

# 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

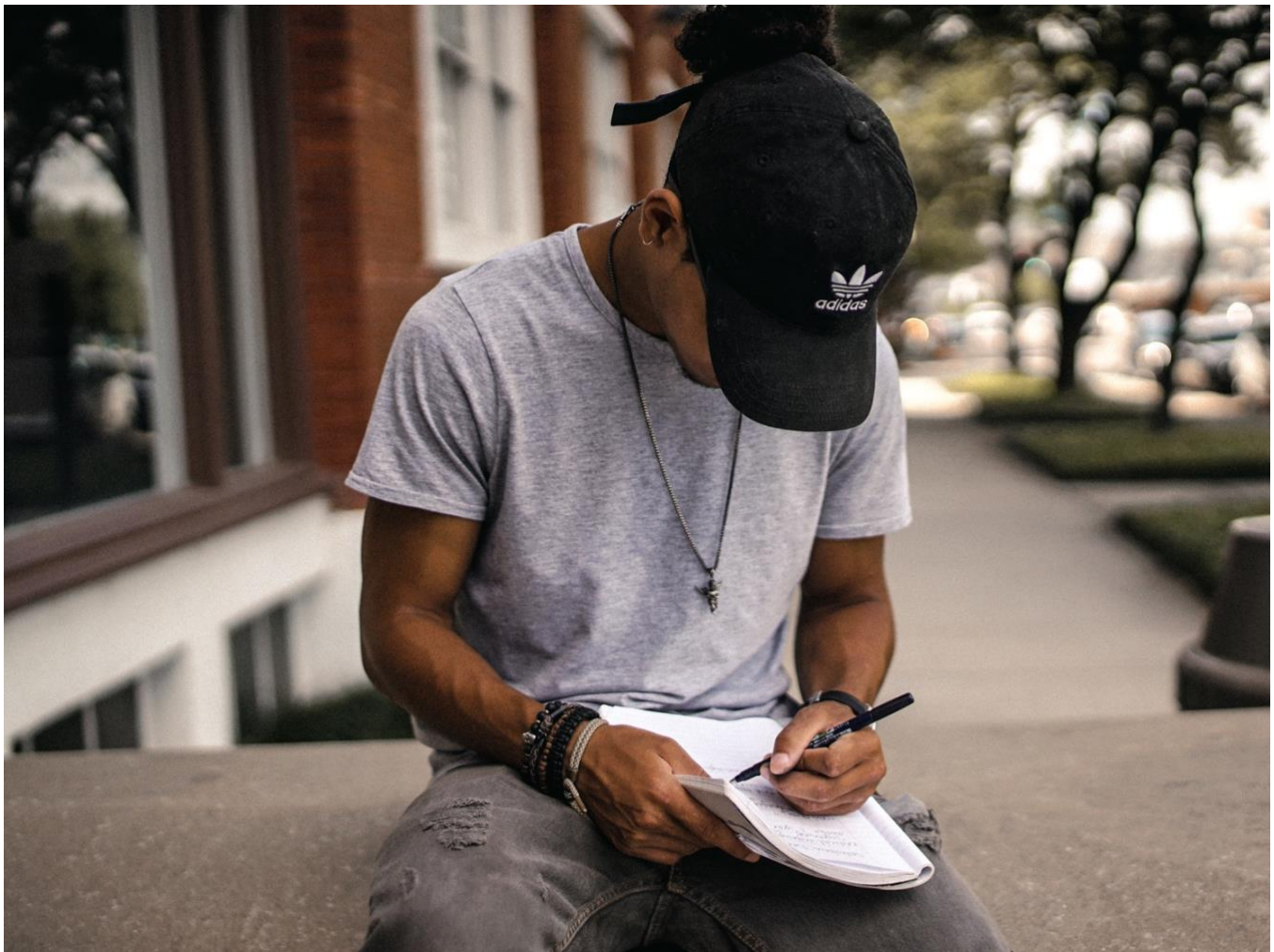


PHOTO BY BRAD NEATHERY ON UNSPLASH

*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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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

### Works Cited

- Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print
- Alexander, M Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Allen, Myria, Lynne M. Webb, and Kandi L. Walker. "Feminist Pedagogy: Identifying Basic Principles." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 6 (2002): 67-72. Web.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 85-126. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987. Print.
- Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2007. Print

- Binder, Amy. *Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013. Print.
- Binder, Amy, Daniel B. Davis and Nick Bloom. "Career Funneling: How Elite Students Learn to Define and Desire 'Prestigious' Jobs." *Sociology of Education* 89.1(2016): 20-39. Web.
- Boler, Megan. *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 1999. Web.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 3rd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. Print.
- . "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* 62.3 (1996): 465-80. Web.
- Bracher, Mark. *Literature and Social Justice: Protest Novels, Cognitive Politics, and Schema Criticism*. Austin: UT Press, 2014. Print.
- Bransford, John and D. Schwartz. "Rethinking Transfer: A Simple Proposal with Multiple Implications." *Review of Research in Education* 24 (1999): 61-100. Web.
- Brent, Doug. *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-based Writing*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992. Print.
- Charmaz, Kathy. "The Power of Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry." *Qualitative Inquiry* 23.1 (2017): 34-45. Web.
- . *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage Publications, 2006. Print.
- . "Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Expanding Sociological Horizons in the Twenty-first Century." *Sociological Perspectives* 43.4 (2000): 529-47. Web.
- Chatelain, Marcia. "Teaching the #FergusonSyllabus." *DissentMagazine.org*, 28 Nov. 2014. Web. 23 March 2015.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2004. Print.
- Edward. "Portfolio for ENGL 111- Winter 2016." Unpublished essay, 16 March 2016.
- Engle, Randi A., Diane P. Lam, Xenia S. Meyer, and Sarah E. Nix. "How Does Expansive Framing Promote Transfer? Several Proposed Explanations and a Research Agenda for Investigating Them." *Educational Psychologist* 47.3 (2012): 215-31. Web.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum, 2000. Print.
- Giroux, Henry. "Academic Freedom Under Fire: The Case for Critical Pedagogy." *College Literature* 33.4 (2006): 1-42. Web.
- . "Beyond the Ivory Tower: Public Intellectuals and the Crisis of Higher Education." *Higher Education Under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities*. Eds. Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson. New York: Routledge, 1995. 238-258. Print.
- . "Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy." *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994. 325-343. Print.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Hoffman, Frances L. and Jayne E. Stake. "Changes in Student Social Attitudes, Activism, and Personal Confidence in Higher Education: The Role of Women's Studies." *American Educational Research Journal* 38.2 (2001): 411. Web.
- . "Feminist Pedagogy in Theory and Practice: An Empirical Investigation." *NWSA Journal* (1998): 79-97. Web.
- hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze." *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End, 1992. 115-131. Web.
- . *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- . "Toward a Revolutionary Feminist Pedagogy." *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End, 1989. 49-54. Print.
- Hong, Grace Kyungwon. *Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2006. Print.
- Kempf, Arlo. "Anti-Colonial Historiography: Interrogating Colonial Education." *Anti-colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance*. Eds. George Jerry Sefa Dei and Arlo Kempf. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006. 129-158. Print.
- Kim, Gene and Arlyn Arquiza. *State of Diversity at UW—All Campuses*. Seattle: University of Washington, Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, 11 Feb. 2016. Web. 20 July 2016.
- Marzano, Robert J. *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004. Print.
- McLaren, Peter. "White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism." *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994. 45-74. Print.
- Melamed, Jodi. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2011. Print.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Race, Multiculturalism, and Pedagogies of Dissent." *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 190- 220. Print.
- . "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88. Web.
- Nowacek, Rebecca S. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2011. Print.
- Perkins, D., and Gavriel Salomon. "Knowledge to Go: A Motivational and Dispositional View of Transfer." *Educational Psychologist* 47.3 (2012): 248-58. Web.
- . "Teaching for Transfer." *Educational Leadership* 46.1 (1988): 22-32. Web.
- Reiff, Mary Jo and Anis Bawarshi. "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year

Composition." *Written Communication* 28.3 (2011): 312-337.

Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2000. Print.

---. "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." *Genders* 10 (1991): 1-24. Web.

Shaul, Richard. "Foreword." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. By Paulo Freire. 30th Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum, 2000. 29-34. Print.

Sheth, Falguni A. "Why Our Best Students Are Totally Oblivious." *Salon.com*, 13 Sept. 2013. Web. 17 June 2015.

Stenberg, Shari J. *Repurposing Composition Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age*. Boulder: Utah State UP, 2015. Web.

Stitzlein, Sarah Marie. *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2012. Print.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2004. Print.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).