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## RADICALIZING FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION: A NOVICE EDUCATOR'S VENTURE INTO REVOLUTIONARY TEACHING

Xochilt Trujillo Flores

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RADICALIZING FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION:  
A NOVICE EDUCATOR'S VENTURE INTO REVOLUTIONARY TEACHING

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English and Writing Studies

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by  
Xochilt Trujillo Flores  
May 2022

RADICALIZING FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION:  
A NOVICE EDUCATOR'S VENTURE INTO REVOLUTIONARY TEACHING

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May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

This project is based on my experiences and reflections as a novice instructor on implementing educational practices which center a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical approach in a first year composition course (FYC). Using my own experiences of teaching FYC as a central focus, this project will collect data through teacher-reflective journals. Those journals will be focused on how radical pedagogy shapes my approaches to teaching and how I experience/implement that approach in my day-to-day practices. In doing so, this project aims to address the persistent gap between theory and practice, particularly in the context of novice educators' experiences in a FYC class. The primary goal of this project is to offer insights in how the field might better guide educators who are committed to radical, critical, feminist, and anti-racist pedagogies to enact those pedagogies from the start of their careers, rather than having to learn how to teach the "traditional" way first, only to have to unlearn those approaches later.

While the 1974 CCCC/NCTE resolution "Student Rights to Their Own Language" is considered a foundational text in the composition field, that resolution has yet to become a reality (Horner et al., Hudley and Mallinson, Kinloch, Lovejoy) and the privileging of "standard English" continues to live on in many composition classrooms, to the detriment of all students. The composition field has long acknowledged such educational practices uphold linguistic prejudice, institutionalized racism and other caustic hegemonic ideologies

(Baker- Bell, Jones Stanbrough, and Everett, Rawls, Young,). Laura Greenfield proposes a radical pedagogical praxis which would destabilize institutionalized forms of oppression, examine the politics behind writing and help students critically analyze how power/oppression is working in their own lives and in their language use. That praxis would be characterized by explicitly questioning language hierarchies (Inoue, Young, Lippi-Green), changing harmful grading practices (Poe and Inoue, Elbow, Shor) and centering scholars of color. A radical teaching praxis must be deeply critical (Freire, Shor, Giroux), as that pedagogy has long been looked at as a way to counter harmful hegemonic educational practices.

The composition field is flooded with calls to reject harmful teaching practices yet, the field is also not preparing its teachers to do so. Mosher calls training in the understanding of linguistic diversity “far from wide spread”(2) in teacher preparation and in higher education as a whole. The theorization of the need to change these practices “has far outpaced pedagogical practices for advancing this proficiency in classroom” (Canagarajah 40). The onus lies entirely upon the novice educator to put these practices into action, without any overt professionalism training on how to do so.

Building from Greenfield and Freire’s work and undergirded by Inoue’s question of “how can we language so that people stop killing each other”, this project will explore the experience of designing and implementing a class that sits at the intersection of teaching writing and pursuing social justice via equitable

educational practices. It will contribute to bridging the gap between the call to action and the actual practical application of that call.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Teaching Assistant experience on which I grounded my research for this project would have not been the same without Dr Jasmine Lee's supervision and absolute support. Her willingness to show up for me (and all her students) is an inspiration, and a model I hope to replicate for my own students.

I also must acknowledge that as a teacher, I am very much a product of CSUSB's English department. I cannot adequately recount all the ways that the amazing teachers in this department have helped me through my years here. The work I strive to do is a continuance of the care and love that you have modeled for me.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family: not only does your love and support sustain me through the hard times but it is also what makes the good times so good. Sergio, without you I could not have done any of this.

## DEDICATION

Everything I do, I do for my children: Ollin, Cuauhtémoc and Yarezi.

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Academia is teeming with rules, both unspoken and overt. It reveres objectivity; it is far too important to be limited by subjectivity. One must never include “I”. It leads with the brain, concerned only with facts, data, and theories. Never include feelings. Academia has a set of standards that must be followed in order to gain admittance into its hallowed halls. The rules are righteous, necessary, and fair. This project intends to break them all.

Academia is both my liberator and my oppressor. It has taught me how to push back against systems of oppression, yet my brown skin has always felt malapropos inside of the ivory tower. My indigeneity has always chafed against this system, a product and tool of Western colonization. My tongue forever harnessed and held back; my entire linguistic repertoire has never been truly welcomed in these spaces. No, academia has never welcomed me in my entirety. There is always an aspect of myself that I had to check at the door—immigrant, brown, Chicana, woman. The educational system, as it stands, can be wounding toward anyone who is not a “traditional” student (read: white heteronormative male). This is a well-known fact. This knowledge must inform our actions, especially those of us who are educators. We know that the system is broken, and we can no longer put off fixing it. This project endeavors to disrupt the caustic practices and ideologies which necessarily undergird conventional classrooms, particularly first year composition classrooms.

Far more important than the wounds I carry; academia has or has the potential to harm countless other students of color and students that occupy other marginalized identities. This project is for them.

“Justice is what love looks like in public” Cornell West.

The composition field is flooded with calls to reject harmful teaching practices yet, the field is also not preparing its teachers to do so. The theorization of the need to change these practices “has far outpaced pedagogical practices for advancing this proficiency in classrooms” (Canagarajah 41). For novice educators, especially, this gap between theory and practice can seem insurmountable. The onus lies entirely upon the novice educator to put these practices into action, without any overt professional training on how to do so. Undergirded by Asao B Inoue’s question of “how can we language so that people stop killing each other,” this project explores the intersectionality of teaching writing and pursuing social justice. Building from Laura Greenfield’s definition of what it means to be “radical,” this project will attempt to discuss key aspects of a radical first year composition (FYC) course and potential practical applications. Specifically, I will examine how a radical pedagogy would impact feedback and grading, language policies, and curriculum of a FYC course. I will draw on teacher reflection research, gathered via a reflective journal throughout a semester as a Teaching Assistant (TA) to ground my project. This is all being done in the service of changing the entrenched dynamics that have made

academia such an erasing and ostracizing force in the lives of students who occupy marginalized identities.

David Hobson describes a reflective journal as “[e]ach teacher’s...textbook of emergent practice, ongoing research,” (10). The process of writing a journal allows teachers to record and reexamine their everyday classroom practices. This can stimulate critical introspection and personal growth. This approach to teacher research is fruitful because, as Hobson states, it “grounds the action in who we are; it relates the professional to the personal...” (Burnaford et al. 9). My reflective journal recorded my experiences teaching this course and delves into what worked, what didn’t, and why. While I use teacher reflective journaling as a method for collecting data, I will be using methodology from radical poet and theorist Gloria Anzaldua’s autohistoria-teoría to analyze and make sense of that data.

Autohistoria-teoría is an approach to theorizing that integrates personal experiences, cultural knowledge and deeply reflective self-awareness to advance social-justice. This is a merging of the private and public which aims to construct a “hybridized space of creativity and bridge building, in which we use our life stories to develop deep critical, spiritual, and analytical insights, to boldly theorize experiences and insights against the broader landscape of specific sociocultural discourses” (Bhattacharya and Keating 345). Anzaldúa coined the term “autohistoria-teoría,” to describe a genre of writing which transgresses hegemonic methods of knowledge-making in an attempt to break the dichotomy

between mind and spirit, between intellect and embodiment. Autohistoria-teoria creates a space for “women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms... Writers of autohistoria-teoría blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and other forms of theorizing” (Anzaldua et al. 319). Autohistoria-teoría compels the writer to commit themselves to reiterative thinking processes which probe the connections between identity, culture and experiences in order to produce theory which is grounded on the self and is reflective of (and amplifies) cultures which are often minoritized within academia.

Autohistoria-teoría is a rigorous process which requires the writer to engage in profound self-excavation to produce writing with a concrete epistemological foundation and function. The resulting compositions serve to construct “a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories. Through this lens, Anzaldúa and other autohistoria-teorístas expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation” (Anzaldua et al. 319). The emerging theory is therefore deeply personal but also, most importantly, iterative; it is a tangible product that can help guide the practices of others.

The usage of Anzaldua’s autohistoria-teoria advances this project in many distinct ways. Principally, this methodology enriched and multiplied the types of dialogues which could be included within these chapters. Autohistoria-teoria not

only makes space for but actively encourages the inclusion of lines of inquiry that the hegemonic educational establishment would find unacceptably subjective. This methodology did for this project what I hoped to do for my students; it created a space that welcomed the whole person along with lived experiences, intuitions, perceptions, sensitivities, and all. It directly counteracts the erasing and marginalizing nature of academia by centering and celebrating each individual's subjectivity. In addition to diversifying the conversations that are included in the ensuing pages, autohistoria-teoria serves this project in another fundamental way; it gives a radical form to this radical project. It is performative of many of the changes that this project advocates for including the decolonialization of the classroom, the inclusion of "othered" knowledges and languages and the de-corporatization of educational practices.

Employing Anzaldua's autohistoria-teoria methodology to shape this project was liberating yet also deeply uncomfortable. Naively, I thought that it would be "easier" to write a project grounded entirely in my own experience, yet I was unprepared for how challenging it was to write in this form. I had not realized just how ingrained the hegemonic/Cartesian method of meaning making was in my own mind. I knew that the rules were biased and ultimately meaningless yet, as a product of a colonizing institution, going against those rules felt intensely counterintuitive. This unease was compounded upon by the need that I have always felt as a Chicana/English Learner to prove that I not only belonged in the institution but that I could master anything that was thrown my way.

Experimenting and being avant-garde was simply a privilege that I didn't have, for what might be seen as "pushing the boundaries" for a "traditional" student is often interpreted as remedial from those with minoritized identities. These doubts created a site of struggle that I had to traverse every time I sat down to write.

The struggle to reclaim my voice and "risk the personal" (Keating) continuously resurfaced through workshops and revisions and plagued me throughout this entire project. I realized that these difficulties were further proof that non-standard by no means equates to less rigorous. There is an erroneous conflating of hegemonic academic standards with arduous and anything outside of those standards is categorized as "taking the easy way out" yet this fails to acknowledge the valor that is needed to push past boundaries and feel like an outlier. The boldness needed to push past institutionally defined limits, especially without the protection of armor-like layers of privilege, is a heavy burden. A burden that gets progressively weightier the further away your subjectivity places you from the "norm".

I cannot, in all honesty, say that I overcame all these doubts. In fact, it is easy to see those doubts emerge throughout this project in the tonal shifts of my narrative. There was a moment that I despaired that this project felt too disjointed, and I looked for a way to regularize my voice. This threatened to become another stumbling block to the completion of this project, yet I was finally able to recognize that my embodiment already held the solution to this

intellectual query. All my life, I had always felt “ni de aquí, ni de allá.” I felt too Americanized for my culture and concurrently too foreign for this culture. It felt like there was always a chasm in my identity until I realized that what I had characterized as a wound was in actuality fertile ground. I was, and have always been, both de aquí y de allá. I lack nothing. I personify a meeting space between two cultures which, though rich in inconsistencies, is also rich in new languages, ideas, and possibilities. I have always curated my identity from between cultures, and when I was finally able to stop looking at my identity through a lens of deficiency, I recognized the strength in that. I am an example of what Anzaldua calls the new mestiza, a person caught in between worlds but who is stronger for it. This is the me I refuse to negate and the me whose voice speaks through this project.

I have personified this hybrid subjectivity in these pages “to make links... [I am] a borderland person, a bridge person. [I] connect from [my] ethnic community to the academic community, from the feminist group to non-political groups, from the Spanish language to the English language..” (Anzaldua et al. 212). This project is such a connection, a bridge between my academic voice and my private voice. I am tired of feeling like I have to cleave off pieces of myself or my voice to step into academic spaces, so I decided to take my first stand against that dismemberment within these pages. I use both voices and was able to stop trying to regularize my voice when I realized that regularization is synonymous with standardization. As my project is a meeting space between the

personal and professional, these pages are also a meeting space between my academic voice and my conversational one, and I take pride in both.

This project is separated into four chapters. Chapter 1 is dedicated to explicating the theoretical frameworks upon which my pedagogical approach was grounded: radicalism and critical and antiracist pedagogies. Chapter 2 discusses language policies and how those can be used to actively combat linguistic prejudice. The third chapter discusses how I employed those frameworks to create the content and structuring of the curriculum. The final chapter considers how a radical stance dictates a complete reworking of how feedback is given and its implications on grading. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 incorporate my reflective teaching journal in order to share my experiences and observations.

The aim of this project is to present my experiences and my narrative to challenge the path to professionalism in composition. A common critique within the composition field is that the existing paradigms of professional training for “writing teacher education is an underdeveloped, sometimes misinformed, and often invisible field deserving of much greater attention than it currently receives” (Hirvela and Belcher 128). There seems to be an unspoken assumption that you automatically know how to teach writing once you learn how to write. This, in my experience, is not necessarily true. The writing process and the curating of your voice for different texts is highly subjective and situational. It is influenced by a vast number of factors and knowledge gleaned throughout your entire education, from numerous classes, teachers, and texts. I do not know how I learned to write,

not really. I know that most of what I know about writing has been picked up implicitly and that I go around filling the gaps in my practice by borrowing tidbits from various teachers. No one person taught me how to write, just as no one person taught me how to think. I know that what I know is just a fraction of what there is to know and that I will never be done learning about writing. Because writing is not just a skill you pick up, like learning how to knit or playing the guitar, the teaching of writing is also not a simple practice. It is a complex process which cannot be thoroughly examined in one or two courses, instead it requires deep and continual engagement, not solely in the theories behind approaches but also in the translation of those approaches into actual everyday practices.

In addition to the complexity of translating theory into practice, teaching writing also necessitates an integration of the self into our practices. As a Chicana, immigrant, bilingual, woman, I am highly cognizant that my embodiment cannot be separated from my teaching practice. This is not to say that I would want it to, I simply mention this to bring to the forefront the importance of situating our teaching practices in our own knowledges. Yet this is rarely the focus of teacher preparation programs;

The current practice in many institutions of walking the instructors through rhetorical traditions or composition movements is insufficient. Focusing on professional knowledge in a product-oriented way ignores the experiences, values, and beliefs teachers already bring to the profession. It cannot sufficiently address the uptake of teachers...More importantly, it overlooks how classroom

practice needs to be reconfigured in the light of competing knowledge and beliefs. (Canagarajah 266)

As it stands, teacher development is too depersonalized. There is a huge disconnect between the theories of pedagogy which we are taught and the integration of those theories into teaching practices that align with our values and our own situatedness. The integration of our values and beliefs into our classroom practice is even more critical for emerging educators who wish to challenge the status quo in their classrooms. But because our values demand drastic action, we are simply left trying to construct an equitable path forward bit-by-bit. There is not a rhetorical tradition nor a composition movement that I can turn to which espouses or exemplifies the same comprehensive transformation which I know that writing classrooms require. Therefore, there was never a teacher preparation course which taught me how I could institute the sweeping change our students deserve. The ultimate goal of this project is to use my experience and reflections as a way of highlighting and bridging that gap in scholarly conversations.

A radical reworking of FYC requires as much introspection for the instructor as it does of the students. A radical teaching approach demands an explicit rejection of systems of oppression and a centering of students as experts of their own lived experiences. It creates space within a classroom for different language varieties, not only for the students but also in the scholars which are studied. More than anything, a radical classroom is built upon deep-attending

and a commitment to providing students with the tools they need to critically examine their realities and fight injustices. This is an ambitious goal for any educator, especially an inexperienced one, but it is also a goal that our students cannot afford to continue to wait for. If we truly want to disrupt the status quo and transform our institutions; then the time is now, and the work must begin immediately.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

My own experiences with academia had shown me that there was still a considerable amount of work to do in order to create truly equitable classrooms. Throughout my graduate education, I had caught glimpses of practices and ideas that rang true to me, but I had yet to find an approach to pedagogy which was fully compatible with my values and overarching goals. There were various theorists that I admired but I had yet to piece them together in a way that didn't feel disjointed and fragmented. Laura Greenfield's *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement* did just that. Within this book, I found a framework which helped shape my pedagogy in a way that was congruent with my ideals. I used this framework to undergird my overall approach to teaching and to guide my objectives.

There is much research within the composition field about how traditional education is a vehicle for institutionalized oppression and of ways to disrupt current educational practices which uphold caustic hegemonic ideologies, (Baker- Bell, Jones, Stanbrough, and Everett, Rawls, Young, Ruiz, Inoue). This wealth of research has earned the composition field a reputation of being fairly liberal. Yet, rarely do these theories make their way into actual composition classrooms. All these grand visions seem to live only in theory, research, and books, not in concrete practice. Greenfield attributes that fact to the field's liberalism itself. Though Greenfield is writing about the writing center field in

particular, the radical framework that she presents as an alternative to the current liberal framework is not only relevant and applicable to the composition field, but it also holds tremendous transformative potential.

While many equate conservatism with the perpetuation of the status quo and see liberalism as the answer to that, Greenfield sees liberalism as a flawed framework more closely tied to conservatism than to actual liberatory practices. Greenfield describes liberalism as a “pedagogy of self-defense” which is affected by a lack of self-assurance. Greenfield explains that liberalism fails to be a strong enough political framework to create an activist paradigm because it is so concerned with what it isn’t (it roundly rejects conservatism) that it falls short of being to explicitly name what it is. While liberalism rejects conservative binaries and the idea of a singular “Truth”, that same liberal tendency to not believe in one truth makes it uncritical and unable to assert that which is false. In their rush to not be like conservatives, liberals accept everything as truth; “[r]ejecting a conservative belief in absolutism, liberals’ valuing of relativism is upheld so vehemently it often comes at the cost of positive social change” (Greenfield 47). This means that while liberals encourage questioning of the conservative truth, they fail to provide concrete answers. This becomes especially problematic when in turn liberals are unable to denounce unethical positions as false and therefore do not meaningfully confront injustice.

Liberalism is also characterized by its suspicion of authority. Greenfield critiques this because in their overzealousness to not impose on personal freedoms, liberals are

[f]ailing to critically distinguish between imposition and engagement...

liberal educators often retreat into practices of indifference. Indeed, some liberals fear any association with conservatism so severely they equate it with pure domination and therefore interpret the assertion of their own values as oppression (46).

Here again, liberal's fear of domination means that they are uncomfortable affirming their own ideals; vagueness then becomes inactivity. Because liberals are suspicious of authority, they are also suspicious of power. This suspicion follows even when confronted with their own power. Greenfield argues that although they feel guilty for having that power, people do not actually want to relinquish it so they will not engage in truly trying to dismantle it;

this liberal discomfort with power can lead privileged teachers and tutors to try to offer their students a voice while lacking a commitment to uncovering and working through the complexities of power dynamics in a way that would fundamentally change the system at large or threaten their own privilege with any tangible consequence (50).

This complicated relationship with power and authority means that liberalism will not use the power and authority they possess to do the work required to push for social justice. This unwillingness to be active agents of change means that their

commitment to transformation is superficial at best; “[t]rue solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its practice. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (Freire 50). A farce that maintains and reiterates the inequalities found within the university, becoming a closed, self-fulfilling system, just like conservatism. And just like in their conservative counterparts, the status quo remains unchallenged and unchanged in liberal classrooms.

Critics of conservatism claim that the maintenance of the status quo, which is so highly prized in that ideology, is really done in the service of capitalism. They term this “corporatizing the university” which converts the educational institution into an assembly line which creates workers to fit into existing systems. Greenfield uses Jonathan Neale’s summary of this idea:

First, universities and schools justify the division of labour in the whole society . . . The second job universities do is to interpret the world and train new professionals in ways that will be useful to business and governments. The third job is to confuse people about reality in order to keep the capitalist system going (36).

By refusing to disrupt the status quo, liberal practices do what they proclaim to be against in theory; they also corporatize the university. It ultimately works to maintain the system. It creates students that fit into the current system, workers to fill positions, not because it believes the system is inherently good but rather

because it fails to provide a concrete path toward change. Liberalism acknowledges systemic inequalities, yet considers them a “necessary evil” Yet, Inoue articulates the radical answer to this assertion; “[e]vil in any form is never necessary. We must stop saying that we have to teach this [way] because it’s what students need to succeed tomorrow. They only need it because we keep teaching it!” (National Council of Teachers of English 36:43). Teachers who keep telling their students that fitting into an unfair system is “necessary” evil continue to reiterate that evil; they keep that evil alive.

Greenfield believes that the answer to the liberal problem of inaction can be found in a radical praxis framework. Greenfield constructs this framework by drawing on the work of radical theorists and educators such as Judith Butler, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Donaldo Macedo, Patricia Bizzell, bell hooks, Lucien Demaris, and Cedar Landsman, among others. This framework, Greenfield posits, is more capable than liberalism to bring about change because it presents concrete ways forward. Radicalism, as Greenfield explains, is made up of three basic tenets. The first of which is that truth is a human construction. Greenfield explains that everything consists in ideologies because “every value, interpretation, conclusion, and social state exists because a human held that value, a human reasoned through that interpretation, a human drew that conclusion, a human built that state” (54). It then follows that there is no truth outside of what a human has deemed to be true because every belief is mediated by human experience. This is an important concept because it then

highlights the impossibility of neutrality in any position. This creates the need for radicalism to continuously name and deconstruct its own assumptions of truth in order to engage in its own vision. This is one of the biggest departures of radicalism from liberalism: radicalism is assertive in explicitly naming its own “ethics, comfortable with irresolution, and committed to reflective positive change making” (55). While, Greenfield states, liberalism’s failure to explicitly name its own ethics cause it to experience an existential crisis that leads to pessimism, which in turn leads to anxieties and inactivity, radicalism differs in that it accepts that despite all “good intentions”, as people, our thinking/behaviors will sometimes be flawed. That is accepted yet is not seen as a reason to despair. The radical answer to that contradiction is being “soft on people, tough on systems” (55); all should continuously rethink and question our own beliefs while being understanding of human limitations, even as we strive to destroy systems of oppression. Just as people are not perfect, radicalism acknowledges that there is not one perfect right way to seek change. In fact, Greenfield shows less concern with people fully identifying with radicalism as with the study of systemic oppression as something man-made, not inevitable or intrinsic. These systems are in place because of human ideologies and human interventions. Consequently, these man-made systems can be un-made by humans. “Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective

reality” (Freire 37). This forces subscribers to this ideology to reject pessimism and instead be compelled to do their part to deconstruct systems of oppression.

A second foundational belief of radicalism is that power is neither good nor bad; it cannot be possessed but rather is exercised. If exercised negatively, it can suppress/oppress, but when used in a positive manner, it can be productive and transformative. In this view, power is not the contrary of freedom but rather can produce freedom. This view of power calls people with power to use it to seek justice by “taking risks, making use of their platforms, lifting up silenced voices, changing structures, listening and revising their own practices, holding other privileged people and structures accountable, and channeling their resources” (59). This view can resolve liberalism’s guilt over power by reminding them their power does not need to be negated nor destroyed but rather put to good use. They are free to preserve their power, provided they enact it to strive for justice. Another important consequence of viewing power as having the ability to act is that anyone, even the most marginalized, can exercise it. Resistance can be enacted by any person, not only those in a formal position of power (i.e., the president, the boss, or the teacher). While it is recognized that everyone can act in the face of oppression, it is also acknowledged that no one can change entire systems alone. Resistance will look different to every person, but everyone can contribute to a collective resistance which can be transformative. The goal of this praxis is to encourage resistance, not seek liberation from all power. This was one of the most salient points of this framework:

Although critics tend to misunderstand the radical project as desiring an unrealistic utopia, radicals instead do not map out an idealized state. Freire explains most aptly that the

“fight is not . . . for a democratic society so perfect it suppresses sexism, racism, and class exploitation once and for all. The fight is for the creation of a society capable of defending itself by punishing with justice and rigor the perpetrators of abuse; it is for a civil society capable of speaking, protesting, and fighting for justice” (Greenfield 58).

This belief is fundamental to adopting the praxis of justice and hope that Greenfield presents. It creates a concrete goal, not a utopia, which fuels hope in its attainability.

The third, and final, principle of radicalism that Greenfield explains is its belief that authority resides not in a person or an institution but in ethically engaged praxis, or reflective action. Reflective action is described as critical and “purposeful, informed, measured, and contextualized rather than naïve and idealistic” (Greenfield 65). This action is birthed through a critical dialogue that centers the person being affected, their perspective and their chosen methods of resistance. Radicalism does not claim a one-size-fits-all mode of resistance but rather understands that resistance must be tailored to the individual and their talents, needs, and/or goals. Greenfield emphasizes that radicalism does not even claim to know what the outcome should look like, as long as those affected

critically understand their realities then the way forward is entirely situational and must be chosen by them.

A composition classroom undergirded by radical ideology would apply the previously presented tenets and use them to create a site of struggle. Because “[r]adicalism... is rooted in hopeful action in resistance to systems of oppression and in service of creating a just and peaceful world” (Greenfield 18), the acceptance of radicalism as a foundational framework for pedagogy would fundamentally change various aspects of a classroom. Building a First Year Composition (FYC) course upon this framework demands a deeply critical pedagogy. A radical FYC course would create opportunities for dialogue with students which would help them analyze how power and oppression are working in their lives. This examination of oppression must reveal to students that “[t]o no longer be prey to [oppression’s] force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 51). A Freirean problem-posing education enacts a perpetually reiterative process of listening to the community (both inside and outside of the classroom), identifying problems or issues, then dialoguing with student to name the problem and what a possible path of resistance. This last step is the praxis that Greenfield’s framework demands. It is what transforms liberal pessimism into radical hope.

One system of oppression that FYC is particularly well-equipped to combat is linguistic prejudice. Though ironically, in its conservative iteration, it

often serves as a site and mechanism for the propagation of linguistic prejudice. It is well-trodden ground that this type of prejudice serves as a vehicle for systemic racism, especially in educational institutions (Royster, Poe and Inoue, Baca, Ruiz, Smitherman and Villanueva, Greenfield and Rowan, Young, Condon and Young, Matsuda, Beavers et al). In the words of Anzaldua, "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity- I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (13). Language and ethnic identity are so inextricably linked that the denigration of an ethnicity's language is truly a denigration of the ethnicity itself; it is the last form of explicit racism that is still widely accepted within the public sphere. It operates covertly, disguised as "academic standards", often even eliding its classification as racism. Even the overt naming of this as a form of racism becomes "topo non grata" (Villanueva 4); an awkward stance that many shy away from or are too intimidated to espouse. Yet the unwillingness of writing teachers to call out this racism does not lessen its affects, "[b]ehind it there is a material reality" (Villanueva 18) that students are left to contend with alone. As anti-racist scholar Ibram X Kendi states, "there is no neutrality in the racism struggle... One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist'" (Kendi 9). Not challenging racism does not make it go away; it perpetuates it. There is no side-stepping or eliding racism; it is either directly confronted or engaged in (thus directly endorsed).

Conversely, for those educators that do name this oppression (i.e. Villanueva's "new racism" or Inoue's "white language supremacy"), it becomes imperative to implement a pedagogy which confronts it "by teaching about racism and by developing pedagogical approaches that enact and model antiracist engagement..." (Condon and Young 10). Antiracist classrooms dismantle linguistic oppression by examining the dominant language ideologies of schooling, language standards, the classroom's politics and probing the racist ideologies behind them all. In designing a radical/antiracist FYC, it is necessary to adapt "[s]ocially just goals for First-Year Composition courses... that help students see the resourcefulness and rhetorical value of all their language habits" (Beavers at al 1). Subsequently, antiracism work is "twin-skin" to linguistic justice; one necessarily follows the other, especially for writing teachers.

Another reason that the composition field is well-equipped to confront linguistic oppression is its positionality within the university. FYC is one of the few classes that the entire student population must take, regardless of major. This means that all students at some point or another must set foot inside a composition classroom. As this requirement seems unlikely to end in the foreseeable future, that constraint should be leveraged to create a site of radical transformation. If those classrooms are radical ones, this has the potential to change the way that the ENTIRE student body thinks about language and the politics that surround it. In addition to challenging the internalized racism/linguistic prejudice that many students of color bring with them to FYC

classes, this approach also has the potential to change the way that future doctors, mathematicians, scientists, teachers, corporate bosses/supervisors, and countless others react when they come across other language varieties. While we must never underestimate student agency nor assume that students will “convert” to our way of thinking- even just the potential to make one future professional critically examine their attitude toward different language varieties (and the bodies that are inescapably attached to them), is world-changing. While composition might not “save the world” (Bizzell), it does have the potential to change many worlds; the worlds of the people that our future professionals will interact with. That world will contain one less racist encounter, one less door shut to them because of racism, one less racial wound. If that doesn’t mean much to you; you must have never found yourself at the receiving end of one.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LINGUISTIC INTEGRATION AND LANGUAGE POLICIES

I can honestly say that I did not entirely appreciate my language until I took a linguistics class. That is not to say that I wasn't proud of it before then. I had actually done poetry, spoken word and other forms of creative writing in my early twenties that had taught me that there was power in my voice, in the language I used. Yet it was a defiant pride, a reaction to an attack; "you don't like it? Too bad!" It wasn't grounded in reflection or knowledge; it simply was a mutinous cry in the dark. Linguistics gifted me with the ability to fully embrace my language because I learned to understand it intellectually and not just viscerally and love it all the more because of that.

It is widely accepted within linguistics that all dialects are linguistically equal and have the same expressive power (see Horner et al and Young). It is also a linguistic fact that there is no such thing as one correct or "standard" English; everyone speaks a dialect, no one commands a "pure" English. While all these are widely accepted facts within the fields of linguistics and composition/rhetoric, they are concurrently disputed by the general population. They are not accepted as fact and most students, especially in college and higher education, continue to strive to "perfect" their language. This rejection of linguistic truisms is likely a result of the fact that most college students have no contact with linguistic material whatsoever.

Linguistics is considered an upper division subject matter, meaning that only students majoring in English (or linguistics itself) are ever exposed to it and even so, in the latter half of their college careers. This means that the vast majority of all students have no training whatsoever in a subject matter that could potentially help them embrace their own language varieties and use them to combat linguistic prejudice. I sought to change that in my classroom. My goal was to introduce vital linguistic concepts that could work to free my students from erroneous linguistic constraints, validate student voices (especially those that come from a linguistic minority background) and push the entire institution towards embracing practices which seek linguistic equity into my own FYC course.

The necessity of spreading linguistic knowledge is an idea that has been affirmed by numerous scholars. In “Dismantling ‘The Master’s Tools’: Moving Students’ Rights to Their Own Language from Theory to Practice”, Anne H Charity Hudley and Christine Mallinson, using a theoretical framework based on ideas by Audre Lorde and Martin Luther King Jr, explain how language, specifically linguistics, can be used as an instrument for social justice. The authors see the integration of this subject matter as a tool to transform academic institutions into inclusive places for students, especially students of color;

[a] growing body of linguistic research shows that valuing student diversity—along racial/ethnic, cultural, and linguistic lines—can help promote student confidence and sense of academic belonging ... Promoting academic

belonging means that we must ensure that courses about language (whether in linguistics programs or in related majors) are situated in the curriculum in such a way as to make them accessible to and inclusive of students of various races” (Hudley and Mallinson 525).

The dissemination of linguistic material has the potential to transform our relationship with our own language and also how we react to the languages of those around us. If that dissemination begins in a FYC course, it would be accessible to a considerably wider range of students than those who traditionally come in contact with the field of linguistics.

I began the process of integrating linguistic material into my FYC course by examining my motivating factors. By reiterating to myself that linguistic equality is vital to combating systemic racism, I not only identified my driving force but also articulated my ultimate goal. In “The ‘Standard English’ Fairy Tale: A Rhetorical Analysis of Racist Pedagogies And Commonplace Assumptions About Language Diversity” Greenfield concludes that the reason that most non-linguists cannot recognize the validity of certain linguistic truisms is racism- veiled as language disparagement. Greenfield supports her argument by highlighting the fact that the language varieties that are most demonized are those that have been historically used by people of color to push back against racial oppression. Greenfield provides examples of the systematicity, expressive power and congruence of such language varieties (Ebonics, Hawaiian Creole) and concludes that “it is not the language which causes listeners to make

assumptions about the speaker, but the attitudes held by the listeners towards the speaker that cause them to extend that attitude towards the speaker's language" (50) (emphasis in the original). It is not the dialect that is being put down but rather the speakers (usually of color) as represented by their dialects. This information stood out to me as imperative for my students to know because I assumed that by exposing how racism hides behind language disparagement, students would understand why we were even talking about linguistics in a writing class. I have always felt that students are more open to material if they understand the driving motivation behind it.

Beyond underscoring the racist attitudes behind language discrimination, Greenfield's text also exposes another myth that I found crucial to disrupt: the myth that "Standard English" exists at all. Greenfield calls the assumption that "Standard English" exists a false premise as she contends that it is not an identifiable dialect with set features. Rather, "Standard English" is qualified by what it isn't; any variety of English which is not linked to communities of color. Greenfield proposes that "standard English" would most accurately be termed standardized Englishes, which is more in line with its true meaning as instead of one dialect it encompasses all the ways of speaking (and writing) by privileged white people.

While I recognized that exposing linguistic prejudice as thinly veiled racism and disproving the myth of "Standard English" were two of the principal lessons I sought to impart, I knew that linguistic justice should not only be studied but that

it also needs to be enacted. Besides debunking hurtful language ideologies, another way that composition educators can combat white language supremacy is with the integration of other Englishes within FYC courses. This does not mean that a superficial “your language is valuable yet here you have to speak ‘correct’ English” is enough. In fact, Vershawn Ashanti Young in “Should Writers Use They Own English” warns that encouraging code-switching is at best patronizing and at worst racist. Hudley and Mallinson also criticize the code-switching model to language instruction as “demeaning” to students’ home languages/cultures and as promoting internalized racism (what DuBois termed “double-consciousness”). Ultimately, asking students to leave their language at home is asking them to leave a part of themselves at home. It further denigrates their home language- and by extension their identities and cultures. Greenfield also considers code-switching as veiled racism since it demands that students of color remove all traces of their culture and its linguistic features in order to be “proper” and correct.

Horner et al, make the same point in “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach” and further propose that code-switching should not be used to address language differences but rather they call for it to be replaced by a translingual approach. This approach emphasizes that language differences are not “difficulties” to overcome but rather that they are assets (Horner et al 303). Young makes a similar argument but uses the term code-meshing to refer to this approach. Where Young and Horner et al. diverge is that

Young advocates for code-meshing as a practice, as “a form of writing in which multilinguals merge their diverse language resources with the dominant genre conventions to construct hybrid texts for voice” (Canagarajah 40). Meanwhile, translingualism pushes past the product and is an ideology that challenges us to rethink how we understand language. Translingualism explicitly contests monolingualist language ideology by arguing that all language, and by extension all writing, is already code-meshed:

The translingual orientation moves literacy beyond products to the processes and practices of cross-language relations. This orientation can focus on the construction, reception, and circulation of mobile texts, including those that are code-meshed. Furthermore, this orientation expands the consideration to diverse other semiotic products beyond the code-meshed texts of multilinguals. Even native speakers are implicated in cross-language relations when they read and write in English. (Canagarajah 41).

A translingual approach furthers Greenfield’s claim that there is no such thing as one standard of English but rather that the dialects that belong to people of color are ostracized while the dialects that belong to the people in power are standardized.

Translingualism, and code-meshing, not only tolerate language differences but they seek to integrate those differences within the composition classroom. These authors advocate for the integration of students' linguistic resources into the course. Young is advocating for the integration of different

language varieties in oral and written communication and descriptive language instruction and Horner et al. are calling for the recognition that that difference is already present. By not only welcoming non-standard dialects but also clearly teaching about the different dialects and how many are already present in all writing, Young and Horner et al. posit that this would produce multidialectal and plurilingual students who would be able to express themselves better and better understand others.

The translingual approach is not just beneficial for multilingual/multidialectal students but would benefit all students, even those who claim to be monolingual. Brandie Bohney in her article, "Moving Students toward Acceptance of 'Other' Englishes", makes that very point. Bohney self-identifies as a "white woman who speaks Standard English and teaches in a white mostly mainstream-English-speaking school" (66) yet acknowledges that there is still an urgent need to teach her students about other dialects. While she and her students are outside of the communities most affected by the devaluing of other Englishes, Bohney points out that her students have to be a part of an examination of linguistic prejudice because otherwise, it becomes easy for them to perpetuate that prejudice (what Inoue calls white language supremacy) toward others. Bohney makes the point that others have been arguing long before, that changing discriminatory views toward linguistic differences is an issue that needs to be addressed in all classrooms, in all schools. This issue does not only affect multilingual/multidialectal students, but it also affects all students. Whether it

affects them by directly influencing how their own language is viewed or affects them by molding how they will view others' language; linguistic justice must be sought in all places and all classrooms.

The conversation surrounding language varieties and their place within the composition classroom has been taking place within the composition and rhetoric field since the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) released their "Students' Right to Their Own Language" resolution in 1974. This conversation has resulted in many scholars and educators exploring different approaches to deal with language differences and had furthered the conversation about multilingual/multidialectal students. And while the conversation has been very fruitful, it has yet to provide one definitive answer. But perhaps the conversation itself is the answer. Instead of educators discussing multidialectal students with each other, perhaps an even more fruitful conversation could be engaging in this conversation with students. Within her article, "Revisiting the Promise of 'Students' Right to Their Own Language': Pedagogical Strategies" Valerie Felita Kinloch reexamines the CCC's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" resolution and advocates for the usage of that text not only to inform pedagogy but also within actual pedagogical practices. Kinloch does this by bringing the actual document into the classroom and using it as a jumping off point to discuss language rights rhetoric. Most importantly, Kinloch stresses that educators must acknowledge and value students as experienced people from various discourse communities. These experiences can be brought to the

conversation and deepened by analysis in order to make students not only aware of the conversation surrounding language rights rhetoric but also give them enough information of their own communities to be agentive participants.

The exploration of the conversation surrounding language varieties and students' language rights with students could allow them to at least begin to critically explore the implications of pushing back or conforming to dominant language ideologies. While whatever exploration could happen within a 15-week semester most likely would not be sufficient to settle this issue for students, (especially considering that a 46-year scholarly conversation has been unable to), it could be enough to at least unsettle some cultural myths surrounding language which are typically left unchallenged and begin to take on the façade of "common sense" for most speakers. In, "Code-Meshing Meets Teaching the Conflicts", Gerald Graff proposes the integration of debate and argumentation (which has proven to be fundamental to critical thinking) in the classroom surrounding linguistic differences. He argues allowing students to debate can tap into argumentative skills and can also be transformative for students who do not feel at home in academic settings. Graff takes that integration, which he calls "teaching the conflicts" and combines it with Young's concept of code-meshing. Graff proposes using writing courses as a space to argue and debate contested issues about language (dialects/standard English), race and power; a course grounded on the exploration around academic and (and versus) personal forms of language. The suggestion of including argumentation within FYC is illustrative

of how to present linguistic information to students and allow them to navigate through it together. By debating two contrastive viewpoints, students can make their way through conflicting opinions about language diversity and that process of discovery promotes knowledge acquisition in a more effective and organic way than a banking-model of instruction, where the instructor simply tells you what to think.

This hybrid approach to FYC, with the integration of linguistic subject matter and Graff's "teaching the conflicts" could work to unsettle white language supremacy within composition classrooms and would allow students to feel validation for their languages and change their attitudes for others'. This would provide those who wish to push back against the standard English myth with enough information to do so consciously. In addition to integrating linguistic subject matter in FYC, an integration of a translingual approach (and Young's code-meshing) where different language varieties are not only "tolerated" but encouraged and included in the readings of the class would create an environment where multidialectal students could feel validation for their unique linguistic repertoires. Not only should students' voices be respected but so should they, as experts in their experiences and discourse communities. This can be done with the integration of student themselves in the conversation surrounding students' rights to their own language. The reworking of FYC with the integration of these ideas and these approaches would change not only the FYC class itself, but it has the potential to promote the validation of all student

voices. This knowledge served as the starting point to craft the language practices which I used to curate class readings and activities, and the statement of language diversity which I included in my syllabus.

Being accepting of students' language is not just a declarative statement; rather it is a statement of intent that must be visible in all aspects of a classroom. As previously mentioned, I made sure that the readings which I used came from diverse authors. I also included a couple of lessons on some language varieties, specifically those found in the US (a more detailed discussion of these lessons can be found in Chapter 4). These lessons were very broad overviews of regional varieties of English, with a look at some cultural influences. These lessons were all based on the frameworks provided by the aforementioned scholars, yet they were unexpectedly challenging to construct. This was despite the fact that I am completing my Master's as a dual concentration major in both Composition and Rhetoric, and Applied Linguistics and TESL. Therefore, I was familiar with linguistic material, yet it was still difficult to gauge what material would be most appropriate for first year college students and how much. I did not address this difficulty directly but instead pushed through it and did the best I could. I imagine that this would be even more challenging for emerging educators that do not have linguistic instruction. I now recognize this as a potential site for intervention and further exploration. Composition teachers who are interested in challenging linguistic prejudice, and I argue that should be all composition teachers, require more overt training in linguistics and how to teach about diverse dialects,

especially in a scaled-back form that would be more fitting for first year students. Filling in this small void would have greatly improved my readiness to teach this material in my class and would have allowed me to approach this method with less trepidation.

One of the places that my approach to language variety was most visible was in my assignment prompts. In all of my prompts, I made sure to include a clause reminding students that they were free to use whatever language variety they felt was most suitable to their purpose and rhetorical approach. When I opened to the class the possibility of using different language varieties, I also adapted an approach to grading/feedback which centered cultural sensitivity and honored different language varieties, a fuller discussion of this approach will follow in the ensuing chapter. Yet I was surprised by how little I needed those traits. Most, if not all, my students used a standardized variety of English, or an imitation thereof. It is possible that, being that the majority of my students shared a similar ethnic background with me, I simply didn't recognize certain language varieties as our own culture is often invisible to ourselves. I leave the space open to that possibility yet do not think this was the case. I actually think that it is far more likely that students did not take the chance to write in a more personal version of their voice because, as I did when writing this project, they realized how difficult it is to write counter-hegemonically.

Regardless of the reason, it was slightly disappointing to continue to receive the majority of papers in standardized English. I let go of this

disappointment by reminding myself of two things. First, was the importance of student agency. Just as I refused to force anyone to write in a standard form, I also refused to make them write in a nonconforming way. That choice lies entirely in the students' hands and making space for their languages and voices also means making space for any standard forms in which they might choose to write. The inability to recognize student agency is insidious because it is what pushes teachers to teach in conventional ways. We often assume, as teachers, that we must teach this language or these practice because (even if they are wrong), they are also what the students will need in the "real world". But we don't know what each individual student needs, nor should we ever think we do. To think so is paternalistic, and to take away student choices is despotic. Students need to make their own choices, especially regarding whether they will conform or whether they will push back against a system of oppression. Since that conformity and that resistance always comes at a price, the only one who can decide if that is worth paying is the person who it would cost. I tried to create a space where they could experiment with their voice but the final choice to do so still rested entirely in their hands.

Secondly, I curtailed my disappointment with receiving texts that seemed to imitate a standardized version of English by returning to the translingual approach that I had used as a guide for my own language policies. Admittedly, this realization came in the latter stages of this project and only after a conversation with my thesis reader and mentor. I had conflated code-meshing

and translingualism in my mind and thought that they were similar approaches to writing instruction. It was an erroneous reading on my part of what exactly translingualism was claiming; not that we should allow difference but that we should see that the difference was already there, “difference as the norm of all utterances, conceived of as acts of translation inter and intra languages, media, modality during seeming iterations of dominant conventions as well as deviations from the norm” (Lu and Horner 208). This understanding has helped problematize the expectations I had created in my own mind of the type of writing that students would engage in if I openly encouraged dialectal diversity in my assignments. I expected students to employ a code-meshing approach and produce texts that looked more like Anzaldua and Young. Yet a translingual orientation “addresses the synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars” (Canagarajah 41), even when they appear to be written in a standardized form. This approach opens up many future possibilities, specifically it pushed me to look at Juan Guerra’s question “are we expecting students to produce a particular kind of writing that mimics what we call code-meshing, or do we instead want students to develop a rhetorical sensibility that reflects a critical awareness of language as a contingent and emergent rather than a standardized and static practice?” (as quoted in Lu and Horner 212), and realize that my goalpost should not be to receive texts that break conventions but rather to develop thinkers that can continuously question conventions.

The realization that developing that critical awareness in students was more significant than any single text also led me to the realization that a translingual approach is indispensable for a truly radical pedagogy. Translingualism and radicalism share several key tenets, the most important of which is that both necessitate a deep attending to the individual student. Both approaches acknowledge that there is never one perfect practice for all students but rather that an educator's practices must be tailored for every distinct class. Both approaches also are never fully realized, nor can they be standardized, but are instead continuously remade to best serve the people in front of us, not an imagined norm. Translingualism furthers radicalism, as it requires a critical approach to language ideologies: an area that is often overlooked by even critical pedagogues. Translingualism strives to recognize and welcome emergent language practices just as radicalism strives to acknowledge and value the intersectionality of students' identities.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM

As discussed in Chapter 1, a radical pedagogy is inherently anti-racist, critical, feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-oppression. The difference between a radical and liberal classroom would be that the radical classroom is based on praxis; “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 51). A radical class would not pretend these systems of oppression do not exist or that they are perpetual. A radical classroom meets these systems of oppression head on, names them and then tries to dismantle them. A radical orientation to a FYC course translated into problematizing the very thing it is being asked to do as a FYC course; introduce students to university writing. A radical curriculum would seek to answer questions such as what is “good writing”, who decides what good writing is, what language are the students being asked to use and why, what makes someone a “better” writer, what tools do students need going forward in their college careers, what can students gain in 15 weeks, what are students bringing with them into this classroom and what should they leave with? All these ideas and more were swerving around in my brain when I began to plan the curriculum for my Fall 2021 English 1070a FYC course.

In order to design a curriculum for the type of class I wanted, I began by looking toward my future students. Freire discusses the importance of catering education to the specific students and the needs of their communities (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). And so, not knowing what my class roster would ultimately

look like, I looked at the university as a whole. According to the CSUSB website, 66% of Fall 2020's student population identified as Hispanic followed by 12% identifying as White, 6% non-resident foreign students, 5% African American and 5% Asian. The large majority of students, 87%, were from the local communities of San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Most (81%) CSUSB students are first-generation college students meaning that their parents did not have a bachelor's degree. 58% of all CSUSB undergraduates are low-income students. From these statistics, a picture began to emerge. Interestingly enough, that picture was of myself, right down to gender as 63% of students identified as female. It was from the recognition of this shared experience that I began to build a curriculum with one huge caveat. I knew that I could not build a class that would only be catering the majority. It was tremendously important to me to look at every individual student who walked in through my classroom door and I knew that the class had to be inclusive of all students. Critical pedagogy also demands action and the recognition that there could never be an immovable curriculum in a student-centered classroom. Plans had to be flexible and had to allow for students' particularity and student direction.

With inclusivity as my guiding star, I brought 18-year-old me to the forefront of my mind. Pre-conscientization, 18-year-old me felt like an outsider everywhere. I was not quite American enough for society at large and not quite Mexican enough for my immigrant family. Especially pertinent to this project, 18-year-old me did not feel at home in most classrooms- particularly the English

classroom. It is a feeling that many multilingual students experience, “I don't belong to English/though I belong nowhere else” (Pérez Firmat 3), and a feeling that follows us throughout our education. With these remembrances at the forefront, ultimately it all boiled down to one goal for my FYC course: I wanted my students to walk away knowing that all their voices were valid and beautiful and that they should not be afraid to use them in whatever way they wanted. While this seems like a simple goal, it was not until the end of my undergraduate degree when I, as a multilingual, immigrant, first-generation college student, was finally able to take pride in my own language. I did not want that to be the case for my students' college careers. Starting, not ending, a college career with that knowledge had the potential to be world changing. That was all I was striving for, and I built my curriculum with this goal in mind.

Since the overwhelming majority of US students learn through “traditional” (i.e conservative) educational practices, they come into the classroom only partially. They have internalized the capitalist concept of compartmentalization and banking-style education; thus, they enter the classroom only concerned with the educator and what they can extract from them. A radical class must insist that everyone's humanity is acknowledged in its entirety. This must be demonstrated through practices based on what hooks calls an “engaged pedagogy” which seeks to create a space where students and educators “regarded one another as whole human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world” (15). This was the first thing that I incorporated

into my curriculum, and it took the form of the inclusion of a First Day Survey and the negotiating of classroom etiquette in order to adapt a Compassion Charter.

The impetus behind the First Day Survey was twofold. Primarily, it was a way to both prove that we would see each other's humanity, over the following 15 weeks, and that we would welcome that humanity into this space. The survey was a list of five questions- the first four to be shared with the entire class while the fifth was optional and would definitely not be shared aloud. The first three questions were the standard introductory queries: name, pronouns and major/class standing. The fourth question asked students in what they were experts. This was meant to serve as an icebreaker while also encouraging students to remember that we all come into the classroom with different skills and funds of knowledge. The fifth question was a way for me to elicit further information from a student which would help me be understanding of their specific situation. I asked about other demands of their time such as work or caretaking responsibilities etc. This was meant to signal that I was cognizant of the fact that my class was not the only thing going on in their world and that I would be attentive to that. This semester was also exceptional in that we were in the midst of a second year of a global pandemic. I wanted them to know that I acknowledged that along with the toll that these extraordinary circumstances have been taking on us all. The pandemic had upended the entire world and how we moved in that world. This fact had to be acknowledged and accounted for; if business as usual was insidious, business as usual within a pandemic was

utterly nonsensical. The answers to the fifth question included mentions of family obligations, graveyard shifts and unreliable transportation. I promised them, and myself, that I would keep all this in mind moving forward.

In order to continue to invite students into the classroom throughout the semester, I included an “Attendance Question” at the beginning of each class session. These questions were not by any means rigorous academic questions. In fact, they were quite the opposite. They were purposely lighthearted, venturing on downright silly. Questions such as “in weather terms, how are you feeling today” and “what middle school styling decisions do you regret” elicited more than a little giggling. This was a way to further highlight the humanity of every student while at the same time breaking a little of the tension which could hinder open discussions within a classroom. More importantly, this was an easy way to add joy to our time together. This is in line with a radical pedagogy because along with all other emotions “[e]xcitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress” (hooks 6). While this transgression seems innocuous, it was deeply important to my personal philosophy of radical joy. Radical joy goes hand-in-hand with Freire and Greenfield’s iteration of radical hope. Greenfield contends that the hope for radical pedagogy is to create a site of struggle, to which I add that finding joy within that struggle is an act of resistance. I, an undocumented, brown, English-

learner, have thrived within the system, in spite of it not because of it. And to find myself within that system while still able to feel joy is radical- it is in direct opposition to what the system thinks I deserve. In fact, I argue that joy within the struggle is generative, life-giving and an act of self-care which has the potential to call more people to that struggle. There is an often quoted statement by James Baldwin which asserts that “[t]o be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all of the time” (Baldwin et al. 205). I agree whole-heartedly with this statement and also think it could relate to all the other minoritized identity categories to varying degrees, not just African Americans. There are also many writings regarding the generative power of anger. This is a righteous anger, and an anger that is inevitable when confronting the “isms” of the world, yet it is also a heavy burden to carry. I posit that that burden becomes yet another obstacle for educators, and people as a whole, to strive for radical change. That anger and those obstacles propagate what Anzaldua calls

desconocimiento, the opposite of conocimiento, from playing ignorant and not attending to things because they’re going to take too much energy. You’ll feel bad, so “let’s not look at racism; it’s somebody else’s problem.” It’s not the seven deadly sins we struggle against; it’s the little desconocimientos, the little ignorances, the little acts of indifference, apathy, the little acts of unkindness, los desconocimientos chiquitos. Together they are a huge desconocimiento. I think

racism, sexism, child abuse, and violences against women stem from selective perception. (Keating 49)

The anger, the burdens, the desconocimientos become too much to bear (for both students and teachers) if we don't consciously strive to add radical joy to our pedagogies and our practices. Ultimately, I look at my life and know that my values do not permit me to turn away from the struggle, yet I also know that I deserve better than to walk around constantly angered by the injustice around me. I deserve joy. I will strive to mine that joy from anywhere I can, while not allowing that pursuit to make me veer off the path I have set for myself.

The Compassion Charter and classroom etiquette negotiation were a second iteration of an engaged/humanistic practice. This practice was taken from resources given by Inoue at a workshop for writing teachers ("Charter for Compassion"). The inclusion of the concept of compassion and the language surrounding that concept was, per their reflective journaling, a brand-new concept for many of my students. There was also slight push back from one student who felt that feelings and emotions had no place in the classroom, although this was not mentioned in the discussion but rather commented in her journal. This activity did various things which I wanted to forefront my course with. Firstly, it pushed back against the segmenting of students- they are not machines that must switch functions according to their locations. It also asserts that the misogynistic idea that emotions and intellect are incompatible is "reflective of patriarchy, whereby emotional restraint—a normatively masculine

behavior—is unjustly overvalued” (Arao and Clemens 145). I hoped that it would also set the tone for a radically different classroom than they had experienced before. The discussion surrounding the charter was followed by a reading aloud of the charter, a 15-minute quick write to gather their thoughts and situate them besides their previous classroom experiences and finally a dialogue negotiating what this would look like in actual practice inside our specific class. It was important to me that this practice not be conflated with a liberal “kumbaya” moment where we would all accept whatever came out of each other’s mouths and give all ideas the same validity, regardless of their impact. Arao and Clemens highlight the importance of this distinction in their chapter, “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice”, wherein they assert that a space that strives for social justice must necessarily be uncomfortable and challenging at times, otherwise growth will not occur. It is important to show students that we cannot accept racism and other systems of oppression as differences of opinion while also acknowledging that as human we are all imperfect and are all on a path of learning. Arao and Clemens discuss various popular rules which are typically accepted when creating a “safe” space. These all inevitably appeared on my board when my class and I began to negotiate classroom etiquette. In an effort to move our classroom from a liberal “safe” space to a radically “brave” space, I presented my students with various scenarios similar to those in Arao and Clemens’ chapter so that we could problematize them and critically dissect the rules that had been

suggested. Discussion ensued and I proposed some of the new iterations of those rules, iterations which would create a compassionate space that was also generative. I made sure to request dissenting opinions and approval for the final rules from the class in order to further decentralize my role from ultimate authority toward facilitator.

The curriculum for my FYC course was divided into 3 different sections. Week 1 was devoted to establishing class dynamics and discussions around grading practices, which I will discuss more in depth in Chapter 4 of this project. The following five weeks were devoted to foundational knowledge. It is important to note that I knew that I was not going to be able to “teach students how to write” nor all the foundational knowledge that they would need in order to “write well”. I was cognizant of the fact that students had been learning how to write since elementary school, and that no student learns how to write from any one single teacher. Learning to write is as multifaceted as learning how to think- it is a perpetually ongoing process. The goal for those five weeks were to make students rethink how they thought about writing, who they thought “real writers” were and how they approached texts. Ultimately, I wanted to disrupt the idealized version of a writer and challenge the idea that writing wasn’t challenging if you knew how to do it well. More than anything, I wanted students to recognize that as people that routinely “do” things with text, they were already real writers. I wanted students to reimagine our illusory hierarchy of who real writers are and what they sound like. Texts such as Elizabeth Wardle's “You Can

Learn to Write in General” and Anjali Pattanayak’s “There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking” served as starting points for discussions surrounding antiquated ideas of “correct” writing.

Another subject that my class examined during the Foundational Knowledge section of my curriculum was the importance of reading. Specifically, I strove to emphasize that reading is a two-way street, that readers must also work to make meaning from text. The challenge to truly listen to the message that a writer is trying to convey across all differences is imperative to becoming an effective reader, which then directly benefits you as a writer. Becoming a good reader is equivalent to cultivating listening skills “so that we can exchange perspectives, negotiate meaning, and create understanding with the intent of being in a good position to cooperate” (Royster 38). Though it can be difficult to listen to others whose subjectivities are vastly different from our own, only after a message is thoroughly examined can it be assessed critically.

Cultivating close reading skills is not necessarily an easy task nor is there only one way to do it. I chose to assign multiple texts regarding different reading strategies so that students would be able to curate their own practices. In order for this approach to not become overly tedious, I divided the class into groups of four and had each group tackle a different text. Each group was then asked to give a broad overview of the text and extract actionable items that their peers might want to try. These “tips” were shared on a co-created Google Doc so that it could be accessed by all. This activity accomplished a couple of things that were

central to my pedagogical goals. The collaborative aspect of this activity allowed a further decentering of the instructor and also allowed students to take on the teacher role themselves. It also illustrated the advantages of collaboration and community building as students were able to access information from multiple texts in a more efficient and enjoyable way.

During the week that we focused on reading, I also assigned the seminal composition piece by Malcom X, "Learning to Read", along with a short TEDTalk video by Jacqueline Woodson. These texts were important to me, principally, because they promoted the transformational power of texts. These two texts also centered black voices which supported my pedagogy because I always sought to diversify the voices that we were hearing in class. Breaking away from the white/male dominated canon which still guides many English classrooms is fundamental to a radical pedagogy. The video by Woodson also allowed me to include a text that was not writing-based. It helped dispel the presupposition that texts must necessarily be written when in fact modes of composition are employed in the production of anything from videos to music to art. Therefore, the inclusion of multimodal pieces within my curriculum seemed an indisputable necessity in order to tailor my class as much as possible to the interests of my students. This was something I strived to include in my curriculum regularly.

Another topic that we touched upon during the first few weeks of the semester was genre analysis. I felt it necessary to remind my students that "good" writing always is situationally dependent, as is "appropriate" language. I

endeavored to illustrate how genres could serve as blueprints but also how they are continuously evolving and being modified by their users. The point that I wanted students to recognize was that genre, like most anything else, is only useful if it is useful for you. The moment it stops being helpful and begins to be constraining, that is the moment to remember that genres belong to the users and can be molded to fit the needs of those users.

The activities around genre analysis were also done via a collaborative activity. I came to heavily rely on group activities because I had noticed that students were more open in small groups than they were in a class-wide discussion. I had noticed that class-wide discussions tended to be rather limited. I was unsure if that was because this was the first class on Monday mornings, the usage of facemasks to control the spread of COVID or if it was simply because the class was largely made up of freshmen. My insecurities as a first-time teacher routinely made me ask if it was something I was doing wrong. Perhaps I was too quick to fill in the silences or maybe my questions were too difficult or not interesting enough? As I spoke, I would always see eyes focused on me and the nodding of heads but getting a discussion going was like pulling teeth. I tried to do all I could to make the space comfortable and make myself open and responsive to their comments, yet I always failed to elicit much conversation. This was doubly frustrating to me because I sought to create a student-centered space yet always seemed to be lecturing to a quiet room. I was often consoled by the fact that the 15-minute quick writes we did at the beginning

of class were typically filled with questions and showed that students were trying to engage with the material- even if they refused to do it in a vocal way. I wondered what this meant. Had I failed? Had I reiterated the banking-style education that Freire and other critical pedagogues warned against despite my efforts to do the contrary?

While my TA supervisor was completely supportive of the direction that I wanted to take my class and she was always available to give suggestions, I was never really able to coax these particular students from their shells. My reflective journal for one of these day (a day when I was feeling particularly dramatic) lamented, “why do my students hate me?” The parent in me wanted to bribe, maybe even pressure a little using the participation grade. I had to remind myself however, that I was not their parent, that I could not control how they interacted with me and that to try to do so would be contrary to my aim to democratize our shared space. I kept trying to remind myself that “showing up” in class looks different for everyone, and that it was a form of dominance for me to try to dictate what participation meant for each student. All I could do was try to create a welcoming space while also respecting student agency and how they chose to show up. It was during this time that I imagined 18-year-old me in my mind’s eye again. I remembered going to class but rarely speaking out not because I was not interested but because it felt unnecessary, even in my favorite classes. I also realized that it took a couple of years for me to feel comfortable enough to regularly comment in class discussions. Knowing this slightly alleviated my

disappointment in my failure to create discussion-rich classes yet it is still an area that I look back upon with some regret. This is an area that I wish I had more overt and specific training in.

The remainder of the foundation knowledge subsection of my FYC course was focused on writing as a process of revision and rhetorical analysis. Both objectives were central to the learning outcomes provided by CSUSB and are also important to my writing pedagogy. Writing as revision was exhibited through my practice of drafting, peer review and the ability to resubmit an assignment after it had been “graded.” I found rhetorical analysis to be a difficult concept to teach. While it is easy to define, it takes a lot of practice to truly put into practice. This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that we were forced to shift to an online modality when I first introduced this concept. That week, I received notice that a student had tested positive for COVID the day after they attended class. This meant that we were all being asked to self-monitor for symptoms and quarantine (the length of which depended on vaccination status). I still had a family member that was unvaccinated and another who was immunocompromised, so this was a fairly stressful time for me. I also thought it likely that some students might be in similar situations. I decided to shift classes online for a week out of an abundance of caution, and because I knew that stress was not conducive to learning. I took this opportunity to remind students that their health and mental well-being was of utmost importance to me and that I would always prioritize their humanity, a point I tried to repeat often.

Nevertheless, after a COVID interruption emblematic of the times, we returned to class and completed various activities to practice rhetorical analysis. Predictably, students did better during group activities. We analyzed ads and memes (in an attempt to integrate material that was more familiar to students) in smaller groups. These were also some of the classes I enjoyed the most. One of my journal entries mentions how reading Anzaldua's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue", aloud in class and analyzing it together to try to pinpoint her rhetorical methods was one of the few points in the semester when I actually felt like I knew what I was doing. Speaking Anzaldua's words aloud was deeply nourishing for me. This was the type of radical thoughts and language work that I wanted to share with students all along. After some practice doing this type of analysis together, I assigned a rhetorical analysis paper where students were able to pick from readings by Tony Morrison, Audre Lorde, Amy Tan, or Jimmy Santiago Baca. I gave various options for the readings because I wanted students to decide what reading spoke to them the most while also enacting Young and Horner et al's suggested inclusion of nonstandard-dialectal texts. This was a difficult assignment for students and one which left me wondering if I should rearrange my schedule to spend more time on this concept. My teaching journal entry was the site where I decided upon my course of action. I contemplated on my particular students and on what their plans were after this course. Not a single one of my students was an English major, they were mostly majoring in the sciences. This knowledge, coupled with the knowledge that rhetorical

analysis (though an important skill to have) mostly lives in the English department, made me realize that time spent pursuing this line of inquiry would be time taken away from my primary objective. I decided to stick to my schedule, hoping that I had done enough to weigh the needs of my particular students and provide them what I felt would be most beneficial to them.

The subsequent subsection of my curriculum, weeks 7- 11, were dedicated to exploring the myth of “language as neutral” and to enacting a practice which I argue has the potential to disrupt linguistic prejudice (one of my key goals for this course). One of the primary ways that I sought to disrupt linguistic injustice was through the integration of linguistic material to create a hybridized space which would expose students to materials that they might not otherwise come across in order to free students from erroneous linguistic constraints and validate student voices, especially those that come from a linguistic minoritized background. I began this topic with a short discussion about linguistics as a field and then reading “The Linguistic Facts of Life” by Rosina L. Lippi-Green. After dividing the class into groups, I assigned each group to read the introduction of the piece and one of the five subtopics. I made each group responsible for thoroughly dissecting their section by making them responsible to teach it to the rest of the class. I thought that the collaborative aspect of this activity could function as both community-building and also prompt them to engage with the text more fully. While I do not necessarily think that quizzes (or tests in general) have a place within my pedagogy, I did tell the class that this

assignment would conclude with a quiz. This was meant to reinforce the importance of both doing a good job teaching the material to their peers and of listening to their peers when the groups taught their respective lessons. I think that the quiz also prompted students to ask more questions than they might have otherwise. This was one of the two quizzes I gave to the class, both of which were given as a concluding assignment to peer-to-peer teaching activities.

Admittedly, these quizzes made me feel a bit uneasy. I knew that the word “quiz” had the power to elicit feelings of panic and apprehension, neither of which were feelings that I wanted to cause my students. As previously discussed, dialogues in this class tended to be rather stilted and one-sided and this was a fate that I did not wish upon anyone, much less on emerging scholars. I used the quizzes as a method to ensure that students were given the attention they deserved when they were presenting in front of the class. I was fairly apprehensive using tactics that could be perceived as punitive or authoritative. I had worked hard to engage students as people with entire lives that sometimes conflicted with this class, and I constantly made space for that. This was central to my pedagogy and (I cannot stress this enough) WE WERE STILL IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC so I knew that my approach would have to always be cognizant of that. I was routinely flexible with due dates and tried to reinforce, every step of the way, that we were taking this journey together not as dictator and subjects but as facilitator and collaborators. The only time I felt that I needed to assert my “authority” was when other students were involved. The afore-

mentioned quizzes were an example of that. Another example where dates that draft was due for peer review sessions. Before each of the four major assignments were due, I would schedule a peer review session requiring semi-completed rough drafts. These were one of the few times that extensions were not given and that students were required to either show up with the draft or not show up at all. This felt strangely castigatory, but also necessary so that no student was penalized for another's underperformances. I looked at peer-reviews as an opportunity to see how others were approaching an assignment, get constructive feedback on their own writings and as a way to strengthen student writing. After one such time, I received an email from a student stating that they felt "very ashamed" that they had not completed their draft in time for peer review, so (in line with class policy) they stayed home. Shame was not a feeling that I was looking to inspire in my students at all so that email left me a bit perturbed. How could I ensure student accountability to each other while leaving aside harmful/ punitive practices? This question appeared in my journal multiple times and was one of the questions that I did not find a satisfactory answer to. As a product of a system steeped in colonization, it is challenging to stay completely clear of practices that reflect some form of domination. I felt as if I was essentially saying; I wanted them to do this and would not be above punishing them if they didn't. It was of slight comfort that these tactics were employed in, what I saw as, the service of other students and not myself yet they are not tactics that I wish to continue to employ. I would much prefer to learn other strategies that would

stress the importance of showing up for their peers, without stressing students out. Yet as teachers, it is easier to reach back to what we remember seeing as students and enact those practices. This is an avenue of resources that is not as bountiful to an educator that is trying to enact radical change. And while, I can look back on some practices enacted in certain classes, especially during my graduate years, and realize that they were in line with some of the changes I want to enact, the quantity of those practices are a lot fewer for a radical educator than for a conservative (or even liberal) one. This was one of the of the most glaring gaps in the preparation of radical educators, the practices for the everyday enactment of this type of pedagogy are either absent or difficult to access.

As stated above, the linguistic subsection of this course was scheduled to take up about a third of all class sessions and enact many of the practical applications discussed in chapter 2. However, I was unprepared with how long some of these lessons took. The exploration of Lippi Green's text took double the amount of time I had allotted for it. Fortunately, I had "padded" my class schedule with a few "to be determined by students" sessions so it was not difficult rearranging the schedule, especially considering how central this lesson was to my objectives. I was however, forced to cut Kinloch's suggested examination of the CCC's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" resolution from my schedule which I had planned as an in-class activity. The class was also able to read and discuss "The 'Standard English' Fairy Tale: A Rhetorical Analysis of Racist

Pedagogies and Commonplace Assumptions About Language Diversity” by Greenfield as this was fundamental to questioning the myth of “Standard English”. This lesson went relatively well, though as always there was limited discussion. What stood out to me about this discussion was not something that happened in class but instead in the end-of-semester Student Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness (SOTE). One of the comments in the anonymous student surveys had a comment accusing me of “preaching from the pulpit” and basically labeling everything racist without “presenting the other side”. I wished that that student would have felt comfortable enough to bring this qualm up during class because I felt it was a missed opportunity to engage with this argument. I refuse to “present the other side” because my radical praxis is based on explicitly naming wrongs and working directly to dismantle them. Furthermore, as a product of a highly conservative schooling system, these students have been inculcated with “the other side” from day one of their educations. The student already knew the “other side” so well so that it was impossible to read a contrasting viewpoint without feeling attacked or preached to. This situation made me think of the words of historian Howard Zinn:

In my teaching I never concealed my political views... To pretend to an “objectivity” that was neither possible nor desirable seemed to me dishonest. I made it clear to my students at the start of each course that they would be getting my point of view on the subjects under discussion, that I would try to be fair to other points of view, that I would scrupulously uphold their right to disagree

with me. My students had a long experience of political indoctrination before they arrived in my class—in the family, in high school, in movies and television. They would hear viewpoints other than mine in other courses and for the rest of their lives. I insisted on my right to enter my opinions in the marketplace of ideas, so long dominated by orthodoxy” (Zinn and Macedo 89)

I wish that this was something that I could have discussed with that student, and I have made a mental note that perhaps in my next iteration of this course, I would share these words with that class.

While I refuse to present “both sides” as worthy of contemplation, especially when the other side is racist and insidious, I did integrate a reading by Stanley Fish that I did not agree with at all. Using Graff’s “teaching the conflicts”, I assigned Fish’s “What Should Colleges Teach?” alongside Young’s “Should Writers Use They Own English?” as the basis for the subsequent lesson. This was one of my favorite lessons and perhaps more aligned with the expectations of the beforementioned student. These readings are fruitful for discussion because they are in response to each other. This activity was also done in small groups. After being assigned to read both these texts outside of class, the groups were divided- half assigned to Fish and the other half to Young. As a group, students would compose a 240-character Tweet as a response to the other author’s text. I had hoped that reading Fish first (which they were instructed to do) would highlight how perfectly constructed Young’s response was. This class session was very lively, and I was gratified to see memes and GIFs included in

the summation of their respective author's viewpoint. Considering how successful this assignment was, I know that I will continue to use it even if I find Fish's text obnoxious.

The following weeks were my favorite of the semester by far. Implementing Young, Horner et al and Knoch's idea of descriptive language instruction of different English dialects, we spent a couple of weeks exploring diverse voices in texts. The goal was to explore mixed genres and skills in code switching, semantics, syntax, accent, and dialect so we explored various YouTube videos of differing styles of poetry. We also had an actual linguistics lesson regarding regional differences in American English varieties alongside cultural and ethnic American English varieties. We listened to as many samples of these dialects that I could access including Hawaiian creole pidgin, Mountain Talk, Chicano English, Cajun French, African American Vernacular English, Miami English, New York Latino (Nuyorican) English, Pennsylvania Dutch English, Yeshiva English. There were many more that I could not access but I considered this variety sufficient to make students reconsider the idea of only one "proper" English.

The linguistics portion of my FYC was closed by an assignment meant to put students' own language experiences in conversation with the readings we had completed in this section of the curriculum. This "Language Autobiography" was intended to help students take ownership, and hopefully pride, in their own language varieties. This was the only major assignment were students used

different language varieties besides the “standard”, despite that always being an option for them in my class. I thoroughly enjoyed being exposed to more of the students’ linguistic repertoire and it was one of the most successful papers overall. In future iterations of this course, I would like for this to be the first major assignment as I think that the success that they enjoyed, versus the relative difficulty of the rhetorical analysis assignment, would increase their confidence in their writing and the class as a whole. I see a bit of difficulty doing this and still having the foundational knowledge subsection leading the curriculum, but this could be an area in future classes that requires some reworking.

The final section of my curriculum was designed to turn our attention inward. We began to discuss discourse communities in an effort to center the remaining couple of weeks on the students and their particular interests. This felt like a mistake. Contending with COVID closures and individual conferences left only a couple of weeks for actually exploring this concept. This made the lessons feel rushed and not as thorough as they should have been. The motivation behind exploring discourse communities was that students would be able to choose whatever community most appealed to them and research something that was personally significant to them. It also was, at least in my intentions, a continuation of bringing the individual student and their interests into the classroom. My teaching journal was reflective of how rushed the last couple of weeks felt. While the final presentations and projects were done well, I was still left with the lingering doubt that I did not honor the subject well enough. This

slight misstep is reflective of another difficulty that novice educators have, regardless of political leaning. It is a difficult process to learn to cull your own ideas and goals. The impulse is to give the student before you as much as possible, to give them all you think might be beneficial to them, yet this is not an achievable goal. There is not enough time to present too many ideas and to present them well. But like in writing, editing is one of the most difficult tasks.

Moving forward, I would unquestionably remove the last subsection of this class content. Originally, I toyed with the idea of continuing the linguistic subsection until the end of the semester. My first inclination was to finish off the semester with a research paper that built itself off the students' Language Autobiography. I considered asking students to research one of the language varieties in their linguistic repertoire. Ultimately, I felt unsure whether students in their position would be prepared to complete such an assignment. I decided that it would be simpler to engage with easier-identifiable discourse communities. Upon further reflection, I do not think that I made the most suitable choice. In fact, if faced with this choice again I would unquestionably make a different choice. I would, however, make sure to consult with a colleague with a greater expertise in linguistics in order to tailor that final assignment in the way that was best suited to freshmen students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### GRADING PRACTICES

Long before I had a class or had even applied to be a Teaching Assistant, I remember watching Inoue's 2019 CCCC Keynote address, "How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, Or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy?" and feeling deeply moved. Towards the end of that speech, Inoue likens educators who do not change their writing assessment ecologies, despite knowing that standard grading upholds white language supremacy, to the owner of a lush garden denying a starving person food because he was not comfortable sharing the fruits of his garden. Inoue likens students to the starving person, dying on the doorstep of the liberal teacher who is "not quite ready" to share their privilege. Continuing with that parable, I saw myself on both sides of that garden gate. I was/am the student of color with pockets full of "heritage coins [that] ain't worth shit in the White economies of the academy and marketplace"(National Council of Teachers of English 44:39 ).

When I was given a teaching appointment, I suddenly crossed to the other side of the gate without any training in how to feed starving people. Despite that, and even while being conscious that my garden was far from lush, I could not turn away. I was nothing but a visitor to the land of plenty and my garden was not yet my own, but rather rented at a fee I could scarcely afford. It had hardly begun to give fruit, yet I could not wait for an abundant harvest. A formally starving person recognizes hunger pangs and occasionally still feels its echoes. So, although I

was far from completely prepared and insecure about implementing a practice that I had never seen enacted, I knew that my values commanded a direct repudiation of harmful grading practices and the inequitable conditions they create.

I had many concerns regarding traditional grading, the biggest of which was how standardization has long been used to gatekeep and as a stumbling block for non-traditional students: “at its worst, standardization can be inflicted as a punishment, a way to castigate the non-believer or keep out the undesirables” (Balester 64). The “undesirables” have always been anyone who does not fit into the “traditional” student mold (white, heteronormative, middleclass male) and those that do not make knowledge in the “traditional” (Western, Euro-centric, capitalist) way. The university has always upheld “traditional” students as the norm and their practices have always served as the standard- so grading has always been a system that is skewed in their favor. I had no interest in continuing to perpetrate this injustice. This was something that goes against my values, not just because it is intrinsically unfair and racist but also because it upholds a mediocre and boring standard. It is long past the time to look at the standard not only as unreachable for certain students but also as undesirable. Students of color can reach the standard; in fact, many have and do all the time. But the question is why should they? Often the standard is erroneously looked at as “the only right way” but allowances must be made because *some* students can’t reach it. But that fundamentally misunderstands what we are asking students to

suppress. The standard is a boring, white-washed, lack-luster way of stripping away rhetorical abundance in order to leave a meagre shell that “conforms to the rules.” The standard makes us, and our compositions, all the poorer- even those students who can easily reach it. Its one-dimensionality curtails the search for richer/more interesting ways of knowledge-making in favor of an unexceptional alternative. Encouraging students to use their entire linguistic and ontological repertoire enriches both their texts and the university as

          rhetorical power is gained by learning to negotiate between and integrate different text, genres, languages, audiences, or dialects... The writer is empowered to use all available resources to create a text rather than to master and then re-enact a narrowly defined linguistic code; in the process, the writer asserts or invents an identity and may also challenge the norms of a community of practice (Balester 71).

Looking past the standard helps us strive for something better. Both in terms of destabilizing unfair systems but also, just as importantly, of prompting our students toward better ways of knowledge-making and being in the world.

          In addition to confining students creatively and intellectually, traditional grading practices also unfairly dictate classroom interactions. Regardless of the atmosphere that an educator tries to create in their classroom, their grading practices can supersede their efforts and intentions. In “Taking Time Out from Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System”, Peter Elbow gives a succinct list as to why traditional grading practices should be rethought

but the reason that is most glaring to me on that list is the assertion that grades affect learning because they often “[lead] to an adversarial relationship between students and teachers (since some students quarrel with our grades and many others feel resentful” (6). This is completely contrary to the cooperative learning experience that I was aiming to create in my classroom. Collaboration, dialogue, compassion, and social justice cannot flourish in a hierarchical system that puts teachers above students and encourages competition among students. A radical environment “must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire 53). But traditional grading structures preempt any meaningful collaboration. Grades become a threat to hold over students, leverage to make them conform to our expectations. I knew this as a researcher and had experienced this as a student. Looking back on my schooling experiences, the rubric that would always guide me was not my own rhetorical awareness but instead the expectations of my teachers. I principally wrote in such a way as to please my teacher. I would do whatever they said, often even integrating feedback that I didn’t necessarily agree with because they held my grade in their hands; therefore, holding all the power. I had no interest in lording this type of power over students, so I sought a way to level the playing field and hand more agency to my students. I sought to hand back their ability to make their own choices. And I wanted those choices to be based on their rhetorical and linguistic knowledge, not my own preferences.

The importance of sharing power with students was further reinforced when I recognized that writing practices were more significant than any one written product. The ability to continually rethink and reshape writing practices must be fully understood by students as theirs, and theirs alone. Providing students with more agency within the classroom would better prepare them for defining what practices they need outside of it. Writing practices are highly dependent on what the goal for the text actually is. The traits that “good” poets have are vastly different than those that “good” journalists cultivate. This is true of all the different types of writers, they all need to develop distinct, and sometimes contradictory, strengths. This is even more significant for students that do not intend to be writers at all but who will need to write in varying disciplines. Standards of writing are useless if they do not consider students’ subjectivities, goals, and audiences. It is also imperative to remember that this is always a moving goalpost, it does not (and should not) stay stagnant. A more useful assessment practice should be mindful not only to “[reflect] the variety of human experience” but also to “[remind] us that conventions change, that English is a ‘living language’” (Balester 65). Therefore believing, much less teaching, that there is a discrete set of rules that must always be followed is a disservice to students.

More important than any set of rules is the ability for students to understand that writing is always situational, and context driven. The capacity to adapt to those changes are what makes a student successful, not only in writing

but also beyond the classroom. In fact, researchers have found that traits which are more likely to lead to economic success are comparable to those that make proficient writers:

What do researchers [Bowles and Gintis] find more associated with future economic success? Noncognitive traits such as perseverance and the “big 5”- openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Closely related to the big five personality factors are the habits of mind (curiosity openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition) identified in the *framework for success in post-secondary writing* (Poe et al. 7) (emphasis in the original)

These habits cannot be fostered in an environment where the teacher’s word is the final word, and their opinion overtakes all others. A collaborative environment and approach to grading therefore benefits students not only in their compositions but also, and perhaps more importantly, outside of them as well. It lends itself more toward preparing students for life beyond the university than any traditional grading practices.

I came upon labor-based contract grading in the beforementioned speech by Inoue and it spoke to me as a method that would authentically address both the asymmetry of power that resulted from traditional grading practices and also the “[b]roader social inequalities (that) [play] out in local assessment practices” (Poe et al. 6). There is a wealth of research (Hassencahl, Mandel, Knapp, Elbow, Smith) into the effectiveness of implementing a grading contract as a more

equitable assessment practice yet in all honesty, I implemented this practice based off an intuitive leap. It simply made sense to me that students' efforts be taken into consideration more so than their ability to imitate biased norms. Labor-based contract grading accounts for all student labor done while learning instead of solely assessing the outcome or end product. Labor contracts detail the work that is expected during the course, while trying to minimize the effect that quality judgments have on grades. Students could negotiate the contract at the start of the course and check-in at the midpoint of the term in order to assess student progress and to determine if a renegotiation is necessary.

While labor-based contract grading is a highly developed, multi-step assessment strategy, I only felt capable of implementing a very scaled-back, simplified version. While I knew that my version was nowhere near as comprehensive or detailed as the version that Inoue offers in his book, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in The Compassionate Writing Classroom*, I also knew that that simplified version was the best I could do as a novice educator. This would have likely been the case with any grading system that I implemented in my first teaching experience, even a conventional one. Knowing that and knowing that I had a lot to learn regardless of what grading ecology I adopted, I felt less guilty of bastardizing this approach to better align with my limited capabilities. I figured if I had to stumble my way through anything, it was better to aim my wobbly footsteps in the general direction of the radical change that I hoped to enact.

I adapted the sample contract Inoue provides in the aforementioned book with three key changes. The first of which was the omitting of time requirements and suggestions for assignments. This was done firstly because as a novice educator, I did not have a clear vision as to how much time an assignment should take. I only had my own experiences as a student at this point to gauge what could be accomplished within certain time frames, and I considered that insufficient as a guide for labor expectations of others. In addition, my own experiences had shown me that current conditions (i.e., the pandemic and its accompanying stress and upending of everyone's lives) had dramatically affected how much time I had available for schoolwork and how productive I was able to be during that limited time. It cannot be overstated, nor overlooked, how much the shifting of caregiving responsibilities, economic and job-related instability, and countless other stressors which COVID brought in its wake have affected our collective mental-health and productivity. Because I sought to center students in my pedagogy, this rightly affected how much I could ask of students at this time.

In addition to omitting time requirements, I also did not penalize students for late work or absences. Students were expected to complete a symptom check-in each day before attending classes on our campus and I could not make requirements that would possibly compel students to come to class if they were not cleared to do so. This would be damaging to their well-being and our collective health, so I did not believe it prudent to count absences against their grade. Despite this, there were no increase in student absences and most

classes were held with the majority of students present. I also did not see too much late work; at least not noticeably more than I had seen in the traditional class I had interned for a year prior. Most students either submitted their assignments on time or made arrangements with me regarding when they would turn in assignments. This reiterated the belief that there is no need to trick or threaten students with grades because they authentically wanted to engage with their classes as much as their conditions allowed.

Another change that I made in adapting Inoue's grading methodology as my own was that I added a "resubmit" category. This addition was principally geared toward introducing the importance of revision in my grading contract. A resubmit was reserved for the three major assignments of the semester and would be given if a student either did not complete the entire assignment or did not "do the work in the spirit in which it was asked". This meant that there was not enough effort apparent in the final draft. This created a bit of a slippery slope for me as I "graded." I had sought to try to omit quality judgments as much as possible from the assessment of writing, yet I had to insert it a bit in this category. Since I had done away with Inoue's practice of requiring certain labor and time on each assignment, I was a bit stuck on how to ensure that all students engaged with the assignment earnestly. I did this by instituting what I considered a just yet rigorous process of revision. This process began with a rough draft, that was peer reviewed in class (and by me if they gave me a copy during the peer review). I sought to use peer review sessions to encourage students to

engage with each other's work and ideas in order to generate ideas of their own. Peer review work was done in different configurations with each major assignment, once in pairs and twice in groups of 3-4. I gave students guided review questions to answer when reviewing their peers' work and encouraged them to comment on the margins of their peers' work. The questions I provided sought to extract constructive criticism on how to make sure their texts were comprehensible and accomplished the goal of the assignment, rather than focusing on lower order issues such as grammar or errors. An important part of peer review was giving students time to converse with each other and discuss their feedback with each other.

After the peer review session, students would then have another week to make changes and integrate whatever feedback they thought appropriate. The final draft was turned in alongside the feedback from their peers and the rough draft. This allowed me to consult the revision process and see if the student writer had integrated their peer's feedback and made an effort to revise their paper between the rough and final drafts. The three major assignments received a checkmark (which meant that students got full credit for them) or a "resubmit" (which meant that I expected another draft within a week's time). Admittedly, I scrutinized the revision process of the students who I believed had not made an earnest effort or had not completed the page count that was asked for, more so than any other. If I could see proof that feedback was considered or if there was significant revision between the drafts, I would give the student a checkmark. If,

however, the student made no effort to revise and the final draft was too short or showed little effort, they would be asked for another draft.

I realized that in the practice of asking students to resubmit their final drafts of major assignments, I ultimately still allowed judgements of quality to enter the classroom. This was a bit of a stumbling block for me yet ultimately, I thought this more appropriate for the times than asking for certain hours of labor, as per Inoue's methods. I also tried to make these judgments of quality as compassionate as I could. I did this by problematizing my own judgements often, continuously asking myself to work as hard as I could to make meaning from student's writing. I began by trying to "like" (a la Elbow) student writing by valuing it before judging it (Elbow 14). This shift in mentality is a subtle one but one that lends itself to more compassionate reading and engaging with student texts. I also strived to shape my assessments as a form of deep attending that Inoue modeled after Royster:

Assessment might be a problem-posing process that continually attends to questions like: "Do I understand you enough? Am I making you suffer? Please help me to read your languaging properly." What strikes me about deep attending is its compassion and its potential for growing the patience in all of us that is needed when we confront students who are different from us, who do not look or sound or come from the same places as we do... So I reiterate and reframe Royster's questions: *How* are you attending, exactly? What are the markers of your compassionate

attending? How is your attending a practice of judgement that your students can notice? How is it a practice that recognizes their existence without overly controlling them? (National Council of Teachers of English 34:41-35:18)

I always kept these questions in mind when I was making the final judgement on a students' paper. I didn't expect perfect papers, but I did expect signs of growth between drafts. Students who received "resubmits" were few and they were reserved for papers that I thought would likely earn a failing grade in any other classroom. I recognized that this method of grading still did not remove all subjective judgements, yet I did feel like it minimized it to the best of my present abilities. It was by no means perfect, but neither was it uncaring or uncritical. I counted that as a win.

I introduced students to my version of labor-based contract grading on the second day of class. I began with reading the contract aloud and guiding my students through the different sections and concepts. I ended the discussion with a 15-minute quick write to help students think through the material and formulate any questions that they still might have. I was gratified to hear relief and even excitement from most students. Most commented that they felt like this approach to grading would allow them to write more freely and experiment with their writing in ways that they had not dared to before. There was, however, no negotiation on their part in terms of the contract. They accepted the terms that I had laid out in the contract and thought them fair, or at least that is what they told

me. It is possible that they simply thought themselves too inexperienced to contribute to this discussion, but I hoped that the fact that we were discussing it at all made them feel more in control and that it helped level our power dynamic. At the midway point of the semester, we returned to our grading contract and I opened it up again for renegotiation. At this point, students had a strong sense of the trajectory of their grades and seemed content with it because everyone voted to keep the grading contract the same. I stressed during that time that we could discuss changing the terms to accommodate any unforeseen difficulties but no one had, or at least expressed, any concerns. It is possible that students still did not trust themselves yet that is outside of anything that I had control over. I had sought to create as equitable grading practices as I could, and their apparent endorsement was reaffirming to me.

The displacement of grades did not mean that students were left without ways to gauge their progress. In fact, this approach to grading necessitates a much more thorough process of revision and elevates the importance of thoughtful feedback. Feedback is yet another aspect of teaching which was more difficult than I had anticipated. When I sat down with that first paper in hand and a bright teal pen (I was not taking any chances with a red pen), it took me a moment to try to decide on how to proceed. I had emphasized the importance of looking past the rules so I knew that I could not approach grading as error correction, nor did I want to. I also knew that there were some errors that I had to address, mostly those that impeded comprehension. I found that the feedback

that I preferred to leave was typically in the form of questions in the margins and a longer note at the end which would focus their attention on ways to improve their texts. This approach to feedback felt more personal, at least to me. It was like I was having a conversation with them through those questions while also trying to call their attention to how a reader would react to their text. This method of feedback took a very long time, but I figured that it was using the time I freed up by stepping away from conventional grading. I also used this method of giving feedback to reassure my students that even if I was not grading their assignments, I was engaging with them fully.

Ultimately, I believe that using a labor-based contract freed students from the self-imposed writing constraints that traditional grading demands. This freedom created conditions that are crucial for a classroom which seeks to break past institutionalized writing constraints. The results cannot be quantified through traditional means of data analysis yet from my standpoint, they were well worth the effort. Students reported feeling freer to experiment in their writing and feeling as if they had more agency over their grades. This might not be the sweeping revolutionary change that some of us would like to see but it could be seen as the start of possible change. At the very least, the students that took my class will continue their college careers knowing that many of the choices their professors' make regarding grading are not obligatory but are more so indicative of that professor's stance. They will be able to understand that there is room to question naturalized systems of grading because those are neither compulsory nor

inherently good. Ideally, this knowledge can spur critical reflection among students so that they realize that everything can and should be questioned, especially the systems that are not serving their best interests.

The preceding account and contemplations of my first attempt at enacting a radical FYC course are by no means complete. While I have look back upon my reflective teaching journal multiple times and have used those as a guide to my commentary, there are still many things that did not fit within these pages. While I did not intentionally leave anything out, I also did not include some of my most prized memories. I could not adequately quantify or even describe the radical joy I felt when a student's eyes gleamed with a new idea. I cannot explain how I felt when I would see those nodding heads and engrossed gazes as I tried to articulate an idea, following me almost like I was about to physically hand them something valuable. I cannot fully record the gratification I felt when I read students' papers claiming their languages as beautiful and as something worth safeguarding. These experiences did not take place every class session, but they happened amply enough that when I look back on this course, I know that I cannot wait to do it again.

This experience was not without its challenges, and I am too conscious of my shortcomings to even attempt to pretend that it went faultlessly. Even now I am aware that I was left with infinitely more questions than answers. I do not claim to have enacted my radical pedagogy perfectly. Perhaps even because of

its very nature, radical pedagogy can never be fully mastered, as it unceasingly demands it be reexamined and recreated. Yet I can claim that I tried not to turn a blind eye to any practices that could be deemed insidious or unjust. I led with love. And that could be the most radical action of all.

Throughout this project, I identified various potential sites for intervention and further exploration in the professional development of composition teachers. I have argued in this project that composition teachers require more overt training in linguistics to better confront linguistic prejudice. Another site of intervention that I identified through my research, was the fact that there needs to be a more robust support system for emerging educators, specifically filled with folks from differing concentrations. A structured cohort made up of students that plan on teaching at a university, with a focus on actual everyday practices and approaches would be invaluable to curating a pedagogy that is centered on that educator's values and orientations. This would be even more beneficial if the cohort had access to experienced teachers who could help give feedback on prompts and lesson planning and editing of overall concepts for class design. One of the hardest things I came across in teaching my course was figuring out how to encourage and maintain class discussions. This difficulty is also something that the cohort could focus on, and which would be immensely helpful for novice educators.

Ultimately, what I found to be the most important result of this study were not so much my observations but the fact that I was engaging in it at all. To

clarify, all the observations I make in this project- and all my results are necessarily (and purposefully) subjective. This means that they cannot be universally applied. But what I found to be the most useful aspect of this project is how it models the type of attention that the field should be paying to teacher preparation. The field overall needs more work like this, work that steps away from theory and dives into practical applications of those theories. Work that risks being personal and vulnerable so that others can also learn from our experiences and all the mistakes we make along the way. There is a misconception that in order to write about teaching, you have to have read all the theories and know all the things but, as any practicing educator would likely assert- that is not an obtainable goal. Our teaching practices constantly change, and no one ever has all the answers. The answer, I argue, is actually engaging in the question genuinely and producing more work and scholarship detailing that engagement and the resulting observations. The field and its emerging educators would greatly benefit from scholarship that acknowledges different ways of meaning-making and identifies areas of intervention in everyday, evolving practices. Like the Mexican proverb goes, “hacemos el camino al caminar”, we make the road by walking. And in order to make roads that veer away from the status quo and head in the direction of radical change, we must not be afraid to trot where others have not nor to detail the many times we stumble along the way.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

November 2, 2021

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Expedited Review

IRB-FY2022-117

Status: Approved

Prof. Karen Rowan and Ms. Xochilt Flores  
CAL - English  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Prof. Rowan and Ms. Flores:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Radicalizing FYC: A Novice Educator's Venture into Revolutionary Teaching " has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. The study is approved as of November 2, 2021. The study will require an annual administrative check-in (annual report) on the current status of the study on November 1, 2022. Please use the renewal form to complete the annual report.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

If your study is closed to enrollment, the data has been de-identified, and you're only analyzing the data - you may close the study by submitting the Closure Application Form through the Cayuse Human Ethics (IRB) system. The Cayuse system automatically reminds you at 90, 60, and 30 days before the study is due for renewal or submission of your annual report (administrative check-in). The modification, renewal, study closure, and unanticipated/adverse event forms are located in the Cayuse system with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission Webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. Please

note a lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in the application's approval period.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risks and benefits to the human participants in your IRB application. If you have any questions about the IRBs decision please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-117 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive regarding your research from participants or others should be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Nicole Dabbs*

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

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