normal”—rather than just in events like slavery, genocide, and slurs. By using Google as a teaching tool, I also indicate to students that examples of privilege are casually and easily accessible, and that these discoveries are available to them as well.

Challenges to this activity

Though I often find that this activity engages students and gets them thinking creatively about positionality, I have experienced push back. From my experience, students might feel unconvinced that the images which appear with Google search are truly representative of privilege and oppression. In one class, a student remarked that the images which appeared were simply the results of Google's search algorithm.

In response, I acknowledged that Google's search algorithm played a role; but I also reminded my students that the algorithm responds to user's interactions with the search engine. That is to say, the search engine represents the images which people click on, save, search for, and so forth. In this way, Google's search results are indeed an indication of how people think about personhood, and thus, privilege. As such, when instructors use technology and/or point to technology for the lessons it can teach about privilege, I encourage them to push students to remember how technology is created and maintained by humans, and thus reflects human values and ideologies.

Katherine's Example

In my work as an educational developer in a teaching center, I mentored and coached graduate students and faculty in their classroom practice. I used an adaptation of a privilege walk to introduce faculty and graduate student instructors to the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion as they relate to their classroom practice, and to help them be attentive to classroom climate and the experiences of belonging by instructors and students in their classrooms. This activity typically occurs in a multi-disciplinary workshop setting and takes about 20-30 minutes. I have several goals

for graduate student instructors and faculty who participate in this activity. I want participants to see that these marginalized identities and experiences of non-belonging are all around them in everyday academic contexts. I want them to see that belonging is situational and can change depending upon who is in the room and what is represented. I want them to hear real stories of people around them and to develop compassion, listening, and observing, in ways that reflect Intergroup Dialogue practices (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). And I want them to engage in conversation that leads to simple individual and collective actions that lead to belonging.

Drawing upon Peggy McIntosh's 1989 article, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," I developed Belonging Statements that I have heard graduate students of marginalized identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, (dis)ability) at our institution say about their experiences either as Teaching Assistants to undergraduates or as students themselves in graduate classes. Examples include:

- I have had instructors who share my social identity group membership.
- Popular culture includes positive representations of professionals of my social identity groups.
- In my classes, course materials usually include authors of my social identity groups.
- In my classes, my contributions are included, listened to, and valued by my peers.
- When I speak in class, I am understood as an individual and not as a representative of my social identity group.
- In my classes, course activities have meaning and relevance to concerns in my community.
- In my classes, my instructors and peers step in when something is said that is discriminatory to my social identity group.
- My instructors, mentors, and peers understand my socio-cultural experiences.
- In general, I feel like I belong here.

We then engage in a version of a Values Clarification activity (Lederer, 2016). Each statement is printed on a separate sheet of paper and attached to the classroom wall. Participants are given sheets of red and green stickers and asked to read the statements and put either a Green (yes, I have experienced this) or Red (no, I generally don't experience this) sticker on the sheet. After about 7 minutes, we have covered the sheets with stickers. The dots provide a sense of anonymity; each participant can respond truthfully and authentically as they contribute to the collective truth of the room, but they do not have to reveal themselves publicly if they do not want to. The several times I have done this activity, each sheet has ALWAYS had both

green and red stickers, though the proportions change depending on the makeup of the participants. On most occasions, participants have developed their own modifications to the activity; for example, some participants have cut the stickers in half and attached half-red/half-green stickers to illustrate that the context matters for how they respond to the statement.

I then ask people to get into groups of 4-5 and give each group 1 or 2 of the statement sheets to discuss with the following questions for small group discussion:

- What is the dominant experience represented by that statement? What is the non-dominant experience?
- What does that non-belonging feel like? What has it looked like for you? In what ways or examples have you not felt belonging in a classroom context -- as either a teacher or a student?
- How would you address this as a teacher if you assumed that: 1) a sense of belonging in your class was important; and 2) that there would be at least one person who didn't feel they belonged?

When we conduct this activity first on paper, the sheets become a text and a source of data -- an amalgamation of our collective experiences -- that we can talk about, discuss, interpret, and act on. By adapting this activity to a text about our experiences (instead of about our literal bodies), we collectively understand how those constellations of dots came to be as representations of very real personal experiences, fears, and dreams in our academic setting.

Challenges to this activity

I have had a participant willfully not participate in the activity, announcing that the statements did not represent their experiences and that they could not, and therefore would not, respond. I have also had a faculty participant assert that these statements were not relevant to the classroom experience or what they were responsible for as an instructor; they stated that they are preparing their students for "the real world" where their positionalities would not be catered to. I anticipate that participants will push back against activities about privilege and oppression, and I am prepared for and open to these expressions. At the same time, I remind them of the validity of each person's lived experience, of the importance of thinking outside of their own identities and being compassionate about how those experiences of marginalization in the classroom relate to students' performance, of our responsibilities as educators at a public university to provide an equitable education, and of the importance of appreciating others' stories, especially when those experiences are present in the room.

Conclusions

In sharing our reflections on privilege activities, we offer models to stimulate a paradigm shift in the ways each of us -- as people ourselves and as educators of undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty, and staff -- orients toward ongoing learning about power, privilege, oppression, and intersectional identities. We reflect on the affective components of learning about privilege -- nuance, ambiguity, personal growth, and patience with process over endpoint -- that go hand-in-hand with cognitive learning about intersectionality. Each of our activities values the privacy of participants, the complexity of positionality, and the very personal struggle of understanding one's own positionality. Perhaps most importantly, we are concerned with a particular epistemological shift. We each want our students to transition their thinking about privilege from "oppressor/oppressed" and "more or less oppressed" to an intersectional, contextual, and relative framework.

For each of us, humility and vulnerability are closely tied to this epistemological shift. Thinking intersectionally means remaining open to the realization of additional identities and experiences; it also means coming to terms with one's own failure to account for certain identities and experiences. For many people, humility and vulnerability might represent their greatest challenge when taking on such activities. This kind of epistemological shift challenges educators' facilitation skills and can produce discomfort, as participants' worldviews and what they thought they knew may shift. Participants might experience discomfort when asked to "own" their intersectional positionality. Folks might feel overwhelmed by how much they are learning about themselves. They might examine how they are complicit in the oppression of others, and might feel scared about if and how they should change some of their behaviors and their beliefs about others. They might feel intimidated by being asked to hold a place for vulnerability, for being ready to take criticism, for knowing that they will make mistakes and will learn from them. They might feel confused by the paradox or dichotomy of being vulnerable to mistakes and yet open to the critique. Feelings of shame ("I'm a fundamentally bad person") and humiliation ("I've made a bad mistake") have the potential to shut down learners new to these conversations about oppression. Participants might seek a simple answer for how to be "good," and/or how to make sure everyone is being included.

Knowing about the possibility of all of these discomforting feelings, we think intentionally about the experience of our privilege activities as a place of possibility and productive vulnerability. We convey openly and intentionally that the experience is a journey and path, not just objective stuff to know, but a constant process of learning. We believe our activities encourage participants to detach from the idea of a "final" point or lesson not just about "not being an asshole" to individual people. Instead, we try to engage participants to look critically at the systems that inform and constrain our behaviors that result in and perpetuate systems of oppression. We try to offer possibilities and hope in the follow-up discussions. We think deliberately about how to help participants move beyond

guilt toward actions that make liberatory impacts on systems. As facilitators, we publicly admit our own learning position within the activities we propose.

We as educators also engage intentionally in our own learning about the concepts of positionality and intersectionality as well as in personal reflection on our own implicit and explicit participation in others' oppression and liberation. For each of us, this epistemological shift is sourced from our engagements with various literatures, in fields including disability, Indigeneity, race, gender. We recommend texts including: intersectional knowledge (Taylor, 2017; Crenshaw, 1989; Hill, Collins, and Bilge, 2016; Cooper, 2018; Oluo, 2018); vulnerability in education (Brown, 2018; Palmer, 1997; Bertram and Crowley, 2012); (dis)ability as a facet of intersectional identity (Knoll, 2009; Erevelles and Minear, 2010); brave spaces and trauma-informed teaching (Arao and Clemens, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014); and imagining within the academy (Tuck and Yang, 2012; paperson, 2017). These literatures help us think about intersectionality as a lived experience and not as a research methodology. We apply this approach to our learning spaces as we guide students to think intersectionally so they can understand any situation they encounter. We also think about our relationships with our learners and our role in guiding activities about privilege. We remain personally grounded in the activity. We do not have to know all of the answers. Thus, our role is to ask questions, orient students to the activity goal and process, and facilitate dialogue and understanding. We also trust students to engage to the best of their ability, help them choose courage over comfort, and guide them toward ethical behavior and lives that are aligned with their values.

Questions and Practices for Instructors to Consider

When organizing an activity that recognizes privilege and oppression, we recommend that instructors consider these questions:

- How can I activate participants' thinking not only towards various facets of positionality, but towards their interactions with each other?
- What are the identities I cannot "see," but to which I should turn participants' attention? Consider those who are undocumented/DACAmented, homeless, food insecure; those experiencing violence in their personal lives; those facing addiction, and who experience non-visible (dis)abilities.
- How can I encourage *sustained* interrogation of privilege and oppression, and individuals' places in these systems, across a long period of time (i.e., a semester)?
- How can I encourage students to think about oppressions as interlocking?
- How can I orient students towards thinking about privilege and oppression as they manifest in subtle, everyday ways?

- How do I locate *myself* and *my* positionality in activities and discussions? What are *my* feelings in reaction to being vulnerable about my experiences of privilege and oppression?

We invite other educators to share further examples and possibilities around how practitioners enact privilege activities, to share why they make certain choices based on context, positionality, and goals. We also invite dialogue about how we as a practitioner community can reveal, understand, establish the short- and long-term impacts -- cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal outcomes -- of engagement in activities like these. We ask instructors in any discipline to consider how privilege is functioning in the lives of their students, how they are activating students' knowledge towards it, and how to do so in an intersectional, nuanced, and flexible way.

Notes

¹ At a 2015 public talk at Indiana University Bloomington at which they were all present, Ariane Cruz, Amber Musser, Kai M. Green, and C. Riley Snorton discussed how they favored the use of "positionality" rather than "identity" to locate social experience (and thus marginalizations and privileges experienced). We share an affinity for this term for its recognition that the power attached to factors such as race, gender, and class, shift across different contexts and in different combinations with one another.

² An interesting version of the privilege walk that is worth considering is one from the American Immigration Council (2016), which suggest an "immigration status privilege walk."

³ Daniela Gutiérrez López, personal communication, February 22, 2019.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Donning the “Slow Professor”: A Feminist Action Research Project

by Sara Ashencaen Crabtree, Ann Hemingway, Sue Sudbury, Anne Quinney, Maggie Hutchings, Luciana Esteves, Shelley Thompson, Helen Jacey, Anita Diaz, Peri Bradley, Jenny Hall, Michele Board, Anna Feigenbaum, Lorraine Brown, Vanessa Heaslip, and Liz Norton



PHOTO BY NAREETA MARTIN ON UNSPLASH

Introduction

An international groundswell of academic critique has focused on shifting foundational principles, values, and practices that affect academic work and learning cultures. These critiques are often framed in terms of the undesirable consequences of far-reaching changes to universities. Such critiques are diverse in terms of perspectives and analyses, relating to issues of university governance (Brown, 2015); creeping bureaucratization in Higher Education (HE), along with shifting rationales, premises, and practices (Collini, 2012; Furedi, 2017); the marginalization of women (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018) and minority ethnic (ME) faculty (Gabriel and Tate, 2017); or the impact of speed and standardization upon pedagogy (Berg and Seeber, 2016). What unites these critiques are references to aspects of academic life connected to global trends in HE as a corporate, capitalist body subject to all the ills of “bureaupathology” (Kowalewski, 2012), together with a scrutiny of the resultant implications for academics and students.

This essay reports on a qualitative participatory action research (PAR) project undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of women academics at a modern, corporate university in England. We are all members of a feminist, cross-university but informal nexus, the Women’s Academic Network (WAN), promoting the academic profiles of women faculty and lobbying on identified issues on their collective behalf. The focus of the study was to undertake a trial period of adoption of working strategies inspired by the “Slow Professor” movement as described by Berg and Seeber (2016). Our aim was to increase group and personal efficacy in challenging and resisting corporatized academic practices deemed as damaging to academic integrity and the well-being of staff and students.

Critiques of the Corporate Academy

Academic resistance manifested by the Slow Professor concept, along with other critiques, challenge contemporary HE trends. Corporatized universities have gained a rapid foothold in the academic landscape in much of the English-speaking world (Berg and Seeber, 2016); and from there are beginning to colonize other regions through the process of replication of perceived successful models, otherwise known as *isomorphic convergence* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In employing the term “corporatization” with its obvious connotations of business enterprise, we include reconceptualization of academia such as the commodification of HE serving a profitable student “customer” base and operating in a potential or quasi-marketplace, exemplified by the UK where Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are classified as public charities.

Corporatization in education is viewed as having become more established in the UK than the USA; Holmwood (2014) explains that this is owing to infrastructural ability to impose systemic changes on HEI en masse by successive neo-liberal British governments, in contrast to the more gradual transition that has occurred

across the US. Prominent critics, Collini (2012) and Frank Furedi (2017), explore the shifting terrain of UK HEI, along with the new values and practices of the corporate institution displacing shared understandings of what tertiary education has meant. Such attitudinal shifts can be traced in educational policy: the Robbins Report (1963) was the blueprint for UK academia, emphasizing the greater social utility of HE where economic growth was seen as only one of four major contributions academia made to society; by 2010, only fiscal benefits were recognised in the Browne Review Report (Holmwood, 2014). The rise of so-called “post-(19)92” universities deviated from established HE in focusing on industry-based vocational programmes for the mass student market (Blass, 2005).

Slow Academia

The polemics of the “Slow Professor Manifesto” (Berg and Seeber, 2016) draws comparison with other slow movements—for example, “slow food.” In the “Manifesto,” the notion of “slow” semantically conforms to ideas of “deliberate,” “thoughtful,” “in-depth,” and “conscious,” pedagogy, which is argued to be integrally relevant to academic life:

While slowness has been celebrated in architecture, urban life and personal relations, it has not yet found its way into education. Yet, if there is one sector of society which should be cultivating deep thought, it is academic teachers. Corporatization has compromised academic life and sped up the clock. The administrative university is concerned above all with efficiency, resulting in a time crunch and making those of us subjected to it feel powerless. (Berg and Seeber, 2015: 2) Others have also studied the accelerated speed of HE and its impact on academic life. Vostal (2015: 72) focuses on the enforced acceleration of the work tempo that leads to academic “hurry sickness,” substantially eroding personal control of academic time and resulting in demoralising, concomitant decisions of prioritization, referring to which tasks to skimp and who to let down. Gill (2009) challenges academics to turn critical scrutiny onto their working conditions using an intersectional analytical lens exploring, links between macro-organisation and institutional practices on the one hand, and experiences and affective states on the other, and open up an exploration of the ways in which these may be gendered, racialised and classed (Gill, 2009: 40).

In considering intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), we primarily consider the impact of gender and class, although ethnicity/nationality are not ignored. In respect to gender globally, women are entering HE in high numbers and the UK is no exception (OECD, 2014). For those remaining in HE, equal gendered numbers will enter academic careers (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2019; 2018), but will then confront an entrenched academic hierarchy where male colleagues are considerably more likely to advance their careers to full professorship in comparison with female peers, who comprise approximately only 22% (Grove, 2015). Yet ethnicity is closely implicated in aggregate figures, where of the total number of UK professors, there are a mere 85

people self-identifying as Black of which just 25 individuals are Black female (full) professors (Rollock, 2019). Addressing the predominantly White, male profile of British HE, the UK body AdvanceHE seeks to address marginalization of groups by pushing HEI to sign up to their Equality Charters (<https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/>). The Race Equality Charter challenges the continuation of under-representation of ME academics, while the Athena SWAN Charter addresses the marginal position of women academics in terms of representation and progression. Although numerically tiny, the experiences of Black British women academics has emerged strongly through two important new publications, the first being an edited volume of narratives by Gabriel and Tate (2017), while a comprehensive report on career strategies and experiences has been produced by Rollock (2019) for the main national academic trade union, the University College Union (UCU). Both describe the intertwined experiences of isolation and lonely singularity in the color-blind and racist cultures of British academia, in which the intersectional marginalization of gender and class are equally combined.

The dangers of an overwhelming, "hideous" Whiteness in British academia (Mirza, 2017: 39) can work to obscure and thus subordinate the experiences of White (and other non-Black) women academics as hegemonically complicit in White male privilege, as argued by Gabriel (2017), who in turn questions the solidarity of feminism in academia in speaking to Black women colleagues. Gabriel's point resonates with the low ethnic diversity evident in WAN in respect to academics of Afro-Caribbean heritage, where there is a worrying proportional scarcity at the institution.

A moot question relates to the connection between speed, academy, and ethnicity/"race." Rollock's report (2019) refers to the convoluted career paths experienced by Black women academics. Here the intersectional incongruities of being Black and female are heightened in a traditionally masculinized culture of White, male power, thus exacerbating the difficulties of managing the unrelenting pressure of academia. The invisibility of women academics in terms of rank, authority, and power (Ashencaen, et. Al., 2017) acts as a general gendered backdrop enveloping Black women academics, who because of their scarcity experience higher performance visibility that militates against individuals being able to pursue a slow scholarship pathway.

Rollock's report (2019) refers to the convoluted career paths experienced by Black women academics. Here the intersectional incongruities of being Black and female are heightened in a traditionally masculinized culture of White, male power, thus exacerbating the difficulties of managing the unrelenting pressure of academia.

Women collectively, irrespective of ethnicity, constitute gendered and marginalized anomalies in HE, given the

inhospitable organizational environment of male priorities they must negotiate (O'Connor, 2015: 310). Pascall (2012) claims that such environments tacitly conform to a "masculinist," male model of work embracing compliance to a regime of absolute commitment to uninterrupted waged work; with the implication that domestic care duties are either non-existent in the private sphere or delegated to others. Thus slow progression rates among women point to a culture of institutional sexism where academic tasks are gendered (Morley, 2013), with women frequently occupying the less valorized pastoral "Mom's roles" (Eddy and Ward, 2015: 4); as well as "housekeeping" tasks such as teaching and programme management (Grove, 2013: Ashencaen and Shiel, 2019) that lead to slow-track progression rates (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018).

In considering intersectionality, the issue of disability must also be mentioned here, where the expectation of academic speed disadvantages certain groups, particularly those with a hidden disability (such as mental health issues, HIV/AIDS, and epilepsy). Although institutions attempt to capture data regarding disability for equality and diversity reporting, many conditions are socially stigmatised and far more readily associated with students rather than academics, whose vulnerability is negated by corporate processes from the outset. Few academics would feel sufficiently confident and secure enough to publicize that they suffer from profound dyscalculia or dyslexia, for instance, when sound literacy and numeracy are assumed to be the least qualifications for an academic position; and where potentially public knowledge of such perceived deficits could injure professional reputations to an unknown degree.

The Impact upon Health

O'Neill, in reference to Gill (2009), notes that contemporary academia exemplifies neo-liberal principles in its demand for hard working, autonomous, self-motivated, and self-regulated workers, who are also continually engaged in the performance of self-checking against "metrics and measurement" (2014: 6). A pervasive and existential sense of shame, guilt, and insecurity among academics embodies the pathology of neo-liberal academia, as noted by Gill (2009), Vostal (2015), and O'Neill (2014). A previous study of faculty undertaken by WAN indicated that indeed high levels of anxiety and guilt were felt by most women participants, but until then had not been articulated as a collective experience (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018).

Work is a key determinant of health universally, impacting on both physical and mental health through the quality of the working environment psychosocially and in terms of support. A UCU survey revealed that three quarters of academic staff suffer from stress and over half of these respondents experienced very high levels of stress leading to mental health problems (Kinman and Wray, 2013). According to a report by the UK Higher Education Policy Institute, excessive numbers of academic staff are seeking occupational health and counselling support (Morrish, 2019). The report notes, for example, that between 2009 and 2015 there was a 77% rise in counselling referrals with a 64% rise in occupational health referrals (Morrish, 2019).

A review of the evidence on workplace characteristics impacting on health and well-being (New Economics Foundation, 2014) indicates the following significant points:

- Management behavior is highly important, with some management styles more successful than others at strengthening well-being at work; with inspiration and motivation being the key characteristics of positive management.
- “Safe” working environments and a sense of the social value of the work of the organization may increase employees’ feelings of job satisfaction.
- Good levels of job-fit and skill-use with opportunities to develop new skills, can create high levels of employee satisfaction.
- Helping employees to take greater control over their work can lead to better performance and greater job satisfaction.
- Taking steps to improve relationships at work – with a particular focus on relationships between staff and managers – and encouraging positive feelings can improve both job and life satisfaction.
- Organizations can enhance their employees’ feelings of job security and enhance their sense that a job is achievable, creating higher levels of job satisfaction.
- Here we consider whether the current evidence on the enhancement or reduction of health and well-being at work resonates with this study’s findings.

Methodological Approaches

Conceived of as a problem across academia, this study aimed to deconstruct the prevailing corporate discourse of output efficiency and to remedially experiment to moderate or calm an immoderate HE culture of continual demand and uncritically examined measurement and metrics. Earlier research among women academics at the study institution had provided valuable insights into the working culture, practices, and stressors that shaped and, arguably, deformed academics’ experiences of work (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018, 2019). In this study, amelioration and solution of identified issues were sought; and given that these equally affected the researchers, a participatory action research (PAR) methodology was deemed the most appropriate approach to explore the following research question: “What are the perceived benefits and barriers towards the adoption of Slow Professor principles for academic women in a post-92 corporate university following a period of trial adoption?”

The overall aim of the study was emancipatory: first, to find or (re)ignite engagement with conscious and committed deliberation that overtly served and respected in-depth scholarly approaches; next, to embed these as our unique

working practices; finally, to share the fruit of our collaborative enterprise with other faculty colleagues as part of the PAR approach.

The methodological choice required participants to engage with the study as co-researchers enabling us to scrutinize the assumed social realities that current HE practice were a necessary, if social Darwinian, good. In view of the general gendered skewing of academic rewards, the focus of a study on academic issues of accelerated pressures in time-poor contexts was framed as a feminist investigation.

PAR involves a number of cycles where, in the first instance, the co-investigation of a specific problem is diagnosed within the group (Bryman, 2016). Solutions are consequently proposed and a plan of action undertaken by the group; this program is then monitored and evaluated by the co-researchers. Subsequent cycles continue to redefine the problem with new action planned, intervention undertaken and evaluated until eventual resolution has been achieved (Ashencaen, et. al., 2001).

PAR subverts the hierarchical distinctions between researcher and subject through a democratization of ownership of the research, its aims, and outcomes (Roose et al., 2014). Within this egalitarian forum of shared inquiry, intersectional differences and commonalities, embodied among the research team, led to new insights into our experiential knowledge, survival strategies, and resistance (Bondestam, 2011). Analysis was conducted by hand through a participatory and discursive but otherwise conventional coding exercise of the raw data, where the themes form the findings of the study (van Teijlingen and Pitchforth, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Participant recruitment was carried out through the existing WAN network of 146 members, achieving an excellent response. The research team was eventually comprised of eighteen members, although over time there was an attrition rate of two members.

In terms of ethical considerations, PAR approaches can constructively disrupt some of the conventions of research protocols, in that while team members were free to withdraw at any point, participants were elevated to co-researchers whose identities were not subject to anonymity. Principal Investigator (PI) access to WAN members related to our own active involvement in the organization, but given that this is a large, flourishing network there was no unintentional targeting of any particular individuals. Instead, the speed of recruitment suggests that the topic was viewed as one of genuine interest and concern to members, who were keen to participate in a study grounded in ethical considerations towards collegial well-being.

Our collaboration involved close attention to and analysis of our own practice as change agents for “slow scholarship.” In so doing, we used logs and memos to chart these transitions over time. Planning and feedback meetings enabled us to track interventions over the PAR cycles. However, advances towards change were often felt to be imperceptible and necessitated extending the project into the second year. On reflection, it was evident that we had been absurdly blind to our case of Vostal’s (2015) “hurry

sickness” to believe that a meaningful PAR study on corporate speed could be realistically undertaken and embedded into practice within a 12-month duration.

Intersectionality and the PAR Team

As a team, and irrespective of being an all female group, we represent diversity in terms of academic role and rank, discipline, length of service, nationality/ethnicity, family context, and originating class background. We are all “permanent” members of staff, the status of “tenure” having been phased out in the UK some decades past with different employment rights attached compared to the US. In the British HE system, only full professors carry this formal title; others use their professional or civil honorifics. Thus our rankings include a number of lecturers (approximating to Assistant Professors), Senior and Principal Academics (roughly equivalent to Associate Professor), and two full professors. Our discipline backgrounds embrace the health disciplines, the social sciences, environmental sciences, media, and journalism.

In terms of ethnicity, most co-researchers self-identify as White in keeping with HE institutional, and regional demographics, although one team member is South American and others of mixed European, migrant heritage. More variation is shown in terms of class, although academic national pay scales and work benefits are not widely dissimilar across the UK and therefore for the purposes of this article we consider class, as well as ethnicity, as self-identified in relation to how individual team members would define their original family background. Several team members claimed working-class roots, and even distinctly underprivileged backgrounds, as described below:

Lorraine: I am from a White working-class background, my mother being a factory worker and then a cleaner and my father being a railway worker. I grew up in a slum area of Nottingham, UK, and lived for 12 years in a house with no bathroom or indoor toilet. At the age of 13, my parents divorced and a violent stepfather moved in. For four years my sister, mother and I were subject to emotional and physical abuse. When he finally left, my stepfather took all the contents of the house with him. Education was my sanctuary from a chaotic home life. I was the first in my neighborhood to gain entrance to a “grammar school” and the first in my family to pass onto further and then Higher Education. My upbringing has shaped my view of the world and of the good fortune of working in academia.

Given that most of the team would not view themselves as coming from bourgeois, educated backgrounds, class remains relevant as strongly influencing life expectations and aspirations, including access to HE and career opportunities, but where a Marxist analysis of management-worker relations premised upon exploitation remains valid in corporatized academia. Thus if gender and ethnicity offer anomalous characteristics to the norm of UK HE, then so too does class, where, although it has long been the case that some British academics have come from traditional lower socio-economic “blue collar” family backgrounds, the

assumption has been that HE is the natural domain of the elite intelligentsia.

Accordingly, class discrepancies create the dynamics of actual or psychological precarity, as played out among faculty, seeking peer and institutional recognition of their worthiness, notwithstanding their less favourable personal backgrounds, as one co-researcher describes:

this has often meant feeling fraudulent, not belonging, and consequently trying harder to feel accepted and approved of. This is all perception as I have, I think, never been disparaged because of my background.

Tertiary education typically represents an escape route to a hard-won, better life in many ways, but one that also takes its toll in terms of much reduced leisure and greatly increased stress, compared to most occupations. Nonetheless, academic jobs are highly valued by the co-researchers and have been described as sparked by inspirational women school teachers, to whom a feminist legacy and debt is owed and repaid in kind daily:

Vanessa: I was brought up in a poor, working-class community from Southwest England where educational aspirations were typically low. Whilst at school I was in receipt of “free school meals” and we also received financial assistance for school uniforms. Because of this I remember feeling acutely different to other pupils. I have always had strong ideals about the world and what I perceived were social injustices but I never had any aspirations to go to university. This changed in English lesson when I was about 15; we were reading Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* and the teacher asked us to perform a court room scene of what the trial may have been like. I was appointed to the role of defence lawyer and I remember really loving having a debate and being able to construct an argument, which led to a desire to go to university. However being first in family to go to HE was challenging, as I was entering a new work full of processes that were alien to me and to my family at home.

Anne: I am a Principal Lecturer in my 60s and from a White British, working-class, northern family. I grew up in a rural area close to a large northern industrial conurbation. I was encouraged by women teachers passionate about the transformative potential of higher education and became the first in my extended family to attend university. My children have in turn attended university and lead lives that are unimaginable to northern family members.

Challenging a notion of easy privilege, nearly all teammates entered HE as a subsequent career where the trajectory into academia had not been an assumed destiny or indeed a straightforward goal. Only one member had taken a direct route through postgraduate studies into their first academic post and this occurred outside of the UK. Many of us had been recruited directly from industry onto vocational programmes in HE, with a couple additionally gaining a secure foothold in academia only after years of precarious, academic contract work in an HE sector characterised by the labour of poorly paid, part-time hourly casual labour (UCU, 2018). A minority had also experienced

marked ethnic and cultural marginalization in HE either in or beyond the UK.

In considering intersectionality, we explore how discrimination and oppression have played out in our lives, where gender and class are significant factors. This is particularly so for those with legacies of weaker social and cultural capital, further compounded by the marginal positions of women in academia (Morley, 2013; Eddy and Ward, 2015). Migrant legacies contribute to this, whereas first- or second-generation migrants some have experienced the struggle to claim a stake in the newly adopted country.

We deconstruct the term “radical” as etymologically related to “root.” Here we attempt to peel back layers of neo-liberal ideology to construct our understanding of the roots of scholarship – that to which we aspire but experience as undermined. We position ourselves as radically opposed to this erosion and recognize the dangers of normalization and complicity in these alien and alienating processes (Gill, 2017). We challenge a monolithic and hegemonic understanding that marginalizes diverse views of what academics are, what knowledge is, and how it should be shared and disseminated.

Identifying and Testing Slow Professor Strategies

In the PAR cycles, the first task was to critically read Berg and Seeber’s (2016) “Slow Professor Manifesto,” which everyone found strongly echoed their sense of professional unease and dissatisfaction; this proved to be a highly cathartic exercise. We also considered the strategies they suggest, seeking to identify helpful ones of our own. A process of trial-and-adoption was undertaken as our first intervention, recorded in logs and fed back into the wider group for discussion. From the outset, we noted our bad habits that had become insidiously and unthinkingly engrained in our behavior, leading to a continuous sense of disruption and attention deficit-type “woolly thinking”:

Luciana: Start looking at emails only twice a day. Multitasking really affects my concentration.

Sue: Stop charging through the day ticking tasks off never ending lists.

Sara: Regularly taking myself away from Wi-Fi and start doubling the time it takes to meet a deadline. Saying “no” more often.

The idiosyncratic, individualistic ethos of academia has served to create flourishing intellectual cultures and that appealing aura of independent aloofness from prosaic preoccupations (the “ivory tower” fantasy). However, under corporatization, scholarly autonomy is reduced to atomized isolation where it is difficult to distinguish between the personal feeling of being “rushed off one’s feet” and the deliberately accelerated conveyor belt enveloping the work culture, in which the momentum of individual tempo is artificially speeded up and tasks both multiplied and compressed. Our reflective discussions permitted us to discern external mechanisms creating a continual and exhausting sense of fragmented, “fire-fighting” urgency,

facilitating insights into how our adaptive behaviour, often coming at cost to ourselves, reduced our capacity to resist – leading to further suggested Slow Professor strategies:

Lorraine: Restricting the inner bully. Risking candor. Creating timelessness.

Ann: Giving myself thinking time. Prioritizing supporting colleagues above artificial demands. People first!

Vanessa: Time to care for yourself. Being more realistic. Putting in *Clear Days* in the diary. Starting working at home more.

The question of “timelessness” refers to Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003)’s definition: that which is under autonomous control but which becomes irrelevant or invisible in comparison to the absorbing nature of the task engaging attention. Scholarly work ideally constitutes just such a total and joyful obliviousness, but in reality time is too often punctuated by interruptions or seemingly sabotaged by alternative organizational priorities. Omnipresent computer technology, which academics are virtually all obliged to use ubiquitously and competently (Gill 2017), commands open communication channels for an immediacy of institutional demand and individual response. Indeed, within our institution there is a student response protocol demanded of staff to ensure that they answer all student emails within three days. There are no protocols limiting email traffic to staff whatsoever, leading to no respite.

A number of strategies articulated by team members referred to care and well-being, an important point given candid admissions of anxiety and stress in the group and the significant number of cases of cancer and other serious health conditions among our colleagues. Prioritizing self-care as a female academic, however, was expressed as a courageously assertive and subversive stance challenging the feminized call to self-sacrificing duty in a pressurized work culture, where appeals to additional collegiality and team working were often experienced as managerial manipulative devices in contexts of stretched resources.

Reflecting on Speed, Conformity, and Pedagogy

“The norm is fast not slow—and *nothing* challenges it.”

The truth of this comment within our team reminded us of the scale of the challenge we faced as a small group of female colleagues, critiquing powerful, top-down agendas exploiting staff time and goodwill. In terms of institutional profit motives, a conspicuous example is that contracted employment hours are openly acknowledged as bearing no resemblance to the long, unregulated hours ambitious academics are actually expected to put in to be viewed as serious players. Private time is open to encroachment by the institution, as one co-researcher noted angrily in her log:

This was going to be the first weekend I have had off in months and I am totally exhausted. ...Scholarship cannot survive in the face of bureaucratic corporate nonsense that degrades the very meaning of what we came into academia to do.

Alarming, even though we may acknowledge our own fatigue, the competitive work culture is adept at facilitating our self-regulation and conditioning towards excessive loads, as Jenny realizes:

I therefore vow also not to judge others for their workload and not be guilty about protecting time to restore balance.

Yet, self-restorative time is far from encouraged in masculinized work cultures like the corporate academy (Pascall, 2012). Taking time for personal commitments is likely to be viewed as an issue peculiar to women, who are then viewed as the architects of their own failure to rise up the hierarchy (Ashencaen and Shiel, 2019).

Following through PAR cycles our consciousness developed and fully confronted how corporate speed affected our pedagogic approaches. We listed the ways in which haste had begun to infiltrate teaching and the student experience: the minimal time allocated in workload models for the development of teaching material, for instance.

For undergraduates, time pressures are found in strict deadlines, where uploading assignments to online platforms, as institutionally demanded, can result in students being heavily penalized for being literally moments overdue. Other examples include rigid time-controlled grading and moderating responses regardless of class size or teaching loads. Postgraduates now experience a loss of flexibility in terms of study duration, where UK HEI are financially penalized by governing educational bodies if enrolled doctoral students take longer than four years to complete a full-time doctorate, with some institutions interpreting this in a particularly draconian fashion. The classical PhD journey as an academic rite of passage, with all the picaresque ups-and-downs that conveys, has been exchanged for a technocratic, time-controlled process of deadlines, deliveries, and outcomes that fulfill institutional metrics of postgraduate success.

Additionally, we see an unshakeable institutional conviction that online systems offer the best learning experience to students and must necessarily be a boon to time-poor educators, even while advocates caution that they are not a panacea for solving educational issues (Hamdan et al. 2013; Hedberg 2006). While the list of daily examples seemed endless, a greater concern arose concerning teaching integrity where we identified an imposed posture of inauthenticity in ourselves:

An obvious dissonance between the criticality (and reflectiveness) we try to encourage in our students and the lack of it in relation to what staff feel able to say in their Faculties

Gill (2009) exhorts us to analyse our own condition in academia. What kind of transformations would we make were we able to freely enact our understanding of pedagogic authenticity? (Gill, 2009). Generally, it would involve jettisoning many of the micro-managing controls typical of "bureaupathology" (Kowalewski, 2012), with its insufficiently rationalized obsession with standardization of knowledge "chunks," ridgification of dissemination formats, and fanatical detection of student cheating. A paradox of

such managerialism is that uniformity and isomorphic convergence are highly valued (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983); and although it regularly purports to champion "innovation," in practice this is viewed with suspicion and often stifled:

PAR comment:

Risk averse - having to do ridiculous things because of the Uni's risk aversion.

Students imbibe such mixed messages leading to a vicious cycle where they learn to distrust pedagogic diversity and creativity and view teaching variations as problematic. This then reinforces a managerial appetite for ossified standardization and endless staff training on the assumption of general academic/pedagogic incompetence.

PAR comment: As an academic only place to get validation is outside of Uni. The impression I get here is that there is no value to you: always malfunctioning.

Equally, students adapt their behaviour to an environment where increasingly disorientated academics can be openly exploited with impunity:

PAR comment: What students learn from the dysfunctions of contemporary HEI is to expect abnormality, that the workforce is kept extraordinarily busy and pressurized and that there are no boundaries to their work—with the corollary that they are expected to be available to students round the clock and every day of the week.

Through such reflections, our pedagogic praxis is now evolving, albeit idiosyncratically and unevenly (rejecting a herd need for uniformity), but nonetheless reinforced by our raised consciousness of what skews our work and detracts us from experiencing and imparting teaching as pleurably relational and life-enhancing. Liz now feels more comfortable covering less terrain with students but at a deeper level of inquiry. Sara feels affirmed in her practice as "creative, experimental, involving childlike fun, which for me is the best way to learn and impart knowledge."

Vanessa now builds into her diary a quiet hour to reflect on her work and regroup in preparation for the next week. Harnessing the notion that "many hands make light work" has also led to a re-emphasis of the benefits of team working in research and publications. While researching the issues besetting HE and writing about its ills has been emancipatory, it ironically meets the very institutional metrics and measurements that are the source of much academic distress.

Reflecting on Anxiety and Failure

PAR comment: Realising I can't do anymore! And just remembering to breathe...

In the academy, stress and anxiety are cast as personal deficits arising from inefficient time management or lack of professional aptitude, which consequently must be shamefully concealed. The recent suicides of two British academics (Dr Malcolm Anderson of Cardiff University and Professor Stefan Grimm of Imperial College, London) owing to work-related stress issues have substantiated reports of

very high levels of academic stress in the UK (Kinman and Wray, 2013; Morrish, 2019), effectively undermining but not demolishing the personal deficit argument. Nonetheless, academics are still expected to deal with stress as a question of personal resilience, as we note:

PAR comment: Humanization of Care – the blame culture needs challenging, which purports that your context makes no difference to your health, it’s all about you – we know that this is simply not true.

Dehumanization of staff is demonstrated in neo-liberal language: where people are referred to as “resources” and treated as replaceable “units of labor”; where “contractual hours” are accepted as empty tokens to meet employment laws; and shifting terrains and measurements create psychoanalytic, Laingian paradoxical “double binds” (Laing, 1960). Where cultures of managerial bullying are normative, then mental and physical health problems are likely to be commonplace (New Economics Foundation, 2014). Comments offered in PAR discussions focused on how these messages became experientially embodied as powerlessness, belittling, and isolating.

- “Experiences rubbished in meetings—and I feel it is dangerous to rubbish women’s experiences.”
- “On an endless treadmill of meeting pointless demands”
- “Feeling like a disorganised failure. Who cares about the adulterated rubbish you are producing at the end of the academic sausage machine, because there is no time for scholarship.”
- “Stop feeling guilty (I would love to learn how to do it) – I recognise this as a big issue, but also I seem to have very little control of it. I may go for a walk, but I’ll be feeling guilty that I’m not doing whatever work is (always) to be done. Feeling guilty has obvious direct implications to breaks throughout the day, ‘down time,’ timelessness, *being* instead of *doing*.”

Many of us had experienced the blame and bullying culture first- or second-hand as arguably endemic across HE, where the dangers for the corporate academy lie in its allegiance to top-down, impersonalized, and bureaucratized systems that exclude and denigrate academic judgment and experience (Holmwood, 2016), fetishizing marketization in the form of “output,” “key performance indicators,” and “unique selling points”:

PAR comments:

“Corporate quasi-business models permeate all aspects of academic life...We are colonized by the business model against our wills.”

“We are all kept in an uncertain, precarious space that we can’t feel any belonging within. We all feel we don’t fit.”

Occupying a collective position of hierarchical disadvantage, traditional exclusion from elite professions, and gendered, marginalized perspectives and experiences, women academics who dare speak their disagreement with prevailing hegemonic and masculinist values and practices have the potential to build transformatory feminist power. This is particularly so given the evangelical mission of this study and, additionally, as linked to WAN, which is in itself a non-conformist vehicle for gendered policy change (working towards reduced gender pay gaps and improved working conditions); but also by how such messages are received. The negative and sexist reviews that Berg and Seeber’s (2016) work attracted demonstrate how radically subversive the “slow professor” message has been (Charbonneau, 2018). To a lesser degree, we have already attracted unfavorable attention where one teammate was strongly discouraged from participating by a senior member of staff on the grounds that this study could be viewed as too radically subversive for career advancement.

Reflecting on Resistance

Although we often felt abject failures at trying to become Slow Professors, especially within the artificial construct of a time-limited duration (congruent with our academic conditioning), we did succeed in raising our consciousness of how HE had become falsely bounded by damaging beliefs and practices that undermined the very enterprise it claimed to serve: scholarship shaped and shared by us and with others. The frustration we experienced in not being able to achieve our objectives were eloquently expressed:

I feel like Tantalus. I can see the grapes hanging there but can never quite *reach* them!

Nonetheless, this exasperation served a constructive purpose in developing insights into how complicit we had become in oppressive ways of thinking and doing (Gill, 2017). Moreover, it generated a pause in our automatic, often self-harming attitudes and behaviors, allowing the possibility for new habits to form or surprising decisions to be made. One of us having missed out on time spent with our teenage children decided to work part-time in order to fulfil an engaged grandparenting role that in turn helped these now adult children. Another took up a university trade union role in order to further challenge the exploitation of academic workers. A different strategy has been to “infiltrate the ranks,” seeking election to university senate in order to shape slow professor policies from within.

Mastery over manipulative, harmful systems, beliefs, and practices still eludes us; and thus the distance we have travelled between illumination and liberation remains questionable. In a review of Berg and Seeber’s “Manifesto” published in this journal, the question of how far the individual is able to change embedded Goliath systems was raised (Brady, 2017). While Berg and Seeber do counsel against the apathy of despair, the temptation to collude with the system can be strong in neoliberal contexts where the individual is encouraged to feel both diminished and alone. Accordingly, Vanessa reasons that perhaps resistance is a

mark of privilege, a criticism that was levied against Berg and Seeber (2015) as wallowing in their privilege.

Vanessa: I wish could say I have one (resistance strategy) but I don't. I am striving towards wanting to have a (professorial) Chair in the next three years, so I find myself having to play the game. I wonder is it easier to take a stand when you have achieved a level of your career you are happy with. Until then I am conscious I have to play by *their* rules.

Others would comment that gaining the coveted Chair, however, can be a poisoned chalice through ever increasing expectations of continuous high performance accompanied by insatiable institutional demands. This is particularly so if professorial roles are equated with managerial leadership, as is so common in corporate universities, tying individuals even more tightly to experiencing and imposing the ills of bureaucratology (Kowalewski, 2012). Yet, responds Lu, these positions of power can represent another opportunity for ameliorating the worst effects of corporatization.

Academics must beware of divide-and-rule thinking, where by unconsciously assuming the legitimacy and privilege of alpha and beta difference, we may dehumanise the experiences of others, who are equally subject to harmful dynamics regardless of where they sit in the institution. In being mindful of this danger, we must also be politically conscious of power balances in institutional contexts, given the seductive pull towards collusion with oppression, our own and that of others, which leaves the status quo untouched. Accordingly, we urge awareness of how these dynamics can serve to undermine a sense of solidarity with colleagues, which may seem to offer short-term benefits to institutions, but result in long-term losses regarding staff engagement, group resilience, and ultimately productivity.

While we affirm the difficulties of embedding the "Slow Professor Manifesto" in our working lives through the PAR process, it has also revealed new understandings of how we can work in ways that are more authentic to our values and scholarly ambitions at a personal level, but also politically and professionally, as Lorraine comments:

I think there's a third word, the "collective." This project started as a result of WAN's engagement with the Slow Professor book and movement. It followed up with the invitation to the authors to address WAN members. Therefore, the collective grouping of WAN members initiated this project of reflection, which has led to individual action. This then gets fed back into the collective, and the impact is cyclical and dynamic. I think it matters that the network is made up of women who understand the importance and impact of time pressures on well-being, and whose central ideology tends to challenge dominant discourse by the structure of the university. We have the power to influence each other and therefore the uni community. However, I'm not sure that the formal structure is amenable to change.

The so-called "system" conforms to a hierarchical, top-down structure controlled by a tiny minority, access to whom is formal, ritualised, and steeped in unequal power-based

interactions, where university "workers" are expected to conform to the system's self-definitions and processes, rather than authentically creating, shaping, and influencing them. However, the system's apparent imperviousness to and distance from its workforce is an illusion. It cannot function or exist beyond the embodied staff comprising the collective whole.

The challenge for would-be Slow Professors needs reframing in consequence: becoming not so much a futile battle of trying to change an apparently obdurate, immutable system as about existentially and as change agents realising our own power within it. The system exists not beyond us but only through us and thus must be permeable to change.

The dynamics for change lie within us, as academic workers, therefore, and the tools and processes are in fact already readily available or can be made so. A WAN-type network is an example of an informal but effective solidarity; trade unions have traditionally offered another route. However, the processes of probity and national institutional kudos are also available to all academics where such exist globally: here one may think of any international equivalents of the Race Equality Charter and Athena SWAN or disability inclusion movements, all of which strongly promote diversity and equality. Furthermore, instruments by which to measure research or teaching and learning capabilities in institutions can be moulded to empower minority groups in academia. Such groups can be identified through under-representations numerically, such as BAME groups or in terms of disenfranchisement, in which one can include women academics, those from low socio-economic strata, or those with disabilities. What is of vital importance is that these processes are led and championed by minority and disenfranchised groups and not permitted to be controlled and thereby neutralised by the vested interests that maintain current inequalities.

Conclusion

Participation in the study was illuminating and liberating, enabling us as a group to take better control over our working lives at least in terms of our responses to events. The feelings expressed here are important as they reflect issues from the evidence base on work and health, particularly in relation to feelings of precariousness/insecurity and lack of control. Both of these feelings were highlighted earlier as possible causes of ill health in a work setting (New Economics Foundation, 2014). New forms of resistance have followed on from this reflective process and these, rather than dissipating over time, are becoming more pronounced, more strategized and adaptive to tackling circumstances that have shifted towards yet greater control since this study began.

For us, professional discontents need no longer be internalized as a personal dysfunction, but viewed as probable responses to structural and institutionalized problems; and arguably being collective issues, these require collective, politicized responses. We are (re)experiencing the power of being part of a group of articulate, feminist academics who feel connected in our

concerns, affirmed in our experiences, and able to use this new knowledge to help both ourselves and our colleagues. How we choose to demonstrate “slowness” varies widely but overall this has felt hugely energizing and empowering: leading some towards more creative published work; for others a strengthening of resolve working towards HE policy change; or a deepening commitment to identifying and practising authentic pedagogy; or simply claiming unashamedly more time for our needs. Insecurities and isolation borne from harassed, lonely perplexity has been largely exorcized as we engage with the exhilarating potential, articulated in the comments below.

“How do we define success as Slow Professors?”

“What is going to benefit me as an academic today? My priorities!”

“This approach is considered radical but should be the norm!”

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The authors of "Donning the 'Slow Professor': A Feminist Action Research Project" (RT 116) would like to dedicate this article to their departed friend and colleague, Lesley Milne.



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

More Than a Slogan: Or, How We Built a Social Justice Program That Made Our Campus More Just

by Nicholas Hengen Fox



PHOTO BY TOM RUMBLE ON UNSPLASH

Today on college campuses in the U.S., “social justice” is everywhere—a bright signal of some institutional wokeness in institutions that have not always been good or awake to the needs of many in their communities. It proudly names staff positions, like a “social justice advocate,”¹ and programs—concentrations, minors, majors, even graduate degrees. There are now so many such programs that the conservative website *The Blaze* created a public spreadsheet to mock them! (Airaksinen). More informally, the term is lobbed at those “social justice warriors”—students and faculty—involved in these varied projects.

I am, alas, one of them.

In 2014, I was part of a small group of faculty and staff at Portland Community College (PCC) that created a concentration of courses called the Social Justice Focus Award and, the next year, built a curriculum for a capstone class called “Social Justice: Theory & Practice” (SJ210). One purpose of this article is to share this experience for faculty considering building such a course, program, or major; maybe you can learn from our successes (and our mistakes).

But in telling this story, I am also tracing the contradictions tied up in the proliferation of “social justice” on college campuses. Clearly, part of it is an attempt at relevance (a.k.a. student recruitment) in a world that youth (the people we mostly serve) see as pretty dramatically unjust. But even as a marketing strategy, for higher ed to claim it’s doing social justice sparks off massive institutional identity conflicts. Higher education’s long-term investment in (scientific) objectivity, neutrality, and teaching students “*how* to think not *what* to think” stands in direct contrast to doing the work of justice.² What’s more, social justice is proliferating in a moment that Joe Kinchloe calls the “Great Denial”—when, in defense against right wing attack on our independence and our funding, our institutions first claim neutrality and then deny that education has a political dimension at all (10).

But you can’t be doing the work of justice while embracing an imaginary apolitical neutrality. So claiming to teach social justice—to grant degrees in it!—begs important questions about the kinds of promises we’re making to our students and our communities, to say nothing of our conception of who we are as institutions.

I’ll argue here that if we teach social justice in the framework dictated by traditional higher ed commitments, we probably do a bad job. Justice—especially when discussed in a classroom or a journal article—tends to go big: national institutions, global considerations, abstract questions. These focuses, as Amartya Sen has convincingly argued, don’t much help the work of justice.³ Particularly true, I’d add, on campus: such scale is probably out of reach in the space of a paper, a classroom, even a multi-year degree program.

But we *can* make good on the promise of social justice. Based on our work in building the Social Justice program, I will argue that the work of justice is in reach when such courses are built around three traits: they should be (1) centered on a student-led, class-defined, campus-based project that (2) involves collective action. That work must

be grounded in a classroom that is (3) explicitly *not* neutral. Such an approach doesn’t align with traditional academic norms or common practices in many social justice programs. It does, however, align with commitments of radical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, as I’ll detail here. This approach, to borrow language from Sen, leads to a more practical “enhancing justice and removing injustice” at the exact points of its impact; in our case, making changes in our college each term (5, ix). We don’t aim at global justice; we aim at making the changes we can make on campus.⁴

As our students learn to identify injustice, talk about it with others, and enact strategies for change, they are meeting the course’s learning outcomes while improving life for many on campus, including undocumented students, nonbinary students, and students living without housing.

And what we’ve learned is that by starting there, our students are actually making the world more just. As our students learn to identify injustice, talk about it with others, and enact strategies for change, they are meeting the course’s learning outcomes while improving life for many on campus, including undocumented students, nonbinary students, and students living without housing. Their work has made “social justice” more than a slogan on our campus.

Nuts & Bolts: Making SJ at PCC

We had no idea, in 2014, that we were so on trend. From George Mason University (with its vaunted, Koch-funded think tanks) to Eastern Kentucky University; from selective liberal arts colleges (Ohio Wesleyan) to big state schools (U of Iowa, U of Kansas), to a raft of Christian colleges (Cornerstone, Trevecca Nazarene, Oral Roberts), programs—minors, BAs, MAs, even PhDs in “social justice”—were showing up. At the time, all we really knew was that one local school had a Social Justice minor.

But our students were demanding more. A few faculty—teaching in History, Women’s and Gender Studies, Sociology, and Literature—noticed that students were taking all of our classes centering on different facets of social justice, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in sequence. They were reading novels about the exploitation of the working class, studying the corporate agriculture that has destroyed our planet and our health, looking at great social movements across the landscape of the history of the United States... and they kept asking us what other classes they could take.

Working through typically convoluted processes,⁵ we began to build a program that would tie these courses together. At PCC, we don’t have majors, so this non-degree program would be designated a “focus awards”—weird institutional language for a concentration of three, four, or five classes in a particular area of study, but which (per our

college catalogue) “won't appear on your transcript.” Institutionally it's basically a sheet of paper, but it can help students find more of what they are interested in learning. In the initial stage, we also talked a lot about how we might mitigate (if possible) the weight of the subjects in these classes. We worried that however important our subjects felt in isolation, our classes, especially in concentrated doses, were potentially doing some damage—both to individuals with the heavy emotional labor and to the better world we think of ourselves as working towards.⁶ As one student said about my class, “everything in here is a trigger.” And if what you keep learning about justice is that everything is unjust and that many good people have failed to make justice happen, it's hard to go out and work for it. (Sadly, a quick chapter from Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* or a triumphalist recounting of the victories of the civil rights movement just isn't enough to pull everyone through.) It can be a quick route to cynicism—the opposite direction we intend to send our students.⁷

Our first practical step: to figure out what classes, beyond those we regularly taught, would go in the program. We emailed our college's almost 2,000 faculty members to ask for nominations of courses that might fit along these two vectors:

Theory	Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, understand, and critically analyze systems of power, privilege, and domination in society • Identify, understand, and critically analyze theoretical frameworks and approaches to social change • Identify, understand, and critically analyze key organizations, events, and struggles that have shaped the development of social movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a toolbox of skills and strategies to advance social change • Build mutual and responsible relationships with community partners • Expand a sense of social responsibility and agency and a commitment to diversity and equity • Transform assumptions and beliefs in order to imagine new ideas and possibilities (“[ft faculty] Does your course fit into a Social Justice Focus Award?”)⁸

Faculty recommended courses and a small committee (a few faculty beyond the original three, as well as coordinators of two of our campus multicultural centers) juried them, looking particularly for learning outcomes that grounded every section the course taught in these practices. For instance, while a few First-Year Writing (FYW) instructors suggested their courses—and, like some FYW courses, they were clearly connected to social justice—we

didn't include them because not *all* FYW courses would necessarily feature social justice practices. It's not in the course's learning outcomes.⁹

In the end, we built an interdisciplinary award with about 20 courses that students would choose among, including Food Systems and the Environment, Chicano/Latino Studies, Communications, Philosophy, and of course our own fields.¹⁰ And—within the institutional frames and our capacities to take on more administrative work—we were happy with it.¹¹ At the very least, more students would find more courses that linked to their particular interests—and even faculty who didn't have personal connections to the work at the start would be able to guide curious students towards them.

And, yes, at that point we jumped on the bandwagon, naming the program the “Social Justice Focus Award.” We went with “social justice” not because any of us particularly valued the term; in fact, we hesitated for the same reasons I mentioned in the intro: the lack of shared understanding around the term, the way it was easily appropriated. But we also felt “social justice” would be appealing to both administrators (whose approval we needed) and students who might (we worried) hesitate to sign up for a class with a more radical or activist name—we talked about “Revolution 101,” among other unlikely names. We adopted “social justice” in a fairly opportunistic way. And however vexed I was feeling about all of that, I admit to feeling a blush of excitement when “Social Justice” eventually popped up between Sign Language Interpretation and Spanish in our college's course catalogue.

During that first year of talking to deans and presidents and the Degrees and Certificates Committee—slow going, given that no one received release from teaching for doing it—we continued our conversations with students about what would help make the classes feel more hopeful. This feedback was initially informal, but we clarified it further in a series of panel discussions with student leaders in our various student centers (e.g. the Women's Resource Center, the Multicultural Center) and student government. We consistently heard that students wanted a class that applied social justice thinking to our campus. They wanted to directly address some injustice within our immediate, shared scope.

I was surprised by the consistency of this message. Perhaps my own common sense was shaped by those dominant big picture approaches to justice described by Sen.¹² Those perfect institutions, somehow, were always—in my mind—off campus, elsewhere. Perhaps, also, the prevalence of community-based learning or other campus-college partnerships were shaping my expectations (more on that below). But at the very least, the students' interest made practical sense: At a community college where students are often working full-time in addition to their courses, doing the work on campus made some practical sense.

It took us most of the next year to create and get approval to put this vision into practice with the award's capstone class: SJ 210: Social Justice Theory & Practice.¹³ We again had to represent at multiple committee meetings

(mostly committees that had a few friendly faculty, thankfully); had to line up documented support from various upper-level administrators; and of course, then had to deal with the logistics of making sure the course arrived in the Courseleaf system our college uses. While the last step seemed simple, just procedural, we learned that even that required persistent attention. Despite the institutional approval of the course, it didn't just show up in the catalogue; and if it wasn't in the catalogue, it couldn't be scheduled; and if it got scheduled late, there might not be room on campus or students available to sign up.¹⁴ It took almost two years, but by Fall 2016 Social Justice: Theory and Practice was on the books as the capstone, the one course required of anyone getting the Social Justice Focus Award.

How our Program does the work of Justice

In the last three years, it's been a thrill to see familiar faces on splashy posters about how microaggressions harm education, to see students working to inform others about sexual violence on campus populating the tables usually reserved for people handing out free bibles or selling posters of John Belushi. It's exciting to hear from colleagues who come to us because they're frustrated by what students are up to. It's exciting (as a tenured faculty member) to get called to the president's office because of something students have done. These instances are thrilling because they exemplify how students in the class (many for the first time) "practice noncooperation"—a phrase from Gene Sharp—by shouting in buildings, marching around with signs and posters, trying to interest strangers in their cause during the day of action (35).

But beyond these momentary eruptions, the work students do in the SJ program and capstone has changed our college. The results of the class projects aren't just a final paper, a grade, four credits, and some happy memories of a good class. Two years ago, student protests directly led to the hiring of the college's first tenure-track ethnic studies faculty. Other student projects forced a coding change on how gender is entered into student records and the development of a center focused on the needs of undocumented students on campus. I'll say more about these victories—the students' victories I want to emphasize—below.

The rest of this essay examines how the design of the capstone course has enabled learning opportunities, hope, and these tangible, long-term changes to the institution. While I opened this essay by harrumphing at "social justice" as being little more than a virtue signal for higher ed institutions, the work that happens in the capstone class has made me understand that, whatever the institution might want to do with social justice, a well-defined program can do the work of justice and help colleges become more accountable for their use of the term. The rest of this essay focuses in on the three aspects of our capstone class that have enabled this: (1) a curricular focus on student-defined projects that (2) are centered on collective action and (3) anchored in a classroom space that rejects neutrality—an all-too-common posture in higher ed, which is (more surprisingly) praised in a lot of writing about social justice programs.

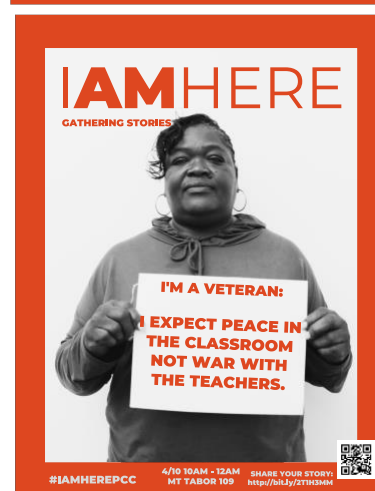
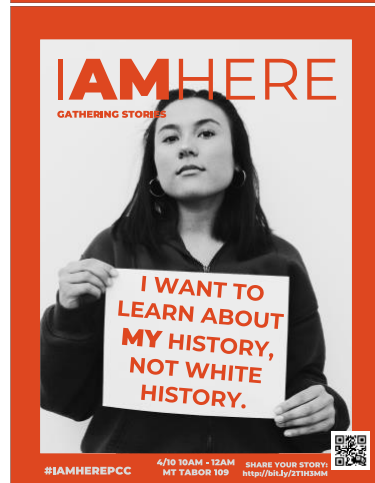
Feature #1: A Shared, Class-defined Project

In one section of the capstone, students discussed—for a whole two-hour class meeting and parts of another—whether the class project should focus on the unmet needs of undocumented students on our campus. Students heard from one another, reflected on what they heard, shifted positions, reconciled their desire to do good with the risks this work presents for undocumented students (even in a self-proclaimed sanctuary institution). There were difficult moments. Some students (who were personally unaffected) said dismissive (or, more generously, naive) things. Some undocumented students came out to the class during this discussion (others were already public with their status). But the conversation, shaped by the use of stack ("stacking" of speakers in an equitable way, which was run by a student), developed real clarity.¹⁵ And—after all that—the class ultimately decided to focus on supporting students without stable housing instead.

I can imagine some teachers getting vexed here—So much time lost! What about the readings?! I was definitely feeling that in the moment. And, along with that, other pressures: some students were ready to get moving on the project; others evinced real anxiety about the intensity of the conversation. Still, talking it through and building consensus is part of the learning of

the course—we literally teach these skills.¹⁶ And, of course, democracy is slow.¹⁷

In each of our SJ capstone classes, the students complete a self-defined collective project. It's in the learning



outcomes.¹⁸ The class picks the issue in which to intervene. They decide how they will intervene. This is a substantial contrast between our version of this course and many social justice programs capstone courses,¹⁹ many of which explicitly require work *in* the community (as opposed to on campus) that happens within already existing partnerships. Some social justice programs depict such work—students building houses, Habitat for Humanity style, or working in the fields—on their webpages.²⁰ As I noted above, there’s a clear link between Community-Based Learning (CBL) and many social justice programs. Anecdotally, when I spoke with folks at other regional institutions about my research on this project, CBL came up in every conversation.²¹

Our approach is different. We, as faculty, don’t define justice by aligning the class with a particular non-profit and their already existing mission. It’s up to the students. Picking the class issue and intervention makes up the middle part of SJ 210. It is a topic of conversation for weeks and eventually takes over the class entirely. But the time is worth it. The opportunity to make this decision helps students recognize their agency. And if they can’t pick a topic—which sometimes feels like a real possibility!—then they won’t have met the learning outcomes (or made the campus more just).

Beyond the development of agency, this approach has other benefits. Starting by *talking through* a shared project within frames where people in the room are explicitly affected pushes students beyond “positional confinement”—the phrase Amartya Sen uses to describe how our identities shape our understandings of justice (154). While each student has their own personal project as well, they can’t—in this shared work—dwell fully in their own particular (often already-explored) spaces for thinking about justice. This fracturing—where one student works on animal testing, one on deforestation, one on “improving treatment of skaters”—is a theme in social justice-focused courses.²² The shared project forces conversations—and pushes students to evaluate which aspects of justice merit the work and attention of their classmates.

Pedagogically, the way this work is shared strengthens the bonds of the classroom. Since everyone is implicated, everyone is more likely to contribute. This leads to better conversations (and of course it’s a baseline principle of culturally responsive teaching).²³ And because we teach consensus decision-making, more voices are heard than in a traditional classroom conversation.

None of this is easy. It takes time. And it can be stressful. In one section, a student had a panic attack while the class was practicing consensus process by trying to order an imaginary pizza. Still, having been with these students in this work, I feel confident these are worthy risks because of

the learning they enable in the moment—and the action the students can do together as a result.

Feature #2: Collective Action

In a class that focuses on immediately felt injustices, justice requires doing something. Once students have picked their issue, they begin the work of planning a day of action, which typically takes place near (sometimes *very* near) the end of the term. For me—and other faculty—there’s anxiety around this. You show up for a class meeting over which you have very little control. I felt this acutely with the class that focused on unhoused students. Their day of action had been devised by three subcommittees. I had a sense of what they were up to, but I could see they weren’t fully communicating amongst themselves. I feared, walking to the classroom that



morning, that I’d find the students sitting in their customary circle, waiting for me to tell them what we were going to do.

But when I showed up that morning, the classroom was full of noise. There were tents and sleeping bags, lots of poster board, a bunch of toothbrushes, cans of food. Before class started, the students were running around the

building, throwing up posters with facts about students and poverty, taping things (like the toothbrushes) to them, and setting up tents with facts and stories hanging on the outside.

I watched them as they watched people reacting—some students and staff passing by preoccupied (or deliberately ignoring them), others noticing the unusual display of camping gear in the common areas of a building full of classrooms, the cafeteria, and the student center. I was standing there, feeling proud of them for pulling it together, when they all started whispering that campus security was coming—one classmate had texted an alert.

The security officers showed up. They bought coffee at the kiosk. They surveilled a bit. And they left. The class giggled.

If the day of action ended there, I would've been happy—and we would've had a lot to debrief. But a student—he was president of the student government that year and often a vocal leader in the class—pulled out copies of some chants his group had written. In the atrium, he began to lead one, missing the rhythm over and over and inspiring more giggles. They stuttered along for a few minutes and then with the president again pushing, the students picked up some of the tents and set off marching and chanting—out of the building and through the quad.

After marching for ten minutes, the students were exhilarated. One woman in the class, who almost never spoke in the big group, was beaming as she shouted the class's slogans. On our quiet, exurban campus, it was a remarkable day.

In that day of collective action, I found myself watching students move through stages of dismantling their well-trained sense of obedience. As Gene Sharp argues, a default sense of obedience to power is the foundation of social control—and, I'd add, is often taught to students from their first moments in school, making their rebellion *at school* particularly powerful. For a class, for credit that day, students were breaking with *habits* (being quiet, sitting still, learning from a teacher at the front of the classroom), with *fear of sanction* (they were spying on campus security officers, they were putting up posters without permission), and, perhaps most importantly, the *absence of self-confidence to disobey* (32). They weren't just learning Sharp's theory or facts about the stunning number of students living unhoused. They were chanting slogans they wrote, putting up posters they created, asking for food and supplies (on behalf of those in need) from other students and staff on campus. Their day of action was an exercise in putting their learning together by "practicing noncooperation" (Sharp 35).

And doing these things, they felt powerful.²⁴ As more than one student reported the next week in our class debrief, they had never done anything like this before. They were fulfilling the course learning outcomes (the collective action, the use of targeted communication strategies), but also "gain[ing] understandings of how social justice movements achieve change"—through disobedience, through hope, through action (Social Justice 210 Course Outcomes).

And the doing is a foundational part of the work of justice. By resisting—even for just a couple hours on campus—the obedience that enables the injustices that structure our world, they are making some change. Not that the college is suddenly and immediately just, but *more* just. And a *more just* campus is good work for a ten-week course.

Feature #3: Not Neutral

It probably seems obvious to say at this point, but this is not a class led by the familiar "fiction of the completely objective robot prof" (Gooblar). Still, I want to pause here to acknowledge that the class's explicit non-neutrality is foundational to the work I've been describing. It merits saying, I think, but particularly because, neutrality shows up consistently in writing about social justice work on campus.

For context, two quick examples from instructors specifically thinking about social justice-focused courses. Kristi Holsinger's book *Teaching Justice* delves into "barriers and limitations ... to teaching about social justice and activism in the college classroom environment," particularly *within the field* of criminal justice. Holsinger finds resistance from students (who may not see themselves as committed to social justice) as well as concerns from faculty about "ideology" (111). One faculty member she surveys worries about "walking the line between espousing my political ideals and encouraging students to think broadly," while another complains that "Many who teach social justice tend to be liberal" (114).

Lauretta Frederking's *Reconstructing Social Justice* details a minor in social justice at a private, Catholic university. Her description of the social justice course repeatedly evokes neutrality: "For the introductory course, my colleague and I determined that it was a good sign that typically both sides were equally angry with us" (11). This is the pedagogical equivalent of bothsidesism in media—where all positions are put forward as if they are of equal value. Later she writes of her responsibility in class to "ground the [students'] emotion in empirical cases and contexts, and to analyze ideas *rather than pick sides* within the context of a social justice debate" and of "rigidly limiting [her] participation during the emotional moments precisely to affirm *neutrality*" (163, 164, italics mine).

This is a familiar impulse for many in higher education—shaped by cultural practices (refraining from displays of emotion, maintaining hierarchies) based in the "epistemologies of the North" that have defined both campus norms and the conventional ways of knowing within many disciplines.²⁵ I admit that I defer to this impulse in some courses I teach²⁶ and I can see how this approach might feel right as shaped by some disciplinary spaces, particularly Holsinger's field of criminal justice. (Which, for me, begs a bigger question of how effectively one can teach social justice in certain pre-existing disciplinary fields.)

In teaching social justice, I think the answer cannot be neutrality. We need to acknowledge from the start that the course is not neutral. First, because even with the vexed and shifting definition of "justice," I do not think many conservative positions (at least as currently defined in the United States) can find a home in social justice courses. As

philosopher David Miller, in his analysis of social justice, notes: “The traditionally conservative focus on personal liberty and individual rights is often used to *block* conversations about social justice before they begin.”²⁷ In other words, if the course doesn’t own some explicit commitments—if it performs a version of neutrality common in academic thinking and teaching—it will be quite hard to do the things I describe above. For instance, if the class is structured around neutrality, those long group discussions could end up being even longer because we’d have to start with whether migrants deserve justice at all, punishing underrepresented students who might feel the need to defend themselves. Put another way, because the class is explicitly not neutral from the start we don’t risk the most vulnerable members of the class being coerced into a “debate” about their status because the class has already moved past that debate. If we approach social justice as a term that encompasses any concern students might have, it will be impossible to narrow down the issues or spaces of intervention as a group.²⁸ And what happens to us if we refrain from reacting emotionally to things like the students chanting and marching around campus? Does that diminish some of the repair in that work for the students (or for us)? Does it signal to them that their behavior isn’t what the instructor wanted?

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To me, in naming the course “social justice,” we institutionally announce some commitments—that, say, people, particularly those who experience oppression, deserve justice. This is made more explicit in the course’s learning outcomes, which name “systems of power, privilege, and domination” and the work of “critique[ing] structures of power and oppression and their impact on communities, the environment, and society” (Social Justice 210 Outcomes). By naming and framing the course as we have, we set up a big tent around social justice—it’s not a course in X-ism or Y-ism; and debates about whether bad parking is an injustice or about anarchism’s effectiveness are common in the class. While there are other classes where neutrality may be helpful, for the conversations, collaborations, and actions I’ve described here, rejecting neutrality is an essential foundation.

Doing the Work of Social Justice

When you put those three features together you have a curriculum that teaches social justice effectively by engaging the students in a transferable set of practices—identifying local injustice, finding consensus, and working to make changes. And it’s in the way these practices—of talking, deciding, feeling anxious, and ultimately acting and feeling the joy in it—come together that the class achieves that goal we all held at the start: repair. The hope and joy students

find in the action (and the glow that follows, illuminating the debrief session) is the most visible aspect of overcoming the hopelessness and trauma that so much learning about injustice can engender. We haven’t solved all the issues, but the class creates space and time to disabuse students of any of the conceptions of their powerlessness that have been pushed on them by the institutions they’ve lived within.

The weight this class puts on the intervention is why, throughout this essay, I’ve been drawing on Amartya Sen’s *Idea of Justice* as a way to contrast what we do with most dominant philosophical understandings of “justice.” Like Sen, we give primacy to what is essentially a pragmatist approach: doing what we can to make the world *more* just without worrying about the perfect justice it’s all too easy to become fixated on. This is an important contrast, though I haven’t named it explicitly, with John Rawls. Rawls—whose paradigm for thinking about justice is dominant in lots of contexts, including lots of writing about programs like ours—offers a very different approach to thinking about justice.²⁹ While I can’t neatly capture his complex, career-spanning work here, I can say that many of its aspects are a mismatch for our work. His focus on a normative approach doesn’t gel with our pragmatist needs; his interest in how abstract figures apply fairness behind a veil simply doesn’t map onto the world our students live in. Rawls is useful for thinking through, for asking questions, but because of his normative orientation, his work is a mismatch for teaching social justice.

To emphasize the contrast with that normative orientation, I want to close here by detailing some of the long-term impact of this work on our college—the changes our students have made to the institution beyond the course or the focus award. Some of the projects that have come out of the class have, in specific ways, made our campus a more just place. The project around houselessness I was just describing aligned with the development of the Panther Pantry; a year-round resource for anyone on campus, the Pantry has food, but also clothes, bus vouchers, and more (PCC Student Leadership). The Pantries officially opened six months after the class’s day of action. While they were not a direct result of the class, cross pollination in their design (students in the class were also part of student government group that worked on the Panther Pantry) and the class’s demands amplified their visibility and helped explain their necessity to the college community.

But perhaps an even more remarkable change is the DREAM Center. Officially established in 2017, the DREAM Center is a dedicated, staffed space on campus designed to support undocumented students. While many colleges have declared themselves sanctuary institutions, a space like the DREAM center makes that symbolic support more tangible; offering everything from peership to advisors who know how DACA impacts financial aid to community resource connections, the center explicitly supports a targeted group of students at school—and in their lives beyond campus.

The idea of the DREAM center grew out of student projects in the capstone class. Within a year of that class, a group of students, all of whom had enrolled in the SJ capstone course, had—in collaboration with the campus Multicultural Center—made effective demands for dedicated

funding, written grants, and raised money. Now the college proudly trumpets their work in speeches, press releases, and accreditation reports (Hill, "Liliana," Hill "A Dream"). One of those students worked for the college, for nearly two years, as the DREAM Center's coordinator. The student's work has literally reshaped the space of the campus and the college's org chart.

As those two examples show, the students' work persists, even when the students have moved on. And how could those victories not mitigate against despair?³⁰ The students' work, in the context of the class, has made the campus a more just place for themselves, but also for students who never enrolled in (or even know about) the course. And we're running the capstone course each term of our academic year—four courses, four collective projects, connecting around 100 students a year to peers doing this work.

These students' leadership shines a different light on the contradiction I framed at the start between the pursuit of justice and the long-standing self-articulation of higher ed as neutral and rational body. Even if these projects don't embody those traditional views of higher ed, they clearly connect to a deeper, older commitment: they show students who are preparing to lead the world.³¹ And they do it a touch better than even someone like Cardinal Newman would've imagined, since our students are not just preparing to lead, but are actually *already leading* our institution.

Through the practices that shape our program—and especially its capstone class—I believe we are making good on the vague promise of social justice. Year round at PCC, students are doing the difficult work of trying to eliminate the injustices that are part of our everyday lives.³² Their work has made me a believer in what can happen under the banner of "social justice."

Acknowledgement

I hope this piece honors the labor of my colleagues who created this program and who teach in it, as well as the students whose work in the Social Justice Focus Award is truly making our community more just.

Notes

1. Googling this term in 2019, I get hits for job postings at Texas Tech and Georgetown; other universities already have this position, including the University of Portland.
2. Cohen nicely sums up Clark Kerr's dominant paradigm of the multiversity as: "objective, neutral, and dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and services to the community" (*The Shaping of American Higher Education* 232).
3. Throughout this paper, I rely on Amartya Sen's critique of traditional philosophizing about justice. Sen suggests much thinking about justice has embarked on a quest for "perfect justice" focused predominantly on building just institutions like governments and courts; he calls this fixation "transcendental institutionalism." In our

classes, a version of this critique comes from Nancy Fraser, whose "Abnormal Justice," helps set up our discussions in SJ210.

4. As Susan Dieleman, David Rondel, and Christopher Voparil put it in the introduction to *Pragmatism and Justice*, "There has never been a political movement that [...] in the name of nothing but transcendental 'justice itself'" (5).
5. As a community college, our capacity to charter new degree programs is somewhat limited—and many of our students are in the process of transferring for a four-year degree, so picking up an Associates of Social Justice probably wouldn't make much sense for most of them.
6. While we didn't do this work under the umbrella of trauma-informed pedagogy, the five principles of trauma informed education—"ensuring safety, establishing trustworthiness, maximizing choice, maximizing collaboration, and prioritizing empowerment"—are on display in the way the courses work together. Digging deeper in, it turns out, may have been part of the solution. Carello & Butler "Practicing What We Teach."
7. In a short piece from *Rethinking Schools*, Bill Bigelow quotes a student summing up this position: "If everything is connected, then you can't change anything without changing everything. But you can't change everything, so that means that you can't change anything." (Bigelow, "Defeating Despair")
8. It's worth noting that much of this language would eventually show up in both the outcomes for the capstone course and the focus award description.
9. This focused space for studying social justice probably helps militate against the concerns expressed by critics of too much social justice on campus (which often seems to me a code for not conservative enough). See, for instance, Reedy, "Social Justice, the University, and the Temptation to Mission Creep."
10. See the full list here: <https://www.pcc.edu/programs/social-justice/courses.html>
11. That parenthetical is important because if you're thinking about doing something like this, keep an eye on the—probably uncompensated—work. To us, it felt short term—and there were enough folks invested to share the load. But it would be easy to dip into overload.
12. For example, "The characterization of perfectly just institutions has become the central exercise in the modern theories of justice" (Sen 8).
13. We did the award before the class for a number of reasons, but one important one was that once the award existed, we felt the argument for a (fairly radical) capstone class would be easier to make: We weren't making up something new; we needed to strengthen the already-existing award!

14. To be clear, these weren't extra hurdles because of the subject matter—they're the hurdles of a class that doesn't fit easily into the disciplinary divisions of the college's administrative structure. Without a clear commitment to that kind of support, faculty can look forward to a similarly DIY experience.
15. Taking stack is a common way to order speaking to minimize the domination of conversation by one or two members who feel entitled to speak more than others. A quick overview: [http://cultivate.coop/wiki/Taking_Stack_\(Meeting_Facilitation_Technique\)](http://cultivate.coop/wiki/Taking_Stack_(Meeting_Facilitation_Technique))
16. We model the process using Seeds for Change's simple consensus pamphlet: "Consensus Decision Making: Short Guide." There, students learn practices of taking stack, of sharing space; some of our classes decide with fist of five; others use full consensus models (complete with twinkling).
17. Calling back to the previous section, it would be slower if the class pretended to be neutral—opening even more points for endless discussion.
18. The outcome language is: "Complete a whole-class collaborative campus or community-based social justice action project" (SJ 210).
19. Dominican University literally names the major "Social Justice and Civic Engagement." Also: Eastern Kentucky U: SJS 450S: Learning through Civic Engagement; Merrimack University, in which "you'll have the opportunity to participate in community-based or nongovernmental organization internships." (https://www.merrimack.edu/academics/liberal_arts/social-justice/major/)
20. Trevecca Nazarene University
21. Perhaps, as I say above, this is part of a larger conception of justice as living elsewhere—not on a college campus. Perhaps it is also tied to the institutional focus on neutrality—we can do the work of justice elsewhere, not on campus, because that would betray some bias.
22. Those examples come from Jessica Singer's high school curriculum for an English class as an "activist" project (117). The range here leaves plenty of room for students to remain in their own lanes without having to encounter disagreements or differences of opinion. One more example (from Kristi Holsinger's *Teaching Justice*): "The most common approaches tend to be volunteering with a local agency that is already involved in addressing a particular social problem.[...] Another approach utilized by many students was letter writing. They wrote policymakers, various governmental representatives, and additional newspaper editorials. [...] Others joined organizations and donated money, food, or clothing." (91)
23. See Hammond, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), particularly the section that traces the impact of "connect[ing] with others in community" and linking new information with "Existing funds of knowledge" (47, 48).
24. And they learned practical things, too: how to make a sign or banner, what kind of tape works on what kind of walls, how to start a chant, and how to keep an eye on the people that might stop you from doing what you want to do, among others.
25. Many, many thinkers have critiqued the scientized, logic-driven, framing that today's colleges and universities inherit from the European institutions that have shaped both our disciplinary frames and our institutions. Philosophically, this is akin to what de Sousa Santos calls "epistemologies of the North": ways of knowing that find legitimacy *only* in "science based on systematic observation and controlled experimentation [...] rigor and instrumental potential" (5).
26. For instance, when students want me to tell them who the most important writers are in an intro literature class, I maintain a sort of neutrality. (What's the value in me telling them that Zadie Smith or Ernesto Cardenal is more important than someone else?)
27. "My point is that we cannot confront aspirations to social justice with the predefined conception of individual liberty, because what counts as liberty, as well as how it should be distributed, will depend on how we understand justice itself" (Miller 14).
28. Isn't the centrality of "personal liberty" a lesson taught through nearly every facet of life in the United States today?
29. Rawls's name shows up a lot in writing about social justice on college campuses—e.g. Frederking, Holsinger, Patterson et. al.
30. The course has helped to mitigate against those feelings of despair I mention above—winning things you want usually does that, right? I ask this question in the spirit of Jane McAlevey, who points out that winning (in the context of union strikes) is often underestimated: "Winning strikes, not losing them, will build a more confident, fighting, politically educated working class."
31. "If then a practical end must be assigned to a university course I say it is that of training good members of society" (Newman 125). Newman also mentions that it teaches "facilitating the exercise of political power" (126). Charles Eliot doesn't say leadership, but it seems strongly implied in his famous 1869 essay "The New Education."
32. This final sentence is a version of one of Sen's clearest crystallizations of his position. Our students are not ineffectually "agitating for a perfectly just world society, but merely for the elimination of some outrageously unjust arrangements to enhance global justice" (26).

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Evelina Fue Tu Nombre / Evelina Was Your Name

by Sonia E Maldonado Torres



IMAGE 1. 2011 TATS CRU MURAL OF EVELINA LÓPEZ ANTONETTY ON UNITED BRONX PARENTS' HEADQUARTERS, PHOTO BY JOE CONZO JR.

Who was Evelina López Antonetty

Known as the “mother of the Bronx,” community organizer and education leader Evelina López Antonetty was a driving force behind the efforts that transformed the Bronx from a symbol of urban blight in the 1960s and 1970s into a livable place in the 1980s. Born in Puerto Rico and raised in the United States, López Antonetty, the woman everyone called ‘Titi’, or ‘Auntie,’ found herself frustrated by the inferior services the public school system provided to poor Puerto Rican and African American children. In 1965 she founded United Bronx Parents (UBP), an organization that fostered quality education and community control of schools. In the 1970s UBP became a model of urban grassroots organizing. Expanding to include a bilingual care center, an adult education program, and a youth leadership center, it empowered residents to fight against the social ills caused by failed urban and economic policies.

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Evelina fue tu nombre

Evelina fue tu nombre
y dejaste aquí en la tierra
la huella de una presencia
de coraje y de valor.

Fuiste madre, amiga, hermana.

Fuiste la titi adorada,
de las masas olvidadas
que reclamaban su voz.

De nosotros los golpeados,
nosotros los maltratados,
de los que con miedo ocultan
su indignación y dolor.

Y es por eso que sabemos
Titi, que tú no te has ido,
y que aún tu nombre evoca
cambio, justicia y pasión.

Gracias por este legado
que no quedó en el pasado,
pues tu visión ha transformado
la vida de esta nación.

Evelina Antonetty and Her Struggle for Bilingual Education in NYC
Hostos Community College
Thursday, April 17, 2019

Evelina was your name

Evelina was your name
and you left here, on earth
the trace of a presence
of courage and bravery.

You were a mother, a friend, a sister.

You were the adored "titi"
of the forgotten masses
who claimed their voice.

Of us beaten,
Of us, the mistreated,
of those who with fear hide
their indignation and pain.

And that's why we know titi,
that you have not left us,
and that still your name evokes
change, justice and passion.

Thank you for this legacy
that did not remain in the past,
because your vision has transformed
the life of this nation.

Poem translated in English by EDU 130 Multicultural/Multilingual Class- Fall 2019.

This poem was presented in the event: Evelina Antonetty and Her Struggle for Bilingual Education in NYC at Hostos Community College (Thursday, April 17, 2019).

وتركت هنا على الأرض
أثر الوجود
من الشجاعة والشجاعة .

كنت أم ، صديق ، أخت .
كنت تيتي المعشوق ،
الجماهير المنسية
الذي ادعى صوته .

منا تعرض للضرب ،
لقد أسىء معاملتنا ،
من أولئك الذين يختبئون مع الخوف
سخطه وألمه .

وهذا هو السبب في أننا نعرف
تيتي ، أنت لم تغادر ،
وهذا حتى اسمك يستحضر
التغيير والعدالة والعاطفة .

شكرا لك على هذا التراث
لم يكن ذلك في الماضي ،
لأن رؤيتك قد تحولت
حياة هذه الأمة .

Poem Translated in Arabic by Althara Alrubay

A student of the EDU 130 Multicultural/Multilingual Class- Fall 2019

Evelina nye wo dzin
Evelina nye wo dzin.
Nkaa dum a igyaa no asaase
Do a yjdzee kaa wo daa
Nye akokodur na ahocdzen.

Nna eyj nã, nyjnko na akyerjbaa.
Cwo a wohuan wo "Titi"
A dcm kukuankoma a nkyj
wcaka hcn ahyj no ndj wctse hcn ndze.

Hjnom a wcabor hjn,
ahyj hjn atseetsee.
Hjn a cnam suro ntsi,
Yenntum annda hjn yawdzi edzi.

Djm nti na yenyim dj Titi,
Ingyaw hjn, osiandj
Wo dzin kenyan nsesa,
pjrprjryj na cdc kann.

Yjda wo ase wc, djm egyapadze a
Hjn werj nnkefir da.
Osian w'enyidoadzehun a
Asakyer abrabc wc cman yi mu.

Translated in Ghanaian Fanti by Lawrencia Mensah Brown
A students of the EDU 130 Multicultural/Multilingual Class- Fall 2019



IMAGE 2. This is my group of students from the EDU 130 Class: Teaching in the Multicultural/Multilingual Classroom at Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College. On Thursday, April 18, 2019 my students and I coordinated an activity in which we celebrated the National Bilingual/Multilingual Learner Advocacy Month. In this activity, one of our adjuncts professors presented information about the struggle that a Puerto Rican woman, Evelina López Antonetty had in providing access to bilingual education to a monolingual-Spanish community in the South Bronx. The group worked collaboratively in the English translation of the “Evelina fue tu nombre” poem. Picture of students who translated the poem in Ghanain Fanti and Arabic



IMAGE 3. Lawrencia Mensah Brown (left), Prof. Sonia Maldonado Torres (center), Althara Alrubay (right)



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note
Political Discourse in a Visual Art Classroom

by Clifton W. Hamilton



PHOTO BY CHRIS RODRIQUEZ ON UNSPLASH

Lessons anchored to current events that students feel passionate about often make for great instructional practices. My International Baccalaureate (IB) students, predominately Haitian immigrants and Haitian-Americans living in small, lower-middle-class homes or crowded apartments, are proud of their heritage. In a case of perfect timing, an opportunity arose for me, their IB Visual Arts teacher, to provide for them a format to respond to the January 11, 2018 “shithole countries” statement by President Trump. My students had been quite vocal about Trump’s statement upon returning from their winter break. The impetus for the lesson was a *New York Times* article I read on January 25, 2018 describing an interchange between a White House curator and a Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum curator, with the White House curator asking for permission from the Guggenheim representative to borrow Van Gogh’s *Landscape in Snow* for display in the White House. The request was denied, and the Guggenheim curator instead offered Maurizio Cattelan’s artwork titled *America*, a toilet made of 18-karat gold. Quite a statement. My thinking was this: If the Guggenheim curator can suggest artwork for President Trump’s White House, why can’t my middle school art students do likewise?

The day after the article was published, my students and I read the Matt Stevens *New York Times* article, discussed its central idea, and then examined an online copy of Van Gogh’s *Landscape in Snow*. We had just recently completed a four-week unit on Dada, so students in my three IB Visual Arts classes, mostly sixth- and seventh-graders, were learning that art can be a simple yet effective medium for political discourse and protest. The Middle Years Program (MYP) of the IB encourages students to make practical connections between their studies and the actual world. Interdisciplinary actions are highly encouraged in the MYP, and I saw this lesson as a connection between the arts and social sciences. The lesson also addressed two IB Visual Arts objectives: (a) recognizing that the world contains inspiration or influence for art and (b) identifying an artistic intention. All the parts of a successful lesson seemed to be there. Given the demographic makeup of my students, I was also expecting some interesting proposals. After we read the article together in class, I asked my students two questions: (a) If you were to create a work of art for the Trump White House, what would it be? and (b) Why this particular work of art? I gave my students twenty-five minutes to respond in writing. Little or no talking took place among my usually boisterous students in all three class sessions. Only one of my 58 students asked if it was permissible for her to respond in a negative, anti-Trump manner. I told her that she is entitled to her opinion and to respond to the two questions as they were written. In no way did I wish to break away from my neutral delivery of the lesson. I wanted genuine responses.

In analyzing the 58 responses the next day, four themes emerged. The first theme I labeled *Thoughtful Art*, as students proposed artwork that was aesthetically pleasing or encouraging in its message. One student said she “would create an inspiring work so he (Trump) can be a better president.” Another student offered to “paint a field of running horses as a beautiful decoration.” The second theme I simply called *Dada*, as two students drew from our

previous unit. One boy said his artwork would be “Dada to frustrate and confuse the Commander and (sic) Chief.” The other boy titled his artwork “Sadness” and described it as Dada with small shapes of cut sandpaper. The third theme I titled *Spiteful Art*; here, students described art that sent a message of disapproval toward President Trump. One girl said she “would make a painting of Obama because Trump made America worse again.” Another student “would draw a picture of America and all the chaos he has created.” One boy wrote, “I will create a red, white and blue flag on a trashcan to show our current state.” The fourth theme I labeled *Vulgar Art*, as six submissions contained references to feces. One student offered to the White House “a sculpture of a poop emoji painted orange to express my views of Trump.” Another student would “draw a pile of poop because that what Trump is.”

Wittingly or unwittingly, President Trump provoked a playground fight with some of my students who were willing and able to fight back, armed with ideas that were either original or reshaped. These iGen students (those born after 2004) were aware of President Trump’s public insults, and they understand how his words create an atmosphere of hate and denigration towards non-Whites. While not all students responded in negative fashion toward President Trump, I believe the assignment provided a safe platform for political discourse for all of my students, for some of them their first experience in documenting a political stance. I think the lesson also brought students closer to understanding social science concepts like political cartoons, campaign logos, and works of art like Picasso’s *Guernica* or Rockwell’s *The Problem We All Live With*. Finally, the lesson reinforced the belief that life really is an inspiration for art.

Absent from my students’ responses were any references to sexual assault, groping, or sexism, some of the many rude activities that President Trump has either been accused of or bragged about. Perhaps the young girls in my IB Visual Arts classes have not yet reached the age to experience or fully understand such harmful acts or they are unaware of the President’s past. It seems that, with this particular group of minorities, issues of race and heritage are more important and sensitive issues than gender-related ones—at least for now. Yet there are other issues that teachers can incorporate into their lessons to create student buy-in and enthusiasm. Animal rights, issues related to LGBTQ, environmental protection, transgender soldiers, and global warming are all topics that can evoke opinions and stimulate deep, important conversations in the classroom. It is crucial for teachers to provide platforms for students to openly and safely express their opinions, frustrations, fears, concerns, and hopes about the world in which they live. Such lessons and classroom activities can be both cathartic and stimulating, depending on the child and her or his perspective on life—especially for minorities living in the Age of Trump and the politics of hate, discrimination, and lies.

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Teaching Note
Explaining Economic Inequality Using the Film, *The Queen of Versailles*

by Teresa A. Booker



STILL FROM *THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES* DIRECTED BY LAUREN GREENFIELD

In introductory classes on race and ethnicity, terms like wealth, economic inequality, and SES (socio-economic status) often take center stage during one chapter or another. There are numerous textbooks on this subject. But, I've had more success explaining these terms by using different media. To illustrate such important themes to non-economics majors, I often show and discuss *The Queen of Versailles*, a 2012 documentary that depicts the Siegel family's two-year meteoric descent from wealth (being worth billions of dollars) to rags (being worth "only" tens of millions of dollars).

Before showing the film, I assign readings to my students that clarify the differences between wages and salaries and between income and wealth. Wages are the payments workers receive after performing a job based upon an hourly rate. Salaries are compensation paid non-hourly workers, typically over a year's time. As for income, it consists of one's salary or wages combined with revenue from any other revenue stream, for example, investments. Wealth, on the other hand, is defined as financial assets along with those high-value items that are purchased with money (such as furs, cars, boats, houses, etc.). In contrast, the term 'socio-economic status' is more nuanced. According to Wickrama (888) quoting Coleman: "Socioeconomic status (SES) reflects one's position in the social structure [and] ...is a function of material capital (e.g., income and property), human capital (e.g., skills and knowledge), and social capital (e.g., social status, social support, and power)."

It is important that students understand these key economic terms before viewing the film because examples of wealth come forth quickly. When the film begins, the audience is immediately introduced to David Siegel, a wealthy businessman, Jackie, his college-educated, younger wife (by 30 years), and their large, eight-child family. David Siegel was not born wealthy. Instead, he acquired his wealth over time, by capitalizing on a real estate tip someone gave him. Elaborating on that idea, David built lodging on his land, sold portions of his properties as timeshares (short residential stays), and, ultimately, became one of the wealthiest, most successful timeshare resort business owners in the U.S. The film shows how hundreds of Siegel's employees earn a salary selling timeshares by talking Vegas visitors into "good investment" purchases. Scenes of the Siegel residence show the extent of the family's wealth: The Siegels live in a mansion staffed by several live-in nannies and countless housekeepers. We see one cook, one chauffer, and one pilot. But, it's implied that there might be more. Although the film is vague about some details, it suggests that the entire staff—except for the housekeepers and pilots (who are most likely hourly wage-earners)—is salaried.

It is not surprising to college students that some people—based on training, education, location, gender, etc.—earn more than others. Nevertheless, I have often wondered to what degree, if any, my students (some of whom are working full-/part-time jobs) envy the Siegels' lifestyle. Invariably, I sense admiration among some as evidenced by their smiles and forward leans as they position themselves to listen more intently. After all, the Siegels have a large income, they have opulent wealth, and they live an extravagant life of luxury. The Siegel children neither

work to support the family nor appear to contribute to the household by performing any chores. In fact, they don't even take care of their own pets. If all that weren't enough, David and Jackie are in the process of building the largest private home in America (worth an estimated \$300 million), equipped with two tennis courts, thirty bathrooms, a basketball court, and ten kitchens, just to name a few of the new mansion's features. As an example of the home's extravagance, one of Jackie's future clothes closets, when completed, will be the size of a small New York City studio apartment.

With each boast, faces of admiration seemingly change to ones of disapproval as "unnecessary" opulence increasingly clashes with students' personal values. However, looks of disgust are soon replaced by astonishment (and self-satisfied smirks) when the Siegels eventually lose everything after the stock market of 2008 fails. When the Siegels lose their wealth, there is a ripple effect: Vacationers-turned-timeshare owners find themselves unable to make their credit card payments and fall behind (or default) on their timeshare remittances. David must lay off timeshare employees because money is not coming in. The family must cut back on their parties and the Siegels are forced to slash their charitable contributions and otherwise drastically alter their normal spending habits. The employment of hourly workers—like the cook and most (if not all) of the housekeepers—is terminated. At least one full-time nanny retains her live-in position, but many other nannies and staff appear to be let go, as well.

Examples of SES are evident throughout the film. David's level of education is never stated but can be assumed to be limited. Nevertheless, his earning power, his connections to rich and famous entities (including former President George H.W. Bush, the elder, and the Miss America Association), and his wealth made his SES unmistakably high *before* the stock market failed. Even after being reduced to a poorer man, David's privilege, connections, and ever-diminishing wealth still make his SES higher than most people's. The Siegel's head nanny—who most likely possesses the same minimal high school education as Mr. Siegel—stands in stark contrast to him: Her SES as a woman of color who performs the ostensibly menial task of caring for the children of the rich, is not remunerated in any serious, monetary way despite her and David's apparently similar educational background. Though the head nanny has cared for the eight Siegel children for years, she has either *not* been paid enough as a live-in employee of the family to be able to afford to travel to the Philippines to see her son or has been prohibited, in some way, from taking personal time to make the trip. In spite of the head nanny's obvious dedication to the family—she consoles the somber children, reprimands the naughty ones, and is left to pick up the excrement of animals who relieve themselves in the home—she is not even treated as a guest for a day during the Siegel's Christmas party. Instead, she is the designated dancing holiday entertainment and expected to wear a reindeer suit for the party—which she does.

The Queen of Versailles ends in an untimely way. Throughout the documentary, Mr. Siegel grows increasingly irritated with the camera crew chronicling his struggle to restructure his debt. One day, he suddenly decides to no

longer allow filming of the documentary, thereby bringing the project to a screeching halt. Abrupt halt notwithstanding, the film holds the students' interest and helps them grasp the concepts of salary, wage, income, and wealth much better than just reading the textbook alone.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note

Telling, Not Being the Joke

by Andrew Tonkovich



PHOTO BY TOM MOSSHOLDER ON UNSPLASH

Q: Tell me, how long have you been working here?

A: Ever since they threatened to fire me.

That old cornball joke still makes me laugh, fifty years after I read it in a kids' magazine. I understood it then as honest if everyday acknowledgement by the presumably once-lazy worker of his or her required acquiescence to power, and of isolation. But its splendid trick syntax and on-the-nose calling out of the coercive relationship of management to labor suggested more, even to a ten year old: cognizance of at least the potential inherent power of the worker -- all workers? -- to apprehend, to subvert, to jest, however fatalistically, cynically or -- my own favorite -- insubordinately.

I've frequently shared this vaudevillian humor *cum* agitprop with fellow part-time teaching colleagues and union comrades. We are called Lecturers at the big public university where I work. Those who've taught for more than even a single quarter as "adjunct," "part-time," "contingent" (you choose) labor immediately apprehend its gentle evocation of our shared precarity and embarrassing second-class status among faculty, despite (or because of) teaching more than half of the undergrad offerings in the University of California system. So, yes, they get it.

But telling this smart dumb joke has also helped explain our working conditions to non-teachers, students, parents and the otherwise curious types who wonder -- often only casually, fleetingly, or when forced to -- about what it's like to be Non-Senate Faculty, untenured, "freeway flyers," in fact the increasing majority of higher education instructional employees. We don't get much attention, or justice, yet there sure are a lot of terms describing us, a rose by any other name still as thorny.

Of course, readers have by now recognized my multi-purpose joke-telling as a gesture of purposeful provocation, and also recognized a provocateur. I am a long-time smart-ass writing teacher activist with vigorous Left politics and, still, somehow, a sense of humor -- a requirement of the job, especially after twenty years of reading freshman Composition essays, a job which tenured faculty do not do, and for a reason. Meanwhile, I insist on teaching, modeling, and immersing students in civic literacy and politics (including labor justice struggles) while ostensibly meeting the institution's fairly unambitious goals of teaching academic writing and research in a required lower-division course, often to students who lack basic critical thinking or reading or comprehension skills, have little research and analysis experience, much less competence required for civic participation.

When did I start working here? My favorite joke has helpfully provided a short answer, and explained, perversely, poetically, why I've stayed as long as I have at a job which reliably delivers insulting everyday working conditions, too much work, lousy compensation, and regular threats to indeed fire me by way of absurd student evaluation (read: consumer satisfaction) criteria among

other and numerous obstacles to practicing something like "radical" pedagogy. The answer is that I've found meaning, opportunity for authentic participation, genuine satisfaction, and camaraderie in *resisting*. Yes, I really *started working* at the university when I understood my vulnerability, and found my parallel, simultaneous work as a union activist: elected member of my union local's board, grievance steward, committee chair, organizer of workshops and meetings and protests and parties. I honestly can't imagine how any Lecturer could otherwise explain, justify, or endure the job.

But there's more. Recently, my joyfully ironic if stubborn joke got funnier, weirder, more poignant and dramatically applicable than even I could have imagined. In its latest telling it helped not only me but other adjuncts. After I was twice denied a request for paid medical leave (brain surgery, if you are wondering), my union leadership and fellow activists organized a grassroots campaign on my behalf, lobbying administration to exercise its prerogative to make an exception to the MOU between the UC and University Council-American Federation of Teachers, and grant a Lecturer otherwise un-mandated paid medical leave for a serious medical condition. I am not kidding. Alas, neither was HR. The institution had interpreted our collective bargaining agreement as providing paid leave only for adjuncts teaching a 100 percent load, so that if I'd had an appointment to teach 8 classes instead of my annual 6, it's possible (though not guaranteed) that I'd receive paid leave.

It's perhaps hard to see the funny part here, unless you've been, like me, telling, living, and repurposing that dumb joke for nearly your entire so-called career. Honestly, I had after the school's decision, given up. I was resigned to filing for university-provided disability insurance (a few hundred dollars every two weeks) while unemployed, living off savings, and -- wait for it! -- paying back that portion of my fall quarter salary already deposited in my bank account before classes started, no kidding.

But here's the glorious punch line. While I was preparing for surgery, then under the knife, and, finally, recuperating, guess what? My union comrades -- those who'd laughed at, been in on the joke, and also embraced and applied its existential demand for resistance -- were working on my behalf.

My union president initiated an online petition meant to shame administration, successfully delivering nearly 7,000 signatures. Two members of our contract bargaining team met informally with the University to object, argue, and negotiate. My union field rep composed yet another letter, filled out required forms, and coordinated with HR to ask again. One union officer contacted media, resulting in local and national stories. Another physically handed out dozens of old-school photocopied flyers and taped them up around campus, resulting in phone calls and emails.

In less than a week the Vice Provost and Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Personnel changed their minds, accommodating my (our) request and, yes, establishing a precedent which clearly the school had sought to avoid. Like the guy who has only a hammer for a tool, management

often sees only thumbs. Until they saw solidarity, which worked to persuade them. Lately, I am told, another UC campus granted a similar exception to another seriously ailing Lecturer.

I'm doing well post-surgery, thank you, and plan to teach next quarter, and return to my volunteer work with my local. Not long ago a younger colleague asked me if he should accept the conditions of limited job security offered by the university's "continuing appointment" job status, the closest Lecturers currently can get to job security, and something like a career. Instead of applying annually for your own job, this status assures a three-year appointment. I didn't feel I could give advice then, torn as I was between encouraging my colleague's righteous commitment to democratic public education and the vision of struggle, maltreatment, and discouragement I know awaits him.

Today I'd answer yes, to both jobs. To taking the inadequate, precarious, and undervalued position as Lecturer, sure, but only with the commitment to also signing up for the equally, if not even more important job -- uncompensated but urgently, profoundly, and absolutely required -- of union activist.

When did I start working at UC Irvine? Ever since they threatened me, and I started working for and with the political activists who are my union.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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Review

Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strikes and Working-Class Politics

Reviewed by Michael Bennett



RED STATE REVOLT: THE TEACHERS' STRIKE WAVE AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS BY ERIC BLANC

Radical teachers, by definition, do not only care about what happens in the classroom; we delve into the roots of classroom practices and pedagogical concerns in the political economy and social movements that underlie education. On occasion, these roots spring forth in ways that grab the attention of all teachers, administrators, students, and the general public. At such moments, radical teachers need to be able to articulate and act on our political understanding of where such moments come from and where they might lead.

Eric Blanc examines one such moment: the wave of teacher strikes that arose in three red states (West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona) in 2018. He tells a compelling story about how "militant teacher-organizers—most of them young radicals inspired by the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign—initiated these illegal rank-and-file rebellions and guided them to victory in alliance with their trade unions" (3). And these victories weren't limited solely to the bread & butter issue of pay raises. Even the least militant uprising, in Oklahoma, won increases in school funding. Arizona teachers stopped proposed tax cuts, kept an ultimately successful anti-voucher referendum on the ballot, and decoupled future pay increases from concomitant decreases in other social programs. West Virginia teachers "forced the state to freeze health care costs, cancel the imposition of invasive mandatory medical trackers, and drop both pro-charter school and anti-union legislation" (7).

Blanc makes the counterintuitive argument that the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision in 2018, which made all public employee unions into open shops, and other conservative anti-union actions have actually made successful strikes more likely. He maintains that these developments have increased the militancy of workers who now challenge and often lead formerly accommodationist unions that, without closed shops, have to be much more attentive to members who can stop paying dues. Also, because of budgetary constraints, unions in "right to work" states rely more heavily on local union presidents who act like local shop stewards rather than union functionaries beholden to the national bureaucracy. This counterintuitive analysis helps explain why these militant labor actions happened in conservative red states: unions tend to be cozy with and not want to challenge their Democratic allies in blue states, while they are likely to take on blatantly anti-union politicians more directly and forcefully. This is a lesson about which radicals need to be reminded: sometimes accommodating our neoliberal "allies" drains political energy that is best directed at challenging them while taking militant actions against reactionary forces. Blanc supports a rank-and-file strategy that grooms and supports militants who are willing to take on both right-wing and blue dog Democratic legislators, as well as complacent union hierarchies.

Here lies the theoretical crux of the book: How does one develop and pursue a rank-and-file strategy? Many of my comrades in the democratic socialist left are suspicious of an

old-school Marxist rank-and-file strategy based on the vanguard "capturing" unions. This doesn't seem to be what Blanc is arguing for. He takes care to point out that the success of these strikes was the result of cooperation and mutual respect of militant rank-and-filers with union leadership. And, in the end, this is the goal of a rank-and-file strategy: not just to win increased teacher pay and school funds, but to make "advances toward revitalizing the trade unions and rebuilding a militant workers' movement" (8). For Blanc, the lesson of this rank-and-file strategy is not that the vanguard needs to take over unions but that "the Left needs labor just as much as labor needs the Left" (11).

After Blanc outlines his central claims in an Introduction and the first two chapters ("The Roots of Revolt" and "The Power of Strikes"), the analysis really comes alive in the long third chapter, "The Militant Minority," which makes up half the book's 212 pages. This chapter reports on Blanc's investigations of the behind-the-scenes story that challenges the corporate media's contention that these strikes were spontaneous uprisings. Blanc argues that, instead, "an indispensable ingredient in the victories of West Virginia and Arizona was the existence of a 'militant minority' of workplace activists—that is, individuals with a class struggle orientation, significant organizing experience, and a willingness to act independently of (and, if necessary, against) the top union officialdom" (104). Conversely, "the absence of a layer of militant teacher organizers in Oklahoma, for instance, goes a long way toward explaining the relative weakness of its walkout" (105).

West Virginia has a history of labor militancy, but each of the core organizers Blanc spoke with talked about the importance of Bernie Sanders's primary campaign, which led to his victory in every county in the state and "helped coalesce a new organized socialist movement in the form of a reborn Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)" (108). Blanc focuses on the story of two DSA members, Emily Comer and Jay O'Neal, who became leaders of the militant rank-and-file movement for a strike. The latter started a DSA committee on labor and education in the summer of 2017, which included studying Jane McAlevey's book *No Shortcuts*. Comer and O'Neal set up the Facebook page that helped network other union militants who ultimately joined together as West Virginia Public Employees United (WVPEU) to pressure the state's three education unions to strike. To their credit, these unions established a process for responding to the membership's democratic decisions, even when strikers later defied the unions' desires to prematurely end the strike. Blanc ends the story of the West Virginia strike with the image of the President of one of the unions, West Virginia Education Association's Dale Lee, walking up to Emily Comer and saying "You did this." Blanc concludes "Lee was right that the rank and file—with the help of its most tireless and fiery activists—had made history" (139).

By contrast, Blanc traces the relative weakness of Oklahoma's teachers strike to the Sooner state's "missing militants" (139). Though the Sanders campaign helped awaken Oklahoma's long-dormant tradition of socialist activism, none of these newly energized socialists had leadership roles in the teachers unions. The leaders of Oklahoma's two separate rank-and-file groups—Oklahoma Teachers United (OTU) and Oklahoma Teacher Walkout—

The Time is Now! (TNN)—had no organizing experience, no clear ideology, and no connection to the state’s main union: the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA). Though OTU and TNN were able to stoke educator militancy and mobilization, their efforts were based on social media rather than deep organizing. There were no structure tests, no mechanism for democratic exchange and decision-making (thus, no strike vote), a lack of statewide coordination, overreliance on the goodwill of superintendents, unclear school funding demands, lack of outreach to and participation by service personnel. As a result, there was no countervailing rank-and-file pressure to keep the strike going when the union prematurely called it off with few concessions beyond a pay raise and “few gains in terms of building up the collective organization or self-confidence of working people” (141). Though socialists tried to support the strikers, DSA organizer Xavier Doolittle was forced to conclude that “socialists can’t effectively raise class consciousness from the outside” (163), which Blanc takes as a justification for his rank-and-file strategy.

Though the obstacles to a successful strike were even greater in anti-union, pro-privatization, conservative Republican Arizona than they were in Oklahoma, the rank-and-file Arizona Educators United (AEU) led the way to victory for the Arizona Education Association (AEA), a union that represented only 25 percent of the workforce in a state where the legislature is practically in the back pocket of the Charles Koch Institute and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Blanc argues that the “most important differentiating factor” between Arizona and Oklahoma was the “orientation and experience of grassroots leaders” (165). He focuses on three AEU leaders: Noah Karvelis, Dylan Wegela, and Rebecca Garelli. The first two were radicalized by the Sanders campaign; the latter by her experience with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). According to Blanc, the organizing tools employed by Arizona’s militant minority included collectively formulating demands through a democratic, deliberative process; building a site liaison network through deep organizing to coordinate and promote actions; utilizing social media adeptly; developing a close relationship with a union (the AEA) interested in collaborating with the rank and file; attending the 2018 Labor Notes Conference, where they engaged with democratic socialist and radical unionist ideas (such as those presented in the Labor Notes book *How to Jump Start Your Union*). When the union was reluctant to strike, this deep organizing by the militant minority who led the AEU persuaded the AEA to change course, resulting in one of the most successful teacher strikes in recent memory. One of the leaders and the center of the upsurge, Noah Karvelis, concluded that “radicals and anti-capitalists have a big role to play—if you look at history, you see that those folks are often at the forefront of labor struggles” (203-204).

Red State Revolt comes to a quick stop with a “Conclusion” of a few pages and an equally short Epilogue. As indicated by this abrupt ending after a huge chapter that jams together the lessons of all three strikes, the book is oddly organized. Blanc has important lessons to relate, but they are somewhat randomly strewn throughout the text, all the more difficult to find because there is no index. However,

these lessons are worthy of being collected together and repeated:

- Mass strikes are workers’ most powerful weapon.
- To win an illegal strike requires strong internal unity and external support.
- A successful strike movement must extend beyond teachers to staff, public employees, other working people, community organizations, churches, civic groups, media, parents, students, the general public, politicians, local celebrities—in short, any and all possible allies.
- Strikes are important not only for the concessions they win, but also for empowering and politicizing the working class.
- Rank-and-file movements led by a militant minority are needed to overcome the accommodationist tendencies of union leadership.
- Union leadership that is responsive to its membership plays a crucial role in providing infrastructure for and magnifying the impact of rank-and-file movements.
- The Sanders campaigns have been major catalysts for militant labor actions, chiefly through energizing a young, dedicated core of socialist activists.
- Radical unionists and socialists can provide the class struggle perspectives and political organizing skills needed to build militant labor actions.
- Social media is important in building militant action, but only if it is paired with on-the-ground organizing.
- The revival or organized labor is inseparable from the project of rebuilding a militant minority.

These lessons are important for radical teachers working to transform the conditions of their labor for their own sake and the sake of their students and profession. I can imagine this book, or parts of it, also being a component of interesting lesson plans in college classrooms, or even for advanced secondary school students. For instance, the section on the West Virginia strike includes references to the history of labor militancy in that state. History teachers could make interesting connections with the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain. English and film professors could teach this section in conjunction with John Sayles’s film *Matewan*. The section on Oklahoma could be brought into dialogue with narratives about how the state that once had the strongest Socialist Party in the country turned into a right-wing stronghold. The answer has a lot to do with “vicious repression” that sought to eradicate the Left, including replacing the red state flag “because it was too associated with working-class radicalism. Only the state motto ‘Labor conquers all,’

remained as an artifact of Oklahoma’s radical roots” (142). *Red State Revolt* might usefully be taught in conjunction with texts that shaped the analysis of Blanc and the activists he wrote about, including *No Shortcuts*, *How to Jump Start Your Union*, and Micah Uetricht’s *Strike for America*.

McAlevey’s *No Shortcuts*, in particular, pairs well with *Red State Revolt* to provide crucial analyses of the differences between advocacy and organizing; between class struggle and class snuggle (accommodationist union leadership); and between spontaneous action and necessary structure tests. Her book also offers an insightful chapter on the Chicago strike, which (along with other Blue State strikes in Washington, California, and elsewhere) takes us beyond the purview of Blanc’s book. Blanc points to this broader horizon of future red and blue state revolts in the book’s epilogue, where he quotes a discussion he had with McAlevey in the pages of *Jacobin* magazine. They reject the idea that we should be looking for the next “wave” of teacher activism because a wave is a natural force that advances and recedes no matter what we do. Instead, McAlevey and Blanc advocate for a model based the next “struggle” we can organize to build worker agency and powerful movements right now.

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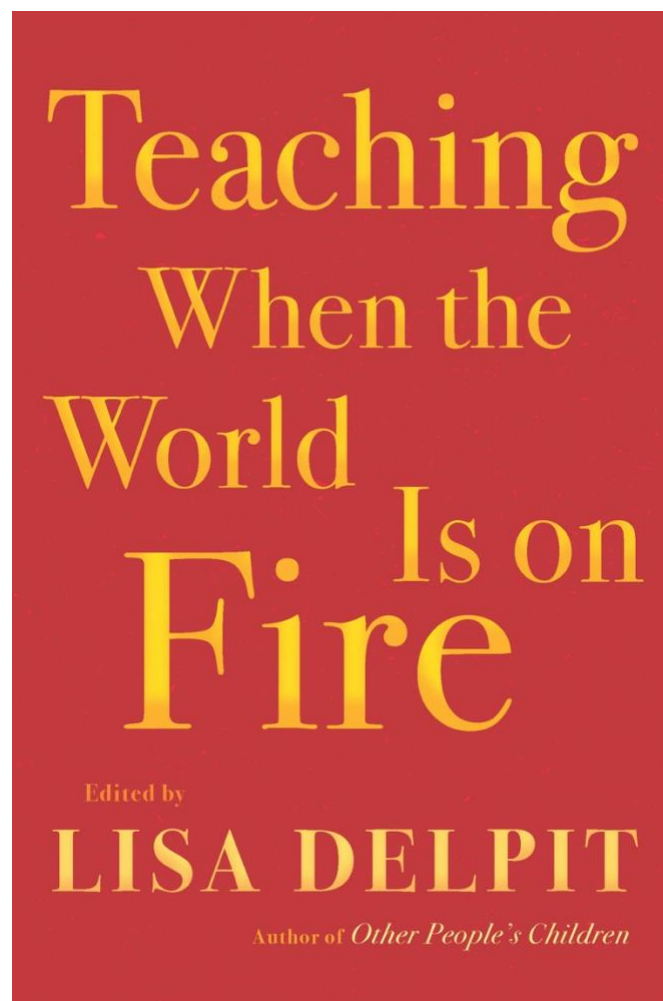
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

Teaching When the World Is on Fire

Reviewed by Tanya Friedman



TEACHING WHEN THE WORLD IS ON FIRE BY LISA DELPIT

Delpit, Lisa. (2019). *Teaching When the World Is on Fire*. (The New Press, 2019)

At dinner recently, I found myself recounting a scene from Ocean Vuong's exquisite memoir, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, which led to a conversation with my 11-year-old daughter about the Vietnam war that touched on the draft and its racial and socioeconomic disproportionality, the country's treatment of veterans, napalm, and the dubious motivation for US involvement. She sank down in her chair and asked if there ever was a time the world wasn't so bad. Her nascent political consciousness has evolved in the shadow of Trump and his never-ending affronts to the safety of people and the earth, and somehow she thought there had been a time before Trump when things were better. In the introduction to her new book, *Teaching When the World Is on Fire*, Lisa Delpit speculates that for children in the United States today the onslaught of "racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, irrationality, and despotic blunder" and general loss of moral high ground from government leadership has made "the world feels more frightening now" (xii) than ever before. As Delpit unpacks this idea, she asks what it means for children to "find themselves victimized by their highest leaders and the policies they enact?" (xii).

The 27 chapters (plus a list of books about immigration for young readers) that compose the volume each grapple with the question of what education can and should be for young people whose lives, families, communities and planet are regularly disregarded, denigrated and attacked. Organized by theme into sections titled Politics Matters, Safety Matters, Race Matters, Gender and Sex Ed Matter, Climate Matters, and Culture Matters, *Teaching When the World Is on Fire* includes essays, advice, anecdotes and lists from well-known educators, theorists and activists like Pedro Noguera, Bill Ayers, Chris Emdin, Bill Bigelow and Mica Pollock, as well as offerings from other academics, journalists, principals and teachers. The chapters reflect Delpit's belief that teachers are among those who can (and should) instill hope in students by giving them the knowledge and tools to navigate our unjust world and take action for justice. Teachers need support to educate and empower students, especially in a political moment when they—and their most vulnerable students—are so often disrespected, blamed, or overlooked. Delpit positions the collection as an offering of solidarity, encouragement and inspiration for teachers, and many of the essays do that in insightful, innovative and heartfelt ways.

As a teacher and teacher educator, I was drawn to the chapters that described how to help students interrogate challenging issues in their lives and communities in ways that maintain hope. Julia Putnam's account of a challenging moment at her school illustrates the paradigm shift, ongoing self-reflection, and time commitment that schoolwide Restorative Justice demands of adults better than anything else I've read. Frederick Scott Salyers reminds us that "it's a near impossible task to educate Black children in a society that constantly interrupts that work with violence" (55) and shares the texts and methods he employs to create space for students of color to name, move through, and hopefully heal from the daily trauma of

an unsafe world. In Camila Arze Torres Goitia's description of her students' remarkable response to their school administration's lack of urgency around sexual harassment, the students' ability to organize shines, while Goitia's critical self-reflections on how and when to offer guidance are as useful as the narrative of her students' thoughtful and inclusive activism.

Teaching When the World Is on Fire provides a middle ground between theory and prescription. Instead of examples to replicate, there are strategies others have used to tackle complicated issues, compelling stories of student activism, and models of self-reflection and collaboration. When I introduce critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy to preservice teachers in their literacy courses and to teachers in professional development sessions, they inevitably ask for examples. Critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy hinge on teachers listening to the actual humans in the room, coming to know and value their lived experiences, histories and cultural contexts, and responding with curriculum and instruction that affirms and expands their identities and ways of knowing, so while I am all for examples, I am wary of supplying blueprints or lesson plans for teachers to implement. Still I understand that centering students' interests, communities and cultural identities in your curriculum and instruction is not easy to do or envision, especially if you've never experienced or witnessed it or if you were educated during NCLB, as many preservice teachers I work with were. Most chapters could, at least, prompt important discussions and reflection, while others will inspire replication and action.

As I read the volume, clear uses and specific audiences came to mind immediately for many of the essays. When I finished Dale Weiss's narrative of young students' shifting perspectives on gender self-determination, I immediately texted a second-grade teacher who is doing a year-long inquiry around gender as an entry point for critical consciousness development, eager to share some of the activities Weiss describes. A fourth-grade teacher has been struggling with helping students recognize and unpack how forces of structural racism impact social issues the students chose as the foci for their service learning projects (littering, hunger and homelessness); Cami Toloukian's account of the steps she took to help her Kindergarten students understand the Syrian Refugee crisis gives multiple examples of how to approach complicated social issues, along with details of her planning and results. Teachers and preservice teachers I work with often struggle with how to take up some of the political and racial issues that students raise, and H. Richard Milner IV's essay, "Yes, Race and Politics Belong in the Classroom," offers actionable tips that direct teachers to hold both an academic and socio-emotional lens as they consider how and when to engage students. Similarly, I felt relieved to read James Loewen's chapter that advocates for teaching Confederate (and all) history accurately as opposed to leaving it out or accepting the narrative currently perpetuated by the alt-right. Loewen's perspective may help teachers and student teachers, who feel pressure to teach "both sides" and worry about teaching ideas that may conflict with what their students' families espouse, to remember there are historical facts and accepted ideals to ground the conversations.

The essays, however, are uneven, and some lacked the urgency, creativity and radical response the world on fire merits. The most compelling chapters contained the author or teacher's reflexivity, their reckoning with how to support critical perspectives in a world that devalues critical consciousness. Only a few chapters, notably Amy Harmon's incisive journalistic take on teaching climate science in Trump country and Toloukian's aforementioned teaching about Syria and refugees, dealt directly with student or parent resistance. When teachers examine their internal and external barriers to raising politicized issues with students, fear of resistance from administration or student families comes up frequently. More guidance on how to respond to resistance would go a long way to making the essays more immediately relevant to educators in a broader range of contexts and to those just beginning this work.

While I found most chapters valuable, there are not many people I would urge to read the book in its entirety. I believe the organization of the anthology contributed to my sense that the sum was not greater than the parts in this collection. Despite the clarity of grouping the essays by content, I found myself recategorizing them by format, by whose story and voice were foregrounded, by the age of the students involved, or by the site and drivers of the activism. In the introduction Delpit points to societal forces of racism, sexism and anti-intellectualism that the president has intensified and accelerated. Explicitly pulling these threads through the individual essays, examining how capitalism, misogyny and white supremacy collectively and separately drive the crises the chapters address, would knit the essays together and also situate the book in a larger historical context, which matters since assaults on people of color, women, poor people, and the environment predate—and will outlast—Trump.

Ultimately, it was the stories from teacher's classrooms, their efforts, creativity and insight, and their students' resistance and activism that moved me most and which will inspire teachers to help students take action to work toward a world that is, at least, better than before. I shared several of the stories with my daughter. We talked about Carla Shalaby's account of a student who gently interrupts his teacher's urgency around the curriculum to assert the importance of "being human together in school" and about Deborah Almontaser's suggestions for making schools more inclusive of Muslim children. She was interested in the different ways students protested and organized around Black Lives Matter in Seattle and climate change in Portland, and we talked about the importance of individual and group action. I also remembered to tell her about the demonstrations and marches against the Vietnam war that did have an effect on the United States military finally leaving.

My biggest takeaway from *Teaching When the World Is on Fire* is that we cannot highlight and publicize the activist work of teachers, collectives and youth leaders enough. But we need to do this alongside our own efforts, lest the expectation that young people lead become another

burden we lay on them. I think this is in line with Delpit's vision that the collection inspire readers to engage, empower, listen, guide, as well as follow youth. They are the literal and metaphoric antidote to our burning world.



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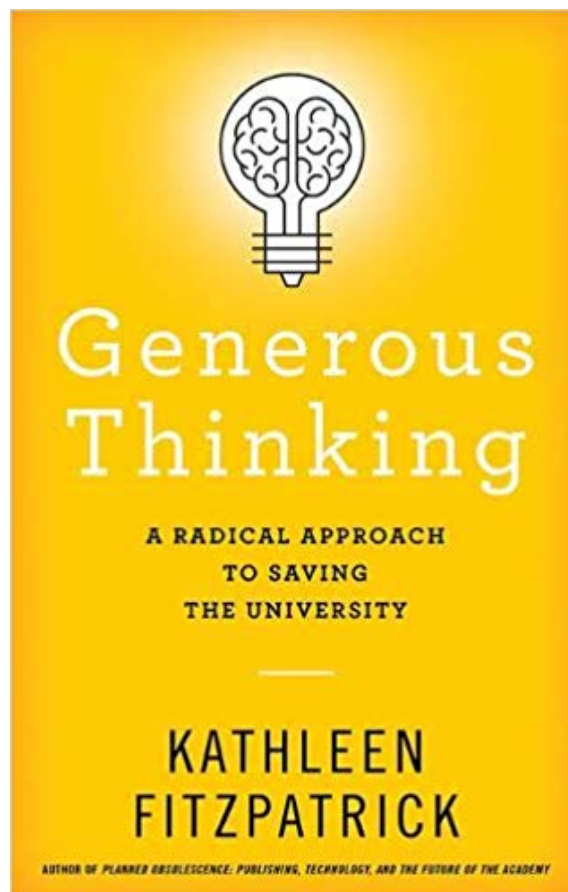
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University

Reviewed by Jocelyn Wills



GENEROUS THINKING: A RADICAL APPROACH TO SAVING THE UNIVERSITY. BY KATHLEEN FITZPATRICK.

Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University. By Kathleen Fitzpatrick. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

As readers of *Radical Teacher* will remember, Jennifer Washburn's University, Inc. (2005) issued a clarion call to scholars and policy makers about the need to remedy the corrosive effects that market-oriented, profit-seeking impulses have had on university research and teaching as well as democracy and the public trust. Although Washburn focused mainly on the corporate corruption of the sciences, many of her other concerns have come to pass in the wake of the Great Recession—including but not limited to accelerated neoliberal policies and public austerity schemes, the expansion of bloated bureaucracies and the careerist ambitions of administrators, escalating tuition costs and student debt, and an intensifying anti-intellectualism with populist movements suspicious of faculty research findings and expertise. As a result, an expanding body of work has emerged to tackle the mounting problems associated with the business models dominating major private and public research universities, the scandalous behavior of for-profit colleges, and, more recently, both the starvation of public higher education as well as the decimation of the humanities and the liberal arts. Following Washburn's lead, much of that work has offered solutions in the form of policy prescriptions.

Although Washburn focused mainly on the corporate corruption of the sciences, many of her other concerns have come to pass in the wake of the Great Recession—including but not limited to accelerated neoliberal policies and public austerity schemes, the expansion of bloated bureaucracies and the careerist ambitions of administrators, escalating tuition costs and student debt, and an intensifying anti-intellectualism with populist movements suspicious of faculty research findings and expertise.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Generous Thinking* makes an important intervention in the debate over what to do about the plight of American higher education, largely because it eschews the usual public policy tweaks that seek to address what can be done given current constraints or to reform the two competing and contradictory paradigms already on life support: what Fitzpatrick describes as "an older one, largely operative within the academic community, in which the university serves as a producer and disseminator of knowledge; and a more recent one, widely subscribed to in the surrounding culture, in which the university serves as a producer and disseminator of market-oriented credentials." (197) Instead, by drawing on her work in digital humanities and collaborative, community-driven projects, Fitzpatrick

argues that faculty members must abandon both models and take a hard look in the mirror if they want to save the university, particularly the public university, from the ravages of the neoliberal agenda and competitive self-destruction.

Fitzpatrick's book is an appeal for a revolution in thinking, a paradigm shift that forces us to embrace community as a strength rather than weakness, and to focus on education as a shared public (rather than individual and private) responsibility, a collective project that not only facilitates "the development of diverse, open communities" on campus and across borders rather than "inculcating state citizens" or training corporate leaders for more competitive individualism, but also rewards service as a central tenet of our work and helps to build and sustain communities grounded in an "ethic of care." (44) Such a shift therefore means the need to resist more than the efficiency models, accreditation traps, and market-driven, competitive structures and ranking systems that have come to define and debase the university and its priorities over the last 40-plus years. Fitzpatrick contends that, by subjecting ourselves, even buying into "a politics that makes inevitable the critical, the negative, the rejection of everything that has gone before" so that we can continue to ride the publish-or-perish treadmill, as well as accepting the reward system that discourages generosity (and service) and sanctions the drive for prestige, faculty members have played no small role in undermining the university and betraying the public trust. (25-6)

Since those involved in higher education have already lost the public's trust, Fitzpatrick argues that we cannot afford to wait for administrators to intervene. Change must begin at the grassroots level: with faculty, staff, students, and community partners working together to reground academic work in discourses with the many publics that the university serves, to get away from treating community engagement as a transactional exercise, to find and support projects collectively developed and governed, and to commit to solidarity and open, inclusive processes and practices. One example that can guide this change is *Imagining America* (<https://imaginingamerica.org/>), a 20-year-old consortium of artists, designers, humanists, organizers, and scholars committed to the creation of a more just, equitable, and "radically inclusive" America and world by promoting and strengthening public scholarship, cultural activism, and campus change that can inspire "collective imagination, knowledge-making, and civic action on pressing public issues" and bridge "institutional, disciplinary, and community divides." (35)

Fitzgerald maintains that such a cultural shift requires faculty to adopt a "mode of engagement that emphasizes listening over speaking, community over individualism, [and] collaboration over competition," a commitment that involves showing up, day after day, to do the work required to communicate our shared responsibility along with the public goals (and public good) of our scholarship and disciplines. That mode of engagement flows into what Fitzpatrick means by "generous thinking"—working with rather than against others; broadening the definition of who our peers might be; and having the kind of "critical humility" that allows us to acknowledge that we might be wrong about

some or many things and have much to learn from artists, students, community partners, and others. Engaging the work of trauma studies scholar Dominick LaCapra (particularly his 2004 *History in Transit*), Fitzgerald argues that, above all, listening, reflecting, and thinking with others helps to develop a generosity based not on a one-time transaction but on “persistence in the absence of hope,” an ethical empathy that we must practice continuously in order to recognize that we may not understand others in our midst but must nevertheless continue to try to learn about them and why they think as they do so we can make the commitment Fitzgerald envisions, to the communities and collectives we need to build and sustain. (4, 12-13, 22, 39-40, 60, 66-8, 232-5)

Fitzpatrick insists that listening, deep, generous listening is the foundation for generous thinking, but we need to do more. Drawing on her career in literary studies and research into “connected communities of readers” (including Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club), Fitzpatrick argues that faculty also need to hear, to pay attention, to “open ourselves to the same questioning we ask of others.” That begins with attempting to understand why students read what they read, including the connections they seek, so that faculty can lead them from more to less accessible texts over time. This kind of openness to understanding students additionally involves learning as much as teaching, so that everyone involved has a better chance to “scale the empathy wall” imagined in Arlie Russell Hochschild’s work. If we read together, as part of a collective process both in and beyond the classroom, we might just remember that questions matter more than answers, that listening allows us “to question what we already know,” and that reflecting on multiple perspectives fosters community building and deeper learning. (119-22) As an additional benefit, reading, listening, reflecting, and thinking together provides an opportunity for faculty to share their love of reading, research, discovery, and learning in ways that can bolster why the humanities and other disciplines continue to matter to the public good.

To convince the larger public that our work is critically important (to democracy, social justice, the environment, etc.), that it remains relevant to the public good, Fitzpatrick also argues that we need to find better ways to get around the institutional constraints that keep us from working in and with the public to build communities of generosity on and off campus. Employing her own “Planned Obsolescence” blog as a vehicle for discussion, Fitzpatrick examines the dangers and rewards of sharing work more broadly. Audacious, perhaps. Frightening, absolutely. But, Fitzgerald argues, the experience was also richly rewarding in providing opportunities to self-question rather than self-confirm, risk enthusiasm about the humanities, and work with communities she had not previously considered: scholars in other fields, artists, policy makers, and the broader public. Fitzpatrick’s most important take-away was that faculty need to make their scholarship more available and accessible to those who care about and can support it. Failing to tell stories of our work and why it continues to matter, she cautions, will only continue to “undermine the public’s willingness to support our research and institutions.” (150)

Fitzpatrick claims that she is not asking academics work as volunteers in this effort, but rather that they invite others to care about and contribute to their work, and to signal their scholarly commitment to ongoing review, so that, as members of multiple communities, faculty can focus on gathering together our collective knowledge and creating “not just tools for production, but tools for living.” (180) Will any of this be easy? Absolutely not, Fitzpatrick concedes, but she also contends that we can no longer avoid working on what we need to think and do about the very real crises in higher education that authors from Washburn forward have exposed. Among the many things we need to tackle, she argues that the first one must center on uprooting the “prestige” and “market-driven” paradigms that reinforce hierarchies and exclusion. In their place, Fitzpatrick suggests that we need to commit ourselves to the collective, privileging service to the public good by working as public intellectuals and offering up new narratives, some based on historical examples that succeeded, at least for a time (including the work that paved the way for the Morrill Act of 1862, which, despite its flaws, focused on educating those who could help their communities from the grassroots-up; the lyceum movement; labor colleges and folk schools; and the Wisconsin Idea that, although top-down, at least invited public involvement, and dared to ask what communities needed and how the university might help).

Fitzpatrick references other projects that attempt to build and sustain communities, including the “Object Lessons Workshop” (<http://objectsofobjects.com>) that helps scholars to express the significance of their work to broader audiences (165), through Michigan State University’s “Citizen Scholars” program (<http://citizenscholars.msu.edu>), and on to indigenous knowledge and slow movement collaborations that privilege communities of knowing, learning, and being over knowledge production and scholarship as a competitive exercise (see, for example, <http://indigistory.com>). She also provides the example of her decision to post the first draft of the book manuscript for community review and feedback at <http://generousthinking.hcommons.org>, where she hopes the conversation she has started will continue.

Fitzpatrick offers an excellent roadmap for re-imagining the university, and how we might live within and beyond it. Like Berg and Seeber’s *Slow Professor*, however, the individual interventions that *Generous Thinking* proposes offer little in the way of how best to tackle the incentive and reward structures that have long undermined the very community-building projects Fitzpatrick envisions, and to scale “generous thinking” beyond the already converted in ways that protect those increasingly over-burdened by the call to “communities of care” and service—especially women, people of color, contingent workers (including those in the academy), and the poor. Still, at this moment of paradigm failure, her challenge is timely and important, providing many of the arguments progressive scholars will need to save the university from neoliberalism and the faculty’s self-destructive acquiescence to it. Let the conversation continue.

Notes

1. Jennifer Washburn, *University, Inc: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (Basic Books, 2005). In addition, see Renate Bridenthal's review of *University, Inc.* in *Radical Teacher* 73 (2005):35-7, 48. For recent works on higher education that resonate particularly well with *Generous Thinking*, see Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (University of Toronto Press, 2016); and Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier, *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

2. See, for example, Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (The New Press, 2016).



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Contributors' Notes

Teaching for Justice



PHOTO BY MICHELLE DING ON UNSPLASH

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