

LiCS

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Print Layout: Justin Lewis
Web Design: Justin Lewis
Website: www.licsjournal.org
Email: licsjournal@gmail.com

LiCS MISSION STATEMENT

Literacy in Composition Studies is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors scholarly activity at the nexus of Literacy and Composition Studies. We foreground *literacy* and *composition* as our keywords because they do particular kinds of work. We want to retain Composition's complicated history as well as FYC's institutional location and articulation to secondary education. Through literacy, we denote practices that are both deeply context-bound and always ideological. Literacy and Composition are therefore contested terms that often mark where the struggles to define literate subjects and confer literacy's value are enacted. We are committed to publishing scholarship that explores literacy at its intersection with Composition's history, pedagogies, and interdisciplinary methods of inquiry.

Literacy is a fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. At its heart, literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. Orienting a Composition Studies journal around literacy prompts us to investigate the ways that writing is interpretive as well as persuasive; to analyze the connections and disconnections between writing and reading; and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on or constitutes the writer even as the writer seeks to act on or with others.

LiCS seeks submissions that interpret literacy at a time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation. We are open to a wide range of research that takes up these issues, and we are especially interested in work that:

- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities
- analyzes the processes whereby literacies are valued or legitimated
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies, especially those drawing on transnational and cross-cultural literacy research

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Together, the articles collected in this issue investigate a wide range of literate identities: of incarcerated people, of homeschooled students, of first-generation college students, of community activists, and of students partnering across national borders between the US, Middle East, and North Africa. While the approaches and arguments vary, the authors consistently trouble our received conceptions of literate identities, their rhetorical functions, and their consequences. The realities of lived experience here complicate our most sophisticated models. Our authors are situated in contexts for literacy that acknowledge what Antonio Bryd describes as the “ideolog[y] of literacy education” and practice, yet in each case, they or their participants are in some way flipping the script.

In “Making Citizens Behind Bars (And the Stories We Tell About It): Queering Approaches to Prison Literacy Programs,” Alexandra Cavallaro extends recent research on literacy education and citizenship by considering how images of the “good citizen” circulate in the context of prison education. Cavallaro contends that “While programs frequently invoke the language of citizenship in describing their goals, they do so without considering the particular challenges incarcerated people face in actually achieving this vision of citizenship--or indeed, if such a vision is ever possible (or desirable) for someone who has been incarcerated.” Cavallaro’s article draws from research in New Literacy Studies, queer studies, and critical prison studies to provide a framework educators can use to both question and revise such constructions of citizenship in prison education.

Following Cavallaro, Chase Bollig’s “People Like Us’: Theorizing First-Generation College as a Marker of Difference” makes an important intervention into how composition scholars have thought about class as an index for difference in university settings. In this fascinating article, Bollig invites us to “theorize” first-generation college as an “identifier” by unpacking the ways students have and have not found this identity category to be productively helping them name and describe their experiences as “literate subjects” at university. Bollig’s research, which draws on seventeen semi-structured interviews of alumni who graduated between the late 1960s and 2010s, provides insight into how students understand the “literate positionalities [such as first-generation college] that shape their encounters with campus representatives and peers.”

Like Bollig, Alicia A. McCartney also explores a particular group’s literacy experiences: formerly homeschooled students who have now entered college. “Child Prodigies Exploring the World: How Homeschooled Students Narrate their Literacy in the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives” illuminates how most of the sampled homeschoolers “reveal their family network as a place of vibrant literary sponsorship” while nonetheless sometimes confronting challenges that “may occur when they transition from this warm family environment into traditional secondary schools.” Considering themes of authority, family dynamics, and larger cultural narratives (e.g. “child prodigies”), McCartney explores how homeschoolers often position their education in response to “traditional” schooling environments, often seeming compelled to defend their literacy practices and acquisition processes through rhetorical strategies such as those M.M. Bakhtin named as “active, double-voiced discourse.”

In “Resisting and Rewriting English-Only Policies: Navigating Multilingual, Raciolinguistic,

and Translingual Approaches to Language Advocacy,” Katherine S. Flowers offers valuable insight into the tactics politicians and community activists have used to contest monolingual language policies and legislation. Flowers carefully traces the arguments—and the approaches toward literacy informing these arguments—opponents made to successfully repeal an English-only ordinance the county originally passed in 2012. The repeal campaign, according to Flowers, drew from “multilingual, raciolinguistic, and translingual orientations to language” by mobilizing arguments “flipping the economics script, linking language to race, and questioning the nature of English.” Flowers concludes by examining the value of meshing these lines of argument and considering how ethnographic analysis into communities’ responses to monolingualism “can provide writing studies with novel models of what it means to resist and rewrite English-only policies.”

Steve Parks and Ahmed Abdelhakim Hachlaf share their work developing the Twiza Project, a collaborative effort among universities and NGO education programs in the US, Libya, Morocco, Kurdistan, and other Middle Eastern and North African countries to sponsor online dialogue on civic and human rights and provide training in community organizing. “Of Rights Without Guarantees: Friction at the Borders of Nations, Digital Spaces, and Classrooms” discusses how the original vision of the program, and its assumptions about how digital technologies can facilitate transnational communication, changed as a result of the dialogue between their classes and what it revealed about “how the *reality* of differing political contexts provided an alternative sense of what a transnational dialogue might produce among students.”

This issue concludes with Antonio Byrd’s review of Annette Vee’s *Coding Literacy: How Computer Programming Is Changing Writing*. Calling the book “essential reading for its breadth of historical and theoretical application to computer programming that updates our notions of writing for a swiftly changing technological landscape,” Byrd shows how Vee’s work can inform future research into the sociocultural and material conditions of computer programming. Byrd further argues that *Coding Literacy* shows the “potential to bring together computer science education’s own ongoing research on teaching diverse students...with Writing Studies’ interests in the ideologies of literacy education and the material consequences those ideologies create.”

This is an issue that captures change--the way in which the lived realities, political contexts, and material consequences of literacy demand that we approach our theories and practices as amateurs ready to relearn what we think we know. We hope you learn as much from this issue as we did.

Brenda Glascott—*Portland State University*

Tara Lockhart—*San Francisco State University*

Holly Middleton—*High Point University*

Juli Parrish—*University of Denver*

Chris Warnick—*College of Charleston*

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Making Citizens Behind Bars (and the Stories We Tell About It): Queering Approaches to Prison Literacy Programs

Alexandra Cavallaro – California State University,
San Bernardino

KEYWORDS

prison education; queer theory; citizenship

In June 2016, the US Department of Education reinstated access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students through their Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot Program, granting funding to 67 colleges and universities across the country. The goal of the initiative is to allow incarcerated individuals to receive Pell Grant funding and pursue postsecondary education in order to develop the skills necessary to “live lives of purpose and contribute to society upon their release” (“12,000 Incarcerated Students”). This pilot program reversed a 1994 Congressional change to the Higher Education Act (HEA) that rendered incarcerated students ineligible for Pell Grant funding, causing many prison education programs to shut their doors. While the future of the program currently remains uncertain, the availability of these grants increased access to education for students who had previously been barred because of their incarcerated status. In a press release announcing the program, the Department of Education frames its work as giving “deserving incarcerated individuals” access to higher education in an effort to “reduce recidivism, promote opportunity, and give justice-involved individuals a meaningful second chance” (“12,000 Incarcerated Students”). Similar language can be found in prison education programs across the country, whether they are Second Chance Pell Grant recipients or not. In mission statements, promotional materials, and media coverage, education and its attendant benefits (reduced recidivism, savings to taxpayers, increased employability) are consistently linked with the creation of “productive and engaged citizens” (“12,000 Incarcerated Students”).

The problem with this image of the citizen reformed by education is that the students in these programs have all been rendered *non-citizens* as a result of their incarceration. During their sentences, they are denied many forms of civic participation and there are additional barriers to voting in twelve states even when their sentences are complete (NCSL). Even in states with no voting restrictions, their marginalized status will continue to follow them, and they will face sanctioned discrimination in the form of decreased access to employment, housing, and post-secondary educational opportunities and will be barred from many government assistance programs. Regaining anything that looks like the popular

ideals of citizenship—voting, access to jobs and education, government assistance—will be difficult, if not impossible.

“Even in states with no voting restrictions, their marginalized status will continue to follow them, and they will face sanctioned discrimination in the form of decreased access to employment, housing, and post-secondary educational opportunities and will be barred from many government assistance programs.”

Given these contradictions and conflicts, why talk about citizenship and prison education together at all? Across the United States, prison education programs invoke the power of literacy education in the project of (re) making good citizens in the stories they tell about their work. In the programs’ promotional materials,

the figure of the citizen becomes a site of struggle, and this figure—the “bad citizen” in need of redemption and the potential for “good citizenship” in the future—is often central to the values that guide these programs. Literacy education becomes a focal point for the individual reform of deviant citizens, but this focus on the individual trains incarcerated people for a kind of citizenship that will not actually be available to them when (or if) they are released. Citizenship is frequently invoked as an ideal, but its complexity is elided. Examining these complexities opens up larger questions about the relationship between literacy and citizenship and the stories we tell connecting the two.

Recent scholarship in literacy and composition studies has demonstrated how the mythos of citizenship gets deployed to tell stories of who is included and who is not (e.g., Guerra; Wan). Such stories, argues Amy Wan, deserve our attention because “[h]ow a nation defines, constructs, and produces citizens communicates not only the ideals of that nation, but also its anxieties, particularly in moments of political, cultural, and economic uncertainty” (1). The development of mass incarceration in the US is a product of similar uncertainties. Because of persistent anxieties about race, legal scholar Michelle Alexander has demonstrated how new, institutionally sanctioned forms of discrimination replace the old—from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, where 1 in 15 black men and 1 in 36 Hispanic men can expect to be incarcerated in their lifetime, as opposed to 1 in 106 white men (“Mass Incarceration Problems”). Since educational programs are such a prominent feature of the carceral landscape,¹ and incarcerated people have a unique relationship to citizenship, I argue that we must include prison literacy programs in scholarly conversations about the relationship between education and citizenship. In many educational contexts, there is frequently an easy conflation of literacy education and the production of good citizens, a conflation that I argue is both especially tempting and especially damning in the context of prison education. While programs frequently invoke the language of citizenship in describing their goals, they do so without considering the particular challenges incarcerated people face in actually achieving this vision of citizenship—or indeed, if such a vision is ever possible (or desirable) for someone who has been incarcerated.

Incarcerated students make an important contribution to conversations about literacy education and the promise of citizenship both in spite of and because of their limited access to citizenship’s

privileges. In this article, I propose a framework to aid in interrogating the role that the production of citizens plays in the educational landscape of mass incarceration, and how teachers and scholars of literacy can intervene in these conversations. Drawing on three scholarly traditions concerned with prisons—New Literacy Studies (NLS), queer studies, and critical prison studies—I demonstrate how teachers and scholars of writing and literacy can intervene in the project of citizenship production by challenging and critiquing the logics of individualism that underwrite prison literacy programs. When we undo these logics, we can resist the individual narratives of redemption and transformation (e.g. Jacobi; Meiners and Sanabria) and envision possibilities that trouble the relationship between literacy education and the production of good citizens in prison.

In order to do this, we must take responsibility for the ideologies that show themselves in the materials that represent the work of prison education programs, including mission statements, promotional materials, and articles in local newspapers. While previous research has offered principles to guide our literacy work inside prison classrooms (e.g. Jacobi and Becker), I build on that work by turning an analytical lens toward the ideologies embedded in the ways we frame the literacy programs themselves, arguing for sustained (and queer) attention to the rhetorics of individual citizenship. A queer lens allows us to challenge the most common ideas about citizenship, calling our attention to the ways it often fails as an ideal, particularly for marginalized people. While we always need to be sensitive to the multiple audiences prison education programs are responsible to, we must also recognize that program materials don't just guide our work—they represent our work to a wider public and can reproduce harmful narratives about incarcerated people. This attention to language is essential because it has a material effect on the incarcerated students we teach, as well as the futures we imagine for our classes, programs, and the wider landscape of prison education.

In this article, I begin by outlining the intersections among literacy studies, queer studies, and critical prison studies, illustrating the ways their intersections might be productively mobilized in critiquing the role of citizenship in prison education. I then follow with a study of the “Higher Education in Jails and Prisons Programming List,” demonstrating the prevalence of and problems with individualist, “bootstraps” ideologies in the construction of citizenship in these programs. I conclude with a framework, influenced by queer prison abolitionists and queer citizenship theorists, to guide the work of revising and taking responsibility for the work of our public materials.

“Incarcerated students make an important contribution to conversations about literacy education and the promise of citizenship both in spite of and because of their limited access to citizenship’s privileges.”

Education And The Carceral Landscape: An Interdisciplinary Framework For Queering Citizenship In Prison Education Programs

When I first stepped behind the walls of a prison three years ago as a writing instructor for the Education Justice Project, I quickly learned that prisons are built on and sustained by distinctly counter-productive logics. All across the country, while states routinely divert resources away from K-12 schools and public universities in times of budget crises, they do not hesitate to incarcerate their residents at nearly 4.5 x the cost (depending on the state) (Meiners 18). In Illinois, for example, where I earned my PhD and started my work as a prison educator, Erica Meiners describes the two different paths that such budget choices create with the phrase “going downstate,” a metaphor that carries radically different meanings for different people: for wealthier Chicago residents, this means leaving the suburbs and traveling south to the prestigious (and expensive) University of Illinois (15). For poorer Chicago residents, their schools underfunded and crumbling, their neighborhoods ravaged by gentrification, this means traveling south to be incarcerated in the state’s prisons, including the Danville Correctional Center, where I was a tutor and instructor for two years. Despite the conventional wisdom that tells us that these institutions are for those who deserve them (prisons for the worst of the worst, universities for the best of the best), these budget choices show that schools and prisons are linked by patterns of uneven resource allocation, illustrating that “these institutions do not merely reflect existing structures of power but reproduce and even exacerbate them” (Meiners 18).

Though I use Illinois to illustrate the ways that seemingly disconnected state institutions are analogous, such patterns repeat themselves across the country, and funding is but one of many points of intersection between public schools/universities and prisons. In California, for example, where I now work as an assistant professor, public colleges and universities are provided with furniture that,

“Though I use Illinois to illustrate the ways that seemingly disconnected state institutions are analogous, such patterns repeat themselves across the country, and funding is but one of many points of intersection between public schools/universities and prisons.”

according to Angela Davis, is largely produced by incarcerated people (36). In fact, the number of connections between schools (and other institutions) and prisons is so overwhelming that scholars and activists have started using the phrase “prison-industrial complex” (PIC), a term

that suggests that “criminalization and imprisonment filter through every aspect of how we live and understand ourselves and the world,” including the design of educational institutions (Spade 3). Seeing prisons not as discrete buildings but as part of a web of institutions and practices demonstrates how prisons invisibly—and yet powerfully—permeate our lives in frequently unacknowledged ways.

Acknowledging these intricate, often unspoken connections between prisons and schools/universities, scholars in literacy studies, queer studies, and critical prison studies have separately

interrogated the operations of the PIC. In literacy studies, scholars have examined the complicated role of writing in the prison environment, examining tactical methods of resistance (Plemons), considering the particularly fraught role of literacy sponsors (Jacobi), and researching the role of hope and possibility in the prison writing classroom (Berry, “Doing Time”). In queer studies, scholars and activists have resisted the incarceration and legal regulation of queer bodies (Stanley and Smith) and critiqued the use of legal frameworks as a means of protection (Spade). Finally, the field of critical prison studies offers frameworks for radically deconstructing the normalized operations of the criminal justice system (e.g. Davis), not merely offering solutions to reform it. Collectively, these three fields acknowledge that the PIC is both a product of and producer of normativity, that it dramatically impacts society’s most marginalized, and that it uses literacy education as a component of its project of reform and punishment. The prison is as central to the work of literacy scholars (a field with a long history of commitment to questioning issues of power and privilege in language use) as it is to the political commitments of queer scholars and activists (whose projects critique injustices produced by normativity).

The intersections of the common concerns of these three fields can provide us with a framework to interrogate the normative ideologies embedded in prison literacy programs and offer a set of values to push this work forward. Queer theory and literacy studies’ shared concerns with the operation of *normativity* and critiques of the *discourses of individuality* offer new insight on literacy education and citizenship when considered in the context of prisons. Following the work of Cathy J. Cohen and others who focus on queer theory’s intersectional possibilities, I apply queer theory’s critiques to a wider field of normativity, one that considers particular relationships to the power of state-sanctioned norms. Literacy, in particular, operates in this way, making it a good entry point into the operations of normativity in the PIC. Eric Pritchard’s term “literacy normativity” captures these operations, describing literacy normativity as “the use of literacy to create and impose normative standards and beliefs onto people whom are labeled alien or other through textsapes” (28). In many prison programs, a lack of education and literacy are often cited as significant factors that led to incarceration in the first place. This actual or perceived “deficit” becomes a way to simultaneously label incarcerated people as non-normative citizens and provide an avenue of redemption for an offending body to reintegrate into society as a “good citizen.” This mode of redemption, however, relies solely on a process of *individual* work. Whether or not you are “redeemed” into an acceptable citizen depends on the opportunities you take advantage of while incarcerated, via an educational project that promises to reform individual “criminals” into economically productive citizens.

The particular challenge with extending conversations to the construction of citizenship in prisons is that incarcerated people, according to Caleb Smith, are the product of paradoxes produced by carceral institutions, becoming divided figures as “a citizen-in-training but also an exile from civil society” (qtd. in Schorb 177). In order to address these paradoxes, I work to maintain an active tension between what Amy Brandzel calls “a politics of presence” and a “politics of radical critique.” In her work on the queer politics of citizenship, Brandzel writes that a politics of presence requires “compassion toward the normative desires and aspirations for less vulnerability, more social belonging, and access to more life chances” (x), while a politics of critique requires “radical and

downright cranky disdain for normativity” (xi). The tension between these two approaches forms the heart of my framework—it requires that literacy teacher-scholars who work in prisons remain cranky about normativity and normative aspirations (in this case, the ideology of individualism that guides prison education programs and the elusive promise of redemptive citizenship) while acknowledging the ways that the promise of such inclusion may seem like a compelling way to end the violence and suffering that this exclusion causes.

Maintaining such critical tensions extends the project of critique that is already familiar to scholars of literacy and composition: on the one hand, we have critiqued literacy’s violence, and have expressed our disdain for the ways literacy renders people acceptable or unacceptable (e.g., through the politics of “standard English”). On the other hand, we recognize the potential power of literacy to effect change and the ways that denying access to literacy perpetuates the disenfranchisement of marginalized people. When it comes to an investigation of prison literacy programs and their role in the production of citizens, we must also maintain this critical tension between the individual and the systemic by working “to expose the intersectionality of normative belief systems and structures of thought, and offer suggestions as to how we might work against the reentrenchment of these processes” (Brandzel x). Examining this complex relationship to literacy in prison education programs, Patrick Berry has argued that “[w]hile we must find ways to maintain a critical stance toward overly optimistic accounts of literacy,” we also “do ourselves a disservice if we do not recognize the multifaceted, sometimes contradictory ways in which writing accrues value in our lives” (“Doing Time” 138). Keeping these tensions at the forefront of our work, he argues, would help us develop pedagogies that are “mindful of the multiple objectives of literacy and writing instruction—objectives that go well beyond a focus on acquiring skills or gainful employment to the use of writing as a pathway toward understanding oneself in the world” (138). Throughout this project, I work to keep these multiple tensions between crankiness and presence, between violence and possibility, alive in my discussion of prison education work. In this way, I hope to move the conversation away from the more reductive, individualist constructions of the incarcerated citizen in a way that has material consequences for individual programs and the wider landscape of prison literacy education.

Literacy Frameworks And Case Study Methods

In order to more concretely and systematically study the ways that prison education programs across the country frame their work, I analyze programs from the “Higher Education in Jails and Prisons Programming List” (HEJPPL). Compiled by Victoria Bryan and Rebecca Ginsburg, this list contains information on 149 prison education programs across the United States.² From this list, I selected 54 programs across 25 states (including Washington DC and two national programs) for analysis. My primary criterion for selecting programs was the presence of a website, mission statement, or write-up so that I would have a stable set of texts to analyze. I also focused on liberal arts and humanities programs with literacy education³ in some form or another, omitting programs that had only a vocational focus. I also omitted programs that were just for incarcerated youth since my interests are in higher education. Throughout my analysis, I leave the specific programs unnamed

because my purpose is not to critique individual programs but rather to illustrate the larger ideological patterns that these programs follow. An analysis of these ideologies allows us to see the ways they are tied to larger social and political issues and how individual attempts at literacy education are never just about the individual but about constructing a (problematic) vision of citizenship. In instances where I reference specific examples from programs, I assign the programs pseudonyms in order to maintain this focus. In what follows, I show the prevalence of these ideologies and analyze their impact on our understanding of the connections between education, citizenship, and incarceration.

Reducing Recidivism And Making Good Citizens: Promoting An Individual “Choice” Discourse Through Literacy Education

In advertising and promoting their work, prison education programs offer an image of the kind of “good citizen” they will create through educational opportunities—one who makes up for their prior “mistakes” by being economically productive and not a burden to good, law-abiding taxpayers, an image that depends on a sense of individual responsibility and pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps. This vision is frequently supported by an emphasis on reducing recidivism, saving taxpayer money, providing a second chance, and improving future employment prospects, without considering the particular challenges incarcerated people face in actually achieving this imagined idea of citizenship. These attributes are featured prominently in the 54 programs I surveyed: 42 of the programs (over 77%) referenced at least one of these features, and 30 of the programs (over 55%) referenced two or more.

One of the most persuasive justifications for the presence of educational programs in prison is cost savings. Programs frequently emphasize that education can save money in order to argue that prison education will give taxpayers a good return on their investment, citing savings ranging from \$36 to \$97 million per year. Mid-Atlantic Prison Program, for example, informs us on their website that since the state spends over \$60,000 a year to incarcerate just one person, the costs savings to each taxpayer attributable to this particular prison education program in “reduced re-incarceration rates could likely pay for the entire program” and should “be considered a mechanism to reduce the scope of prison [and] save the taxpayer money.” Southern Prison Program cites different statistics, but nevertheless frames the importance of college education in terms of how much it can save the state’s taxpayers: it costs \$25,000 per year to incarcerate one person in this state, but “if college experiences could cut the recidivism rate in half, we could save the taxpayers millions of dollars.” Second Mid-Atlantic Prison Program is even more direct in their budgetary comparisons, articulating the importance of a college education by directly comparing the cost of that education and the cost of incarceration: the daily rate of incarceration in their state is \$115 per day, but the cost of attending a local state college is almost half that amount.

Along these same lines, programs foreground education and literacy in the service of job preparation and as producing marketable, directly transferrable skills. Many programs use general language to describe this job preparation: they describe the potential for “meaningful employment,” “increased employment opportunities,” “employment success,” or “improved job prospects” upon

release. Somewhat tellingly, these programs do not provide comprehensive information (beyond mentions of employment in a handful of “testimonials” or “success stories”) on what kinds of jobs the former students were *actually* able to attain upon release. These vaguely articulated goals don’t address the fact that while some employers are offered incentives to hire people with criminal records, employers are also legally allowed to discriminate against formerly incarcerated people, a stigma that no amount of education and no level of advanced literacy will remedy. And, even though they are in the minority, at least five programs require that incarcerated students pay for their courses (some at a reduced rate). Midwestern Prison Program requires “financial support to cover tuition and fees each semester,” while Second Southern Prison Program pays for the courses while the student is incarcerated, but students must repay the state for the loaned amount *as a condition of their parole*. Given that incarcerated people are typically society’s poorest—and that incarceration tends to exacerbate conditions of poverty because of its impacts beyond the individual and into communities—it is difficult to imagine how many incarcerated people would pay for the courses while incarcerated (or come up with the money once released).

Many programs extend their discussions of taxpayer savings by emphasizing education’s role in reducing recidivism, with 61% of programs citing statistics that students who complete such programs return to prison far less than the approximately 68% national average. Though most programs avoid citing specific percentages (preferring, instead, to simply state that education programs contribute to reduced rates of recidivism), West Coast Prison Program boasts that the “recidivism rate among [their] graduates is just 6%.” East Coast Prison Program reports that “virtually none” of their students return to prison, boasting a recidivism rate of less than 3%. For educators who care about keeping students out of the criminal justice system, breaking cycles of incarceration and having fewer people return to prison is a positive result of these programs. However, like the other goals, the discussions of the ways in which educational programs reduce recidivism do not account for the complexity of systemic inequality. In many of these programs, recidivism is evoked uncritically; as Thom Gehring notes, recidivism often functions as “an unsophisticated, dichotomous, terminal variable,” and the burden rests with the individual’s own efforts to keep from returning to prison without acknowledging the many barriers in that process (Gehring 198). These programs position themselves as giving incarcerated people the resources they need not to recidivate so they are able to enjoy their freedom and rehabilitation once they are released, ignoring the many factors that make educational attainment limited in what it can accomplish in this regard (notably absent from these discussions are those who will never be released from prison). Education does not erase all the post-release challenges and barriers, such as when formerly incarcerated people are banned from government-sponsored food and housing support programs. Taken together, these discourses reduce literacy education to its instrumental value as line items on a budget sheet, simultaneously reducing the complexity of literacy education and overstating what that education can accomplish.

Narrating Redemption through Literacy Education

While many programs invoke just pieces of the individualistic ideologies in their project of producing good citizens, some programs bring a number of these characteristics together in the

narratives they feature. Prison educators have critiqued the use of this type of narrative (e.g. Berry, “Doing Time”; Jacobi and Johnston), a literacy practice that Erica Meiners and Roberto Sanabria describe as constituting a “redemption genre” that follows a remarkably similar pattern: “I was born, committed evil, served time, saw the errors of my ways (found God), and I am now on the true path” (635). These are the narratives that tend to “capture public imagination—stories of admission, forgiveness, regret, familial hope and redemption” (Curry and Jacobi 11), and they are part of a larger project that requires incarcerated people “know” themselves (à la Foucault) “through highly regulatory and confining discursive practices” (Meiners and Sanabria 636) that are always—inescapably, unavoidably—mediated by the institution of the prison.

However, while we must acknowledge that “[s]uch narratives of transformation are, of course, distinctive and representative of these authors’ powerful experiences,” they also frequently “echo a romantic cultural script about the power of reading and writing that, while appealing to the public and especially to literacy educators, can overshadow what Morris Young (2004, 28) calls ‘minor narratives’ that fail to align with dominant tellings” (Berry, *Writing Lives* 105) and break out of the conventions of this genre. We cannot overlook or take lightly the materially important functions these narratives serve—many students see themselves in these renderings and they are rhetorically persuasive for the purpose of accessing material benefits, including obtaining necessary employment or speaking before parole boards. No other kind of narrative except one of individual responsibility and reform is going to get you released from prison or get you a job to support yourself. However, the almost complete lack of “minor narratives” that move away from individual redemption mask the larger factors—trauma or systemic structures of inequality—that contribute to incarceration exponentially more frequently than individual choices.

Of course, studying the complexity and range of the narratives used to support prison education programs is impossible when incarcerated people are largely absent from discussions of this work. While we cannot know the rationales behind each program’s choice to use or exclude the voices of incarcerated people, there are numerous potential reasons for this absence: justice-involved people always face a real risk that their words will be later used against them in legal proceedings, and many prison administrations tightly control the writing that goes in and out of the prison, so that even programs that publish collections of incarcerated students’ work (e.g. SpeakOut! (Curry and Jacobi)) must edit the published work to omit anything that might depict the prison in a bad light. However, over 56% of programs had absolutely no presence of incarcerated people in their materials. An additional 30% (17 programs) had some carefully contextualized quotes—in videos, in “testimonial” sections, or in reflections at award ceremonies. Only 8 programs (a mere 14%) have substantive narratives from currently (or, more commonly, formerly) incarcerated people, and only a few of them break from the script that Meiners and Sanabria identify. This absence speaks to the tight control institutions maintain over the ways the programs get narrated.

When they *are* included, many programs make redemption narratives a prominent feature of the way they frame their work. For example, a newsletter for Third Southern Prison Program contains an article very subtly titled “Redemption” that details the story of one formerly incarcerated student’s journey through prison and to a life beyond through the redeeming power of education.

Though very little information is provided on this student's early life, he was incarcerated three times before he was 19 for gang-related activity. When he started his third prison sentence, he didn't take advantage of the prison's educational opportunities right away. Eventually, he "saw the error of his ways" (how he made this change is not explained) and decided that he didn't want to be involved in gangs anymore; instead, he "wanted to be an educated man." This marked a turning point in the narration of his life, or what Meiners and Sanabria would call finding "the true path." Though he was not eligible for a bachelor's program because he was up for parole in four years, he devoted himself to his studies, earning more than double the necessary credits for an Associate of Arts degree. While enrolled in this program, he and other incarcerated students saw a shift in their perspective on the world: "they began to see their involvement [with gangs] differently. They began having condescending attitudes to the thought patterns of their friends and the reasons for doing the kind of things they did." The three additional issues of the newsletter for Third Southern Prison Program are full of similar redemption narratives.

Third Mid-Atlantic Prison Program features "student success stories" where visitors to their webpage can "meet" some of the former students who have transformed their lives "through the power of higher education." The stories begin similarly: the students got involved with crime (drugs, gangs) and continued to get in trouble once they were incarcerated. One student is described as believing he had no value, no hope, and nothing to pass on to his own children. Another student describes how anger and fear led him in the wrong direction, eventually leading to his incarceration. A third student describes himself as "a street thug" with "no respect for [himself] or humanity." After these bleak beginnings, each of these students goes on to talk about the positive impact that higher education had on their outlooks and how instrumental it was in "turning their lives around." When the voices of incarcerated people are actually present in prison education program materials, they are frequently used to illustrate the desired outcome of prison education across the country—good citizens who have seen the error of their ways and have reformed themselves through hard work.

The repetition of these particular kinds of narratives—and the requirement that they are produced as part of the prison experience—illustrates Meiners and Sanabria's claim that "the PIC advances a quiet insistence that those incarcerated 'know' themselves in specific institutionalized ways" (643). This is one of many places where the push and pull between a politics of presence and a politics of critique is acutely felt; students are required to produce redemption narratives for parole boards and prison officials, and so we must acknowledge the current necessity of learning to narrate your life this particular way as a survival strategy; after all, "If an author knows that the audience does not have the ability to bear witness to her life in ways that will be productive for the author, the author can be engaging in tactics of survival" (Meiners and Sanabria 645). Narratives that follow these scripts are useful and desirable: useful for the prisons, in order to show that they are successfully rehabilitating offending citizens; for programs to show that they are helping prisons achieve their goals and pose no threat to their operations; and for incarcerated people themselves, as a tactic for survival and as a way to access material resources. However, a politics of critique asks us to begin to challenge the inclusion of these narratives in the work we do in our prison education programs. If we include and highlight narratives that provide "opportunities for writing and connecting outside

of the self” we “might encourage prison writers to link their individual experience to more systemic understandings and critiques of current practice” (Hinshaw and Jacobi 77). The narratives in these examples simultaneously reinforce and ignore systemic problems; in the examples above, the crimes associated with gang activity or drug use/selling are positioned as a series of bad individual choices, and the decision to turn away from those activities is positioned as another individual choice that gives the incarcerated person a “second chance” (presumably to make up for the first chance they didn’t take advantage of) to remake themselves through education. Absent from these narratives is any acknowledgement of the systemic inequalities that create conditions for gangs or underground economies. We need to make room for stories that show who the individual is in the world, stories that focus on *connectivity*—the way the individual person is connected to others in a web of social relationships. Literacy, in these kinds of narratives, becomes positioned as much more than a tool in a process of individual, bootstraps reform. Instead, literacy education is a dynamic process that doesn’t just impact the individual but also their web of connections in their communities.

Constructing the Good Citizen through Higher Education

Collectively, these rhetorical characteristics have a common focus on reforming *individual* people into model citizens, focusing on the individual responsibility to build a “productive” life (defined as making economic contributions and not being a taxpayer burden) during their incarceration and beyond by participating in education programs. The collective vision of these education programs is implicitly supported by arguments “for what a person needs (or needs *to be*) in order to be prepared for a future and to act as a citizen” (Wan 22). Several programs explicitly evoke the language of citizenship, typically connecting transferable educational “skills” to transforming incarcerated people into good citizens. In Second East Coast Prison Program, for example, interviews with administrators linked good individual choices with creating productive citizens. Participating in this educational program, they argue, “is a concrete example of the positive choices these gentlemen have made to accomplish significant changes in their lives” because “we know that returning *citizens* to a global society armed with vocational and education credentials is truly the equalizer for positive productive citizenship, and greatly reduces the rate of recidivism” (emphasis mine). Collectively, they argue that the effect of education will improve the larger social order: “the more educated the citizenry, the better the social order.”

“A queer intervention—a queer perspective on prison education programs—can be sensitive to the most rhetorically persuasive arguments and begin to shift the conversation to the larger social forces that feed the prison-industrial complex in order to challenge the narratives we tell about incarcerated people.”

However, as with the educational contexts in Amy Wan’s study, the many challenges that formerly incarcerated people face “highlights the inequality among people’s citizenship and the inadequacy of literacy as a sole solution” (26). Their newly acquired skills cannot overcome employment discrimination and

their exclusion from the very social supports that would support a post-release life. No matter how educated, the scarlet letter of incarceration follows them as they attempt to navigate their supposed re-attainment of their citizenship status, a scarlet letter that burns ever brighter with the ways that electronic records make it more difficult to escape the stigma of incarceration. Furthermore, this framework ignores those incarcerated students with little or no hope for release.

This focus on the individual should be both familiar and unsurprising—individualism, or pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, is frequently evoked in discussions of literacy education. The problem with this, according to Victor Villanueva, is “if everything is reduced to individual will, work, and responsibility, there’s no need to consider group exclusion” (“Blind” 6). What we fail to acknowledge is that for some “the bootstraps break before the boots are on, that too many have no boots” (Villanueva, *Bootstraps* xiv). If we only look at individuals to figure out why literacy education does not accomplish its inclusive democratic goals, we come to simple judgments about motivation and responsibility to make use of available resources. There’s no need to contend with the larger structural forces of inequality. This focus on individual work, responsibility, and bootstraps is another manifestation of Harvey Graff’s “literacy myth,” the idea that literacy is linked to upward mobility, a myth that ignores the complex material, social, and economic factors that act as barriers to this supposed mobility. Furthermore, when literacy education is linked so closely with the development of citizenship the way it frequently is in prisons and the way Amy Wan found in her own case studies, “the burden of realizing citizenship remains on the individual rather than locating that burden within a larger system of inequality” (Wan 35). Ultimately, it functions as part of a larger discourse about individual “choice” that is frequently mobilized around issues of crime and punishment—you, incarcerated person, made “bad choices” that landed you in prison. I, person who has never been incarcerated, made “good choices.” Under this ideological umbrella, education becomes the solution to make up for your “bad choices,” never mind that many of my students grew up in neighborhoods ravaged by gentrification and subject to funding cuts for schools, where sometimes the best way to ensure that they were fed and clothed and housed meant joining a gang. The “second chance” that so many of these programs claim to provide is, for many, actually their *first* chance at education.

Jobs, reduced recidivism, cost savings to taxpayers, second chances—none of these is inherently negative. There is nothing wrong with making people more employable or keeping them from returning to prison. We *want* incarcerated people to stay out of the prison system. We *want* them to be able to financially support their families. And these descriptions were not written with radical activists in mind—they were written to be rhetorically persuasive to those who frequently have the power to make or break prison education programs: lawmakers and prison administrators. Cost savings, reduced recidivism, law and order—all of this is persuasive rhetoric in an era of mass incarceration, and a politics of presence requires that we acknowledge the power of the promises of prison education, especially for those who are incarcerated. The problem is that a focus on these factors presents a limited vision of citizenship for the formerly (or future formerly) incarcerated person. These programs seek to fill gaps in education and offer opportunities for incarcerated people, without acknowledging the systemic forces—poverty, racism, underfunded schools, homophobia, transphobia, etc.—that caused these gaps in education or the factors that render the incarcerated

students in these programs non-citizens in the first place.

My analysis of these programs provides just a brief snapshot of the larger landscape that, while not comprehensive, does indicate patterns that repeat themselves across the country. After all, there are programs not included in this study because they operate with no mission statement or public materials at all. Even for those that do publish public materials, they may say one thing and do another, emphasizing particular ideologies in their public materials that may or may not manifest themselves in their curriculum and operations. Without further investigation, we have no way of knowing if they are presenting accurate portraits of the work going on, or if they are used to closely guide the programs. Regardless, they *do* shape the public narratives and images of incarcerated people, particularly since many of these programs publicize their work not just on institutional websites, but in local newspapers, where the representations circulate in the communities that surround the prisons, influencing the cultural discourses about incarcerated people.

Some programs do challenge this common framework by merging discussions of individual responsibility with arguments about strengthening communities, fostering life-long learning, or diminishing the stereotypes of incarcerated people. Third Mid-Atlantic Prison Program, for example, positions their teachers explicitly as “dedicated reformers who share a vision of social justice,” who “also know that by expanding opportunities for college in prison, [they] reduce the rate of correctional failure, increase public safety, and in the long run reduce the costs of prison” to the taxpayers. These are gestures that challenge the normalized narratives of redeeming failed citizens through education, but this is done from within the same framework of individual responsibility. Most programs, however, do not acknowledge this tension between the limitations and possibilities of literacy education. A queer intervention—a queer perspective on prison education programs—can be sensitive to the most rhetorically persuasive arguments *and* begin to shift the conversation to the larger social forces that feed the prison-industrial complex in order to challenge the narratives we tell about incarcerated people. By maintaining an active tension between the politics of presence and the politics of critique, the systemic forces do not get ignored. A queer perspective can challenge the normalization of this particular vision of citizenship in these programs.

Toward A Queer(Er) Vision Of Prison Literacy Education: Constructing Alternate Visions Of Citizenship At The CSCE

In an essay appropriately titled “Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We’ve Got,” Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade issue an urgent call for readers to imagine a radically different world. Drawing on the radical lineage of previous queer activism, they ask the reader to imagine a world without prisons, a world where solutions to social problems do not rely so frequently on incarceration. Their essay urges readers to do this work “with everything [they’ve] got,” a project that is necessarily dispersed and fragmented in order to respond to the dispersed and fragmented organization of the PIC. This work, they argue, must begin by “speaking what we have not yet had the words to wish for,” by imagining radically different alternatives to a system that has permeated (often invisibly) many aspects of everyday life (43). Finding and

articulating these words to imagine new futures is a crucial project for literacy educators working on prison education projects.

The vision of citizenship that I have outlined in my case study, the one so prevalent in the guiding vales of prison education programs, has been normalized to the point of near invisibility: Take advantage of your “second chance” at education and make economic contributions to your community so you aren’t a burden on the good, law-abiding taxpayers. Literacy educators must challenge the ways these narratives construct a problematic image of the incarcerated (un)citizen because the representations of our work not only shape what we do but also perpetuate particular images of incarcerated people to the public. These representations have a material impact because they get re-inscribed over and over in the larger narratives that support mass incarceration. If we do not intervene, this discourse about the work of literacy inside prisons will reproduce itself unimpeded. Identifying and challenging the ideologies of citizenship that underwrite our prison education programs is one queer and critical act that allows us to compose new visions for our work so that we may begin “speaking what we have not yet had the words to wish for.” All across the country, important work is already underway in prison education programs, but if that work falls into a pattern of representing prison education and incarcerated students using bootstraps discourses, then we are shaping larger public perceptions of incarcerated people and placing limits on the work of the programs. However, when we challenge normative narratives of crime and punishment, we open up new possibilities for public representations of our work and for what the work of prison literacy programs can achieve. I end here with describing a few ways we can flip traditional scripts and offer one example of what this might look like in action.

What I offer here is, first and foremost, not a blueprint or a map. To argue for a stable and fixed set of guidelines or principles ignores local complexities and contextualized readings of resistant acts. Given the dispersed and fragmented organization and operations of the PIC, the work of negotiating between the politics of presence and the politics of critique must be contextual, constantly negotiated and renegotiated in ways that are provisional and always subject to constant revision. When taking into account the various stakeholders that influence the way we frame our programs, what looks like progress in one program is not in another. By negotiating local complexities and demands, literacy educators can push back against the problematic narratives that underwrite their programs, narratives that position incarcerated people solely as deviant citizens in need of redemption. We can critique these visions of citizenship by imagining our practices beyond the confines of individualism and by shifting our focus to practices that position incarcerated people as members of vibrant communities and as crucial components of a network of relationships.

Rather than offer a set of specific guidelines that may not address local rhetorical situations, I instead encourage literacy educators in prison programs to pay attention to three key areas of the representation of their work: the rationale and justification for the program, the stories we tell about our classrooms and our students, and the goals and projected outcomes of the program. When we provide a rationale to the many different audiences and stakeholders, we must find ways to push back against justifications for this work that are articulated solely in terms of the cost savings that can come from incarcerated people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps in order to (finally)

take advantage of the educational opportunities that will (finally) shape them into good citizens. When we tell stories of success, we must imagine new possibilities for how those stories might be composed. Finally, when we articulate the goals for our programs, we must frame them in ways that do not position incarcerated people as deviant citizens in need of redemption through education, but as people whose relationship to the PIC has been shaped by a web of systemic forces. In doing so, we can continue to do the imaginative work that will increase the vibrant possibilities for how we can compose our stories that represent our work back to the world.

My own efforts to imagine a different vision of literacy education in prisons began when I was recently appointed as the director of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education (CSCE) at California State University, San Bernardino. In the mid-1990s, the CSCE was developed as a space for research, professional development, and building prison education programs. In taking on this role, I have the opportunity to shape the future direction of the CSCE's mission. As I work to get new programs off the ground and build partnerships with other educators, I begin by thinking about how to make actionable what I call for in this article. How do we communicate differently about our work, and how might this framework shape the efforts on the ground in our programs? What follows is a copy of the guiding values and questions we have developed in order to shape and frame the work that takes place under the CSCE's umbrella.

Community Writing Collective in Prison⁴

Guiding Values

- We value the voices, experiences, interests, and knowledge of incarcerated people.
- We believe that education is a human right. Education needs to traverse borders and boundaries, including prison boundaries, and so we seek to foster literacy practices that enrich lives both inside and outside the prison gates.
- We are committed to an intersectional approach to literacy education, one that recognizes the complexity of each person's relationship to power and privilege.
- We believe learning is a lifelong process and should be open to all people regardless of sentence length and status in the criminal justice system.
- We believe that education is reciprocal, meaning that everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn.
- We believe that educators should be prepared for the particularities of teaching in the prison system and should engage in continual professional development and reflection on their work.

Key Questions:

- What can we learn from each other?
- Who are our audiences?

- What materials and methods best relate our concerns and ideas?
- What can we *hear* from inside a prison? What can we *say* from inside a prison? What conditions shape our writing and thinking?

These values and questions are part of a working document, subject to revision and re-evaluation as the CSCE builds its work and engages with diverse audiences. What I have aimed for here is a set of principles that represents a more complex view of literacy practices within the confines of the prison walls, one that situates literate activity as a way of pushing back against and surviving within institutions that have caused a great deal of harm.

In these guidelines, the curriculum is shaped by values similar to those we have for the literacy and composition education we strive to offer students in our traditional university classrooms. Incarcerated people are positioned as members of a community of learners, as people whose literacy practices are part of an interconnected web of relationships both inside and outside the prison. These guidelines recognize that literacy practices are shaped by a person's position in the world and their relationship to power—no value-neutral literacy education is possible. Literacy allows for reflection—not in the traditional sense of reflecting on the need for redemption or in the tradition of personal expressivism but as a mode of action toward social change, where students are asked to participate in community conversations. It encourages all participants to ask questions about power and privilege, about what we can say and who hears what we say, and what the consequences of both might be, which is especially important in an institution defined by communicative constraint (e.g., Cavallaro, et al.) and inevitable complicity on the part of volunteers (Curry and Jacobi). Ultimately, of course, I would hope that these workshops help incarcerated people achieve a number of goals traditionally associated with prison literacy programs—if released, I hope they will find good jobs to support themselves and their families, and I hope they will never, *ever* return to prison. But these guiding values do not limit us to these future-oriented outcomes, and through being open to all people, including lifers, they attempt to recognize a much broader vision of what literacy can do in the world.

The tensions around citizenship that are illuminated by prison literacy programs point toward the need to bring the *public representation* of our work in line with the values that shape the long-standing tradition of scholarship connecting literacy to power, privilege, and potential social action (Cushman; Royster). Previous scholarship has broadened our understanding of the ways that socially and politically marginalized groups use literacy education both to achieve larger goals *and* to acquire specific kinds of education previously denied to them (Kates; Royster; Sharer). In the context of the prison, we extend this work by seeing how difficult it is “to separate literacy from the US nation-state's equal investment in disciplining individuals into becoming normative and socially respectable citizens-subjects” (Pritchard 25) and the simultaneous impossibility of ever recognizing that ideal if you are an incarcerated (un)citizen.

My goal in developing these guiding values and this larger framework has been to suggest a way for literacy scholars and educators to intervene in prison education narratives and to revise the typi-

cal stories that get told about the connections between literacy and citizenship. Of course, taking responsibility for the narratives that we create is only a small portion of the larger problem that prisons present in our society. However, given the prominent place that literacy education has in the project of reform and punishment, this is an important site of intervention into a very complex problem. Social justice work around the PIC requires a diversity of tactics, multifarious acts of micro resistance that build a larger tapestry of work. My proposed approach and particular intervention is one such act of micro resistance, calling for literacy educators to participate in the project of un-making and un-doing the logics that have caused so much damage in the lives of so many people, the logics that have rendered a whole segment of our society disposable. Our field, in which so many are drawn to projects related to social justice, needs to contend with the difficult and uncomfortable questions that the prison generates for us.

As I sat down to write this conclusion, a short piece written by Elizabeth Gaynes, head of the Osborne Association, came across my social media newsfeed. Gaynes highlights many of the problems with the ways we talk about mass incarceration that I found in my research, and one line in particular struck me: “We can only see people as the worst thing they have ever done if we don’t *actually see them*” (n.p., emphasis mine). The millions of people who are incarcerated in our prisons are rendered invisible by the language we use to erase the multifaceted complexity of incarceration in this country. We continue to blame individual circumstances and promote individual stories of the redemption of formerly bad citizens into good, erasing the array of systemic factors that do far more to contribute to what we call mass incarceration. One crucial way that we can start to *see* incarcerated people is by reframing our work in strategic ways. I offer this queer literacy framework as but one of many entry points into a larger conversation, and it is my hope that other literacy educators will take up this framework and revise it and extend it as necessary. In order to queer our work, we must continue to ask—over and over again—the questions I propose, viewing our work as provisional and contingent in response to the complexity of the PIC. As I continue to pursue these questions, I am both guided by and haunted by a sentence from Thom Gehring, a long-time prison educator in California, a quote that shows me the enormous stakes of such work: “If we want to learn to be less brutal, we need to learn from those we have most brutalized.”

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NOTES

¹ Current estimates place their numbers at more than 200 programs across the country (“Prison Program”).

² The list contained 149 entries as of January 2017; it is occasionally updated when the authors find new program information.

³ Throughout my analysis, I call these programs “prison *education* programs” instead of “prison *literacy* programs” in order to accurately capture their multifaceted focus, but each program I selected has a literacy component as part of their programmatic work. “Literacy,” in this study, is defined as a range of practices that include reading, writing, speaking, and meaning making that play a role in the project of prison education.

⁴ I am grateful to Paul Beehler, Erie Leduc, and Ginger Walker for their feedback on the development of these values.

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“People Like Us”: Theorizing First-Generation College as a Marker of Difference

Chase Bollig Gonzaga University

KEYWORDS

first-generation college students; working-class; race; composition studies; literacy sponsorship

In a cultural moment marked by concerns about income inequality, economic mobility, and the need for a highly literate workforce, universities are framed in public discourse as essential to social mobility. As such, instructors in composition may observe greater numbers of first-generation college students in our classes (representing at least 30% of undergraduate enrollments nationally, with local variations based on institution, geography, and sticker price¹). And although critics of expanded college access perpetuate crisis rhetoric critiqued by scholars such as Tom Fox and Catherine Prendergast, national media regularly laud the achievements of first-generation college students during each graduation and college acceptance season.

Positioned at this tension of access and exclusivity, first-generation college (FGC) students experience challenges that distinguish them from continuing-generation peers. As the first in their families to graduate college, these students may lack networks or social capital that help navigate campus bureaucracies. These students also more likely experience academic challenges as a result of attending under-funded schools and taking fewer college preparation courses, and when they get to college, FGC students are more likely to depart without a degree (Redford and Hoyer 4).

While “first-generation college” as a descriptor gains salience among higher education commentariat, composition studies as a field has not yet theorized the term to the extent of other identity markers such as race and class. As a marker of difference, a way of characterizing an individual’s positioning relative to social margins and centers, “first-generation college” has often been used in composition demographically, to identify student need or profile research participants, or as a way of denoting multiple intersecting and overlapping positionalities that shape student behavior, needs, or literacies. The term itself, however, may be under-theorized in relation to other material, cultural, or personal identifiers that influence student literacies. To address this gap, this article focuses on the relationship between FGC as a marker of difference emerging from interactions with college representatives and students’ own accounts of class on campus.

By focusing on the relationship between FGC as a marker assigned to a student and their own accounts of lived experience of difference on campus, this article contributes to ongoing conversations in composition about the conditions of students’ marginalization and the influence of those conditions on how students see themselves (or are positioned by others) as literate subjects.

With the perennial return to class in the neoliberal moment, we also see a proliferation of class frameworks in composition studies. From taxonomies of class by James Thomas Zebroski and James Rushing Daniel to recent collections such as Genesee M. Carter and William H. Thelin's *Class in the Composition Classroom*, scholars continue to nuance our understanding of students' classed positionality. For example, Edie-Marie Roper and Mike Edwards's contribution to Carter and Thelin's collection argues that traditional working-class identifiers lack resonance with many students because these terms do not reflect today's economic realities. Rather, they argue that composition studies ought to embrace TRIO identifiers such as "low-income" and "first-generation college" to bring instructors' vocabulary in line with students' own identification practices. They write, "If class demands definitional investigation, one component of that investigation should be to examine how instructors talk about class in ways that are different from how students talk about class . . ." (105).

Although Roper and Edwards do not frame their work in these terms, the tension between markers of difference favored by students and those used by instructors may be read as a tension between self-constitution by students and the rhetorical force of others' constitutive rhetoric surrounding terms like "working-class," "first-generation college," and "low-income." This tension may be exacerbated by the history of the use of "first-generation college" and its function in determining eligibility for aid and scholarships. The term was developed by federal programs in the 1970s and 1980s "to identify non-financial obstacles to post-secondary education" (Auclair et al. 3). As the term has proliferated, definitions have also fluctuated: some organizations use FGC to denote parents without *any* college experience while others limit the term to students whose parents did not attain a four-year degree. Although first-generation students by either definition demonstrate lower educational outcomes (Smith), the inconsistent application of the term by researchers and administrators complicates efforts to theorize FGC as a marker of difference. Given these complications, we benefit from placing the term in the context of students' own rhetorics of difference, the practices and perspectives through which they navigate the conditions of their marginalization on campus.

As a marker with potential for organizing students for self-advocacy but which originates and primarily circulates within higher education administration, "first-generation college" warrants particular attention from scholars interested in the intersection between literacy and rhetoric, including what Ben Wetherbee identifies as the "complex, recursive relationship between . . . inwardly and outwardly directed discourses" that accompany self-constitution through literacy (107). Observing the significance of self-constitution in Jacqueline Royster's *Traces of a Stream*, he argues for literacy and rhetoric's shared interest in the ways "identity and competence form through literate practice" (107). With this, he identifies parallel inquiry in rhetorical theory, including in the work of Maurice Charland, who argues, as Wetherbee paraphrases, that "rhetorical texts not only persuade but first *constitute*, or hail, an audience and name its identity" (108). My article extends Wetherbee's argument for the value of self-constitution to understand literate identity, or who we imagine ourselves to be through and in relation to texts, to an investigation of how the FGC marker functions constitutively, including how students see themselves as FGC (or as low income, or not) or how they situate that identifier within a broader understanding of the conditions of their marginalization on campus.

Whereas Wetherbee's article invites us to observe processes of self-constitution, Kate Vieira's analysis of "the social consequences of literacy" for undocumented workers in the US highlights that literacy, for her research participants, is less a matter of identity than identification. In other words, Vieira's analysis demonstrates that literacy status may authorize, legitimize, or contain subjects through the practice of other-constitution, a way of marking and positioning individuals within social narratives of valuation and power. For Vieira's research participants—undocumented workers—the regulatory function of "papers" is apparent not only in labor laws but also in national debates about who "belongs" in the US. While the stakes and contexts are very different for undocumented workers and FGC students, we might extend Vieira's interest in bureaucratic constitution to reframe the conversation away from literate identities and instead toward *literate positionality*, an exploration of the ways that literate status intersects with or amplifies wider conditions of marginalization to authorize, regulate, or enable rhetorical practice.

In this article, I argue that while traditional frameworks for the study of classed phenomena continue to demonstrate explanatory power, the bureaucratic and rhetorical nature of "first-generation college" as a marker necessitates a constitutive rhetorical approach to the term, an investigation of how the use of the term articulates a positionality, situates it within local and cultural narratives, and assigns it value. As a marker of literate positionality, FGC mediates relationships between institutional literacy sponsors and individuals whose material and cultural circumstances situate them at the margins of that institution. In other words, whereas we might trace literate identity to the relationship between self and community, when thinking about literate positionality, we must examine the relationship between individuals and authorizing discourses, whether institutional and bureaucratic or social. Framing "first-generation college" in these terms, specifically linking literate standing, institutional practices, and rhetorical possibilities, helps differentiate from the social, cultural, or other markers of difference with which "first-generation college" status may intersect.

Because the FGC marker also operates within and alongside traditional markers of difference, to better understand how students are positioned by local and cultural narratives and how they adapt to or resist this positioning, in this article I investigate how students have been hailed or constituted into literate positionalities that shape their encounters with campus representatives and peers. Toward this end, I first consider how the demographic and institutional functions of the FGC marker trouble attempts to theorize this term in composition studies. I then consider a case study in FGC identification, exploring the affordances of viewing this practice through a constitutive rhetorical framework. Recognizing that class relations themselves may be understood in part as an effect of self- and other-constitution in literate contexts, this article shifts from case study analysis to an overview of a range of FGC student accounts of class on campus. These research participants' rhetorics of difference parallel class theory in composition, locating the influence of class prior to or outside an encounter, across rhetorical environments as an indelible influence on individuals, or within a rhetorical encounter, erased or amplified by student performance. Ultimately, the ways that students locate the constitutive influence of class may shape our understanding of FGC literate positionality as we observe how students respond to or make sense of their experiences of marginalization on campus.

Research Methods

The analysis in this article draws on interviews with seventeen FGC students and alumni. This interview data derives from an IRB-approved study about first-generation college student experiences and rhetorics of difference that investigated the functions of identification and belonging in on-campus programming at a single large, midwestern state university, including a college preparation and bridge program, orientation event programming, and scholarship residence halls for low-income high-achievers. Each research participant took part in one semi-structured thirty- to sixty-minute face-to-face or phone interview or focus group, conducted between January and May 2014. Interviews included questions about participants' experiences as underrepresented and/or first-generation college students and the support they received from the university, their peers, and their families. Because research participants were solicited on campus and through an alumni listserv, graduation dates ranged from the late 1960s to the 2010s. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms. I analyzed these interviews using inductive coding methods guided by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin; Charmaz; Saldaña), which entails simultaneous data collection and analysis in order to allow analytical frameworks to emerge from the close observation of data.

In terms of limitations of this study, students and alumni participating in this research represent a significant range of experiences across time, including macroeconomic shifts in the region, the university's transformation from open to selective admissions, and attempts by the institution to recruit and retain a greater number of diverse students. Attempts to generalize across their lived experiences of class and their identification as FGC (or indifference to this identification) necessarily risk essentializing in ways that may reify structures or conditions of marginalization (e.g., conflating high-achieving FGC and at-risk FGC, obscuring the significance of participants' racial identities). My analysis in this article also benefits from the demographic and cultural overlap between social class and FGC status, but this overlap may also elide significant markers of difference (and composition theories) relevant to FGC status, including ethnic and racial difference, home language and multilingual learner status, immigration status, and disability. Additionally, while research participants for this project may share many characteristics with other FGC students, these students' experiences may not be representative of FGC experiences for "non-traditional," commuter, or community-college students. Although all research participants identified as first-generation college students, the salience of this term varied widely based on participants' enrollment dates, affiliation with cohort-building FGC campus programming, and their other identity markers.

First-Generation College As A Marker Of Difference

Before taking up a case study in FGC identification, I want to consider characteristics of the FGC marker that distinguish it from other identity markers. As I note above, the historical origin of the term and its inconsistent application complicate efforts to theorize FGC in composition. At the same time, lower academic outcomes for these students have necessitated institutional interventions in a range of contexts. In a literature review for the National Center for Education Statistics, Jeremy

Redford and Kathleen Mulvaney Hoyer, citing Lauff and Ingels, note that among a representative sample of 2002 high school sophomores, only "17 percent of students who had parents with no postsecondary experience" graduated with at least a Bachelor's degree by 2012 (1). Lee Ward and colleagues observe that FGC students across demographics are more likely to "arrive at college campuses at risk academically" and that these students "have lower educational aspirations than other college-bound students" (17). While academic outcomes for FGC students invite institutional responses, FGC enrollments have also grown "anywhere from 22 percent to 47 percent," depending on which definition researchers employ (Ward et al. 10). In response to these patterns, institutions that recruit or enroll large numbers of FGC students (and many seeking to diversify their enrollments) have developed a range of responses targeting FGC literate positionality. These programs are largely organized around academic preparation and college counseling, promoting literacy sponsorship and social capital through mentoring, addressing students' needs for community and affective support or "belonging," and offering material and scholarship support (see Ward et al. for an overview of ten different institutional responses to first-generation college enrollments).² For many individuals affiliated with these programs, their status as FGC becomes a primary means of identifying with and navigating campus environments.

While FGC students' academic challenges and campus programming for FGC students may suggest or promote a cohesive FGC identification, diverse racial demographics complicate efforts to theorize FGC as literate identity or category of experience. For example, Victor Saenz and colleagues report that while students of color are more likely to be FGC students, white (non-Hispanic) students "represent a large majority of all entering first-generation college students due to their numerical majority within the entering college student population" (11). However, Robert Toutkoushian, lead researcher on a 2015 paper, is quoted in *Inside Higher Education* claiming that "[t]he fastest growing demographic is Hispanics and Latinos and they tend to have lower educational levels than non-Hispanics and non-Latinos," so we may anticipate further demographic changes among the FGC population (Smith). Given the diversity of FGC students, as we in composition begin to more fully theorize FGC identification, we should be cognizant of rhetoric that positions FGC metonymically, as in the case of rhetoric that conflates "working class" and "white working class" positionality. Rather, we should embrace a framework that seeks to understand FGC positionality as intersectional and as situated within local and institutional conditions.

Additionally, financial and educational barriers to entry may distort enrollments by faster-growing demographic groups, demonstrating the need to view FGC as a bureaucratic as well as cultural marker. In this vein, Saenz *et al.* observe that the rate of enrollment of African American FGC students has decreased faster than the number of African Americans earning a college degree, suggesting that "it is very probable that first-generation African American students are having more difficulty gaining access to four-year institutions, a supposition which can also be made for Hispanic first-generation students" (12). This situation is further complicated by these students' own application and enrollment behaviors. As Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery observe, FGC students are more likely to enroll at less selective institutions closer to home, even when academic performance would get them into more selective institutions (2). In other words, the racial composition of first-

generation college students in our own classes not only reflects demographic trends but also the admissions policies and recruitment efforts of our institutions.

In this respect, theorizing the FGC marker in composition entails understanding not only national and regional enrollment patterns but also how our own institutions identify, recruit, and otherwise support individuals *as FGC students*. Within my own research sample, for example, two significant initiatives shape participants' sense of their literate positionality on campus. Research participants who were residents of cooperative scholarship dorms benefitted from academic and student-life programming that promoted group cohesion and retention among residents. Many other research participants were active in a pre-college prep program that targeted urban and African American students and which emerged from affirmative action assessments and recruitment efforts of the 1980s. While both initiatives served FGC populations, rhetorics emerging from their distinct missions promoted different conversations about race and belonging on campus. As such, while participants' understanding of difference on campus was shaped by their affiliation with campus programs, their perspectives on FGC experience varied based on their programs' focuses.

In this way, the FGC marker also operates within institutional, cultural, and political narratives concerning difference and access in higher education. For example, while she does not address FGC identification specifically, Stephanie L. Kerschbaum argues that "By using neoliberal discourses to assign value to diversity and by obscuring the local and contextualized nature of many intergroup and cross-cultural interactions, such diversity discourses make it difficult to identify or alter systemic practices that legitimate oppression and disenfranchisement" (39). Similarly, Jennifer Clary-Lemon challenges reliance on terms such as "difference" or "diverse" as a trope in her analysis of racial ideologies of composition. Given the substantial overlap between FGC student populations and the racial groups Clary-Lemon advocates for, her critique of the pattern of decentering race (and centering the systems of marginalization) (W8) represents a compelling critique of the increasing reliance on "first-generation college" identification. The same "lack of theoretical clarity" in talking about race in composition haunts the FGC marker of difference, which as an umbrella term both describes and obscures intersectional marginalization. For example, specifically racialized experiences of difference on campus (e.g., being the only person in class who "looks like you") may become transposed onto a general FGC experience. The effect of this is to euphemize and individualize institutional racism while obscuring the racialized campus experience or conflating class and race experiences.

FGC Identification As Rhetorical Resource

As this review of the definitions, demographics, and implications of FGC enrollments suggests, the FGC marker may resist framing that privileges "literate identity." This marker serves institutional functions, predicting and mitigating student need, while also offering academically "at risk" students a lens through which they can view the conditions of their marginalization. Moreover, as an inclusive marker of difference, FGC may serve as a rhetorical resource for institutions engaging with historically marginalized populations.

The same qualities that might displace other markers of difference also create potential for

organizing among students who might be marginalized by the “traditional” college experience. In some instances, the FGC marker itself becomes a tool for promoting belonging by encouraging students to make connections with other historically marginalized groups. This organizing potential has gained attention in national media such as *The New York Times* (Pappano) and nationally distributed reports from Michigan Public Radio (Guerra). Likewise, campus programs celebrating FGC identification promote affective connections among students and identification across

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institutions. In other words, as a marker mediating relationships with institutional literacy sponsors, “first-generation college” situates these individuals within narratives of value (e.g., promoting “diversity” on campus)

and identification and identity (e.g., “We are first!” or “FGC Unite!”) while also extending the conditions of “belonging” on campus.

Although FGC solidarity campaigns draw on social movement rhetorics, the FGC marker lacks salience among non-college student populations and among many students on campus. This issue figures significantly into the success of interventions premised on community, affective support, and belonging. In his research on FGC salience, Mark P. Orbe argues:

First, the saliency of FGC student status in the overall construction of identity varied greatly [among research participants]. The centrality of FGC student identity was largely influenced by situational context (home versus school) and type of campus (selective, public, community college, or university). Second[,] FGC student status appeared to be more salient when it intersected with other aspects of a person’s co-cultural identity, especially those based on race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and gender. . . . Third, and finally, FGC students appear to lack any sense of community with other groups of FGC students. (144)

Orbe’s work provides a valuable scaffold for our understanding of literate identities of FGC students, but ultimately, Orbe argues, “Unlike most aspects of cultural identity . . . FGC student status does not exist within the context of a larger community with which individuals can identify” (145). This insight qualifies Roper and Edwards’s call for a shift from explicit class identifiers to first-generation college. In order for FGC identification to gain traction as a meaningful resource for mobilizing class conscious or marginalized student efforts, the identifier needs a push for salience as well as a sense of community to buoy that effort.

While many research participants demonstrated patterns of identification with FGC status consistent with Orbe’s observations, one participant in particular demonstrates the potential for FGC identification as a rhetorical resource in encounters with institutional literacy sponsors. Da’vante Rawlings, an African-American student, participated in a program for low-income, minority, and FGC students that focused on equipping participants with academic and affective strategies for succeeding in college. Through this program, he made connections with other FGC students as well

as university staff and faculty. Based on these experiences, Rawlings leveraged his FGC identification as a resource to bridge difference with institutional representatives and other students. From his perspective, FGC students face not only academic challenges but also challenges balancing family commitments and affective experiences of leaving home for college. In his framing of these issues, Rawlings posits that institutional representatives' responsiveness depends on their own positionality:

My problem, was that as a senior, I had a brother who just got arrested. [. . .] So I'm having to, being the oldest of seven, having to step up and take on all these responsibilities that may not be [common]—and that's not saying that someone outside of the first-generation class can't talk about that [. . .] I'm sure they can find people. But sometimes those people aren't readily available to sit down and be like, "Oh, you're a first-generation college student too? Let's sit down. (Rawlings)

Importantly, in this account FGC status serves as a primary means by which Rawlings advocates for himself and others. The elision with the language of social class, his framing of the issue in terms of "the first-generation class," projects a coherent FGC experience that seems dependent on metaphoric identification, a sense that institutional representatives must be "like" the populations they serve. He elaborates that shared FGC status helps institutional representatives see that his experience is not the same as the "typical" student's:

I'm trying to do well [. . .] But I have problems. And not just me but other students. We all have problems [. . .] that are unique, that some people may just never had to deal with. [. . .] Problems that you don't really consider sometimes, I feel like, depending on what background you came from. (Rawlings)

This statement reiterates for Rawlings the significance of one's positionality in not only authorizing particular kinds of literacy sponsorship ("find[ing] people" who can "talk about" FGC experience) but also in making FGC marginalization intelligible to institutional representatives. With this in mind, the problem of FGC salience not only affects how students themselves identify on campus but also whether and to what extent college advocates and literacy sponsors are able to tailor their advice to specific student needs.

While these initial statements of FGC need seem to advance a fixed and coherent notion of FGC identification, further statements by Rawlings nuance this framing and foreground the constitutive element contained of this student's rhetoric of difference. Specifically, he advances "perspective" as a way to describe the effect of being constituted as FGC in conversation with institutional representatives and college advocates. "Perspective" acknowledges the constraining influence of material difference in social interactions while also recognizing the transformative aspects of college experience. The first time that Rawlings brings up the notion of perspective in our interview, the term is embedded in a discussion of how college "will grow you and groom you." He describes meetings with program literacy sponsors: "So when you can sit down and have those conversations, [. . .] it really changes your perspective; it changes how you view college. You know, again, meeting people who were first-generation like us, having conversations with them about the difficulty, [. . .] the feelings of isolation" (Rawlings). In this account, shared FGC identification fosters trust and positions the institutional representative as an advocate, as someone who understands his problems.

Rawlings's use of "perspective" resonates with theories of literacy sponsorship, calling attention to the specifically constitutive element in these relationships. Moreover, his acknowledgement of personal transformation through relationships with sponsors (who "grow you and groom you") similarly highlights the interplay between self-constitution and other-constitution. Rawlings's "perspective" also suggests awareness and navigation of positionality that is rooted not in stable or fixed markers—not strictly a function of his socio-economic standing or racial background—but rather in sustained and continued relationships with institutional representatives who change his view of what college means, who challenge alienating narratives and who situate him within narratives of possibility.

In Rawlings's use of the term, FGC as literate positionality not only functions demographically, to explain why some students struggle, but also serves as a rhetorical resource, as a means of building solidarity. In addition to the examples above, where institutional representatives "find someone" who shares Rawlings's "perspective," he also describes an FGC evangelism that extends to activities on campus. For example,

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the FGC student organization he leads aims for visibility on campus, "so that that perspective that we have—our lifestyle—can be shared throughout the campus and the world" (Rawlings). By suggesting that the resistance that FGC students face on campus stems from others' lack of familiarity with their experience, he appears to posit a form of consciousness-building across difference as a response to deterministic forces of class and race. Viewing the FGC marker as constitutive helps us understand how Rawlings leverages this identification to bridge cultural differences among staff and students.

Rawlings's account demonstrates how one student leverages the FGC identifier in negotiation with campus officials and representatives. By connecting Rawlings with FGC staff, the institution employs the identifier constitutively but inclusively—not merely marking Rawlings as marginalized but showing through personal connection what it means or looks like to be FGC. Not only, then, does this practice serve to position him as a viable subject on campus, to counter narratives of who "belongs" on campus, but it also prepares Rawlings to advocate for himself and others by promoting his "perspective."

While Rawlings's account highlights the rhetorical possibility of FGC identification, his case is also exceptional. As such, our understanding of the FGC marker would benefit from a broader range of student voices. However, many research participants articulated rhetorics of difference not explicitly tied to the FGC identifier. In light of this discrepancy, the following sections contextualize FGC literate positionality by examining how research participants characterize their lived experience of difference on campus, including how these accounts locate the constitutive function of class phenomena prior to, across, or within rhetorical encounters. If the FGC marker's significance to institutions concerns its value in identifying "at risk" students and, as Rawlings shows, providing language for making sense of marginalization on campus, then attention to students' own accounts

of difference helps us understand how FGC literate positionality is also situated within broader landscapes of class on campus.

Locating Difference Prior To The Rhetorical Encounter

Many research participants articulate experiences that identify class phenomena as bounded, fixed, and determined prior to rhetorical encounters with others. Because these accounts focus on class awareness as an effect of geography or culture or as an effect of moving from more homogeneous to more diverse environments, their rhetorics of difference rely on mobility, adaptation, or assimilation. These assumptions situate FGC literate positionality within cultural narratives of personal and economic transformation and necessitate interventions premised on adaptation to norms of (middle class) college culture. However, as a review of class-conscious composition scholarship suggests, these strategies may also represent a burden on historically marginalized students.

Informants' accounts of the geography of class difference illustrate how place itself serves as a class marker. For example, a white scholarship dorm alum describes attending a private Catholic high school on scholarship. He notes that because many of the activities were organized according to which parish a student attended, that student's class status was readily apparent (Price). One African American student describes how even identifying her hometown or neighborhood marks her as poor (Lamb). The emphasis on the geography of class among these informants is unsurprising, as many of these individuals come from deindustrialized areas of the state. Moreover, many alumni lived through deindustrialization, observing strikes and layoffs, changing economies of farming, and the challenges of finding work.

Informed by these geographies of class, many participants described social mobility through education as leaving town for better opportunities. Some participants saw college as "a way out" (Baker), a chance "to write your own ticket" (Murray, Mathis) or to get out of town (Rawlings). One jokes, "I used to kid people I learned the 3 R's in school: Reading, Writing, and Route 23," a reference to the highway leading out of town and towards the state's biggest university (Baker). Similarly, many describe going to college to avoid hardship and hard labor. Nick Price, a scholarship dorm resident, says it plainly, "My motivation was to never work at the steel mill," a sentiment echoed by other scholarship dorm residents. These rhetorics of mobility through education are available to the informants who characterize class difference as an effect of bounded material conditions. They can "get out" of the lower classes by relocating to college.

When class awareness emerges as an effect of shifting environments, research participants observe a need to adapt to the new circumstances, sometimes with some difficulty. For example, Leah Evans, a scholarship dorm participant, describes becoming aware of her social class in junior high, when she changed school districts. She explains,

I honestly as a child don't think that we recognized that we were poor because we were pretty much the same as everyone else around us, and that, then, didn't mean anything [. . .] So it wasn't until I went to junior high where we went mixed with kids from the city that we saw bigger differences in what—in how people lived and maybe what people had.

So we kind of noticed that we didn't have much. (Evans)

Similarly, Rawlings describes how class and racial difference represented a significant obstacle in his transition from his racially (and class) homogeneous community in a former steel town to a predominantly white university. He observes, "People talking my whole life: you're at a disadvantage, you're at a disadvantage, you're at a disadvantage. Now for once in my life, I finally saw it. Wow. Yeah, just from a number standpoint, I could see what they mean" (Rawlings). These accounts call attention to the challenge posed by mobility and adaptation as rhetorical strategies by highlighting how experiences of class difference are necessarily intersectional, deeply entwined with race and culture.

Similarly, some rural white research participants observed that home culture was an obstacle to class mobility through education. Edgar Griffith, a white Appalachian scholarship dorm alum, describes seeing his high school friends preparing for college applications. Despite his own participation in high-achievement courses, Griffith did not initially plan to attend college. When he expressed his ambivalence about this situation to his father, Griffith's father responded, "People like us don't go to college." While Griffith ended up attending and graduating from college, he describes how resistance to higher education seems to be part of his family's culture, so that he is the only person in his extended family—including nieces and nephews—to have ever gone to college. Similarly, Maria Wilkins, a white Appalachian alum, describes how she came from "a family that nobody would have ever thought that people would go to college." Her choice to attend college, especially as a woman, was perceived as an act of rebellion. "And people not really valuing education, in the way that, you know . . . It just didn't make sense at all to my dad. Why in the world would you want to do this, when you . . . when you have a good, you know, a good job possibility" (Wilkins). Taken together, these accounts of class awareness and social mobility all frame class phenomena as relatively stable, tied to material conditions such as geographies of work or entrenched racial and cultural difference. This framing also means that for many research participants, one's class background may authorize or constrain ways of seeing. At the same time, these informants' accounts of resisting the determining force of class—by leaving town, for example—demonstrate their sense of agency through literacy.

Research participants' accounts emphasizing adaptation and mobility share with composition pedagogy a framing of college literacies as transformative. Composition theory that locates class influence prior to rhetorical encounters, as growing out of material or cultural difference, frequently frames pedagogy in terms of analyzing systems of oppression and teaching students to challenge or adapt to the conditions of marginalization. Often rooted in economic or sociological theories (such as Marx, Durkheim, or Bourdieu), these frameworks tend to privilege adaptation to existing structures and norms (e.g., Bartholomae, Bloom, O'Dair) or to abstract the conditions of marginalization and analyze or critique their representations in media and culture (e.g., Daniel).

According to this framing, students may be more or less active participants in processes of subjection and recognition; however, the agency for that transformation is located in non-negotiable norms and standards (or distributions of power). Perhaps most iconically, in "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae's descriptions of privileged (classed) discourses and his pedagogical response relies on a subject produced through submission or assimilation to these discourses. He

writes that the “student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse . . . ; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language . . . He must learn to speak our language” (61). According to this notion of academic discourse, to write successfully a student must “see herself within a privileged discourse, one that already includes and excludes groups of readers. She must be either equal to or more powerful than those she would address. The writing, then, must somehow transform the political and social relationships” in the classroom (64-65). Similarly, in more recent scholarship, Lynn Bloom advocates for first-year writing as a site where students learn middle-class values, and Sharon O’Dair argues that counter-hegemonic pedagogies undermine the value of exposure (and, implicitly, assimilation) to a “superior cultural world” world (600). In terms of implications for FGC literate positionality, composition theory working from these premises crafts interventions that reinforce narratives of transformation through literacy and which locate agency in the ability to align with and adapt to cultural norms.

Locating Difference Across Rhetorical Environments

This section continues the investigation of FGC literate positionality by turning to working-class identity to consider how class markers inhere to individuals as they traverse rhetorical environments. This framework is valuable for understanding FGC literate positionality because although composition theory of class identity proliferates, among research participants for this project class identity seems less firmly fixed, less coherent as a way to understand difference on campus. This tension, echoing Roper and Edwards’s insights on students’ class identities, suggests the need for a framework for FGC experience that recognizes identity markers may be displaced, devalued, or minimized for rhetorical effect. Moreover, these accounts challenge notions of essential FGC experience at the same time as they affirm students’ investments in shared experience.

Although few participants spoke of their class background in terms of an *identity* that persists across rhetorical environments or time, many advanced a rhetoric of “sameness” or connection with other students participating in programs targeting low-income and first-generation college students. One informant, describing the challenges he faced in his transition to college, spoke of feeling alienated in the dorms because he was “an outdoors person” and his room had no windows (Harris). He also described being more at ease among the students in the agriculture program (located in an area geographically removed from “main campus” but still part of the flagship campus), people he described as keeping their hair cut short, “people that you felt comfortable with because of their background” (Harris). Another informant drew on her family’s blue-collar character as particularly valuable, providing a strong “practical” and “common sense” perspective, even if that same perspective was sometimes a point of tension between her and her family (Wilkins). In these accounts, rural or working-class values are framed as assets for these students’ success in college.

For many alumni who had participated in scholarship dorms, collective identification with other residents was a resource in their college success. Importantly, many suggested that the strength of this identification derived from a quality of “sameness” among residents, an effect of living and working among other low-income scholarship students. Of the thirteen interviews with scholarship dorm

alumni, nine participants describe how being in a program where residents were “in the same boat” meant that they experienced less stigma on campus. Many informants also explain that presuming common backgrounds served to erase difference among residents. Evans notes, “I mean we all knew we all were poor, or at least being eligible to be there meant something. And so there was pretty much a given that nobody’s got a lot of money to work with. So, we didn’t talk about it too much” (Evans). In other words, this homogeneous environment meant that they spent less time talking about class as a political or personal issue.

While collective identification was an important resource for many scholarship dorm residents, this collective identification may also have obscured more subtle differences among residents’ class experiences. For example, whenever a research participant described dorm residents’ economic status as reflecting “sameness,” that individual projected their own class identification onto the group. For example, Boyd Moreno describes dorm residents as “just like me”: “middle class guys from middle class families.” Another describes how “you make friends with people who are like you” (Parker). And another notes that scholarship dorm made the difference for him because “everyone was like me” (Griffith). For many, this sameness served as a resource because, as Griffith argues, “anything that you can identify with other people in a similar circumstance is a good thing” (Baker). While many of the predominantly white alumni of the scholarship dorms laud the value of group identification premised on “sameness,” this rhetoric of sameness is often not readily available to informants whose class experience of college is inextricable from their experience as racial minorities on campus. Moreover, because the scholarship dorms are residential programs, many research participants describe the programs as their primary social space. Members of other FGC retention programs in my study, on the other hand, are not assigned a common space and must instead seek each other out, constraining the rhetorical resources available to those students.

As these accounts suggest, any understanding of FGC literate positionality would likely be incomplete without considering the significance or value of metaphoric identification, a point raised saliently in Rawlings’s account of using identification to negotiate difference with institutional representatives and further reinforced in the scholarship dorm residents’ assertion of the value of “sameness.” At the same time, the lack of strong association among these research participants with traditional class identifiers or even FGC status suggests the limits of frameworks premised on stable or coherent identities. This ambivalence invites nuance of our understanding of literacy and identity, particularly when describing processes by which literate positionality is assigned but resisted. This problem also reiterates the importance of Roper and Edwards’s analysis: if our models for classed identity lack salience or explanatory power for students, then we may need to revisit our shared assumptions.

While composition studies’ perspectives on class continue to develop, pedagogies that challenge assimilationist premises often draw on identity, empowerment, and self-discovery, framing class as inhering to an individual across rhetorical environments. For example, Nick Tingle argues that academic discourses erase an authentic working-class self, that “making the move into university discourse is not simply a matter of ‘inventing’ but also of uprooting” (222). This sense that appropriation of and by academic discourse may be psychic violence also manifests in scholarship

that identifies the sociological ambivalence experienced by working-class students (Lucas). When understood in these terms, classed identities become a site of tension as working-class students “struggle to pass for the right kind of students” in middle-class university environments, fostering a “fear of being unmasked as undeserving” (Mack 56).

Scholars working from this premise seek to counter erasure or devaluation of historically marginalized student experiences through resistant pedagogies that investigate self and community through personal narrative, ethnographic research studies, or other ways of privileging experiential knowledge. Such assignments and pedagogies affirm working-class identities by lending coherence to them as objects of study. Widely advocated among scholar-teachers of working-class students (see Beech, Lindquist, Mack, Robillard), these pedagogies find a powerful voice in scholarship by Nancy Mack. She argues, “If they are to survive at the university, working-class students must construct a position that is not discounted as underprepared or limited to an acceptable imitation of the elite original but a respected, working-class-academic identity” (54). By framing the challenge of working-class learning as one of alienation, assimilation, and identity, this scholarship promotes an understanding of classed identity as a relatively stable, highly salient category for many working-class students.

Like those frameworks that situate class prior to the rhetorical encounter, approaches that suggest class identity persists across rhetorical environments may risk constructing monolithic working-class experiences. Roper and Edwards, cited above, challenge “working class” identity premised on industrial-era divisions of labor (105). Aaron Barlow and Patrick Corbett, in the same collection, point out that even within “working-class” populations, we may observe significant diversity (61). Barlow and Corbett resist the tendency to use “class” in ways that displace or obscure other markers, arguing that “[m]uch traditional scholarship of working-class identity fails to consider how the powerful working-class subjectivities our students bring into the FYC classroom are *hidden subjectivities* without easy correlatives in the scholarship of identity” (65). In thinking about FGC literate positionality, class theories that posit a coherent identity across rhetorical environments may similarly obscure the relational, dynamic, and adaptive elements of class identification.

Locating Difference Within Rhetorical Encounters

Research participants’ accounts of leveraging identification (rather than identity) may suggest an underlying perspective that frames class not as a fixed category determined prior to a rhetorical encounter but rather as an aggregate of behaviors and practices operating within and constitutive of such encounters. This section explores the affordances of understanding students’ classed experiences on campus as structured by encounters with literacy sponsors and others. This framework is valuable for understanding FGC literate positionality because this perspective may serve as scaffolding for understanding how students who do not use the FGC identifier may yet advance rhetorics of difference that resonate with a constitutive rhetorical framework of literate positionality. Foregrounding the shifting and relational aspects of class, such a perspective advances a dynamic notion of class and creates space for investigating how “first-generation college” identification may be situated within

larger discussions of students' rhetorics of difference.

In addition to identifying class phenomena as fixed circumstances or articulating nascent class consciousness grounded in metaphorical identification or "sameness," many research participants advanced rhetorics of difference that suggest an understanding of class phenomena as an aggregate of behaviors and practices operating within and constituted by a rhetorical encounter. Rhetorical practices associated with this framework include disidentifying with their low-income background and accounts of class "passing" that suggest for many, class could be erased by context or behaviors. Another tactic for students operating within this rhetoric of difference included suggesting that college attendance itself erases class difference. For example, Julia Lamb, a student participating in a "bridge" program for FGC students, notes that she grew up poor but that it does not really matter because "we're all here for the same thing." Juan Dominguez, a first-generation student who is unaffiliated with retention programs that many other informants participated in, describes how his status as a college student complicates his class identification:

Class. What class would I be? Let's see. I mean, I'm a college student, so hopefully that has room to change. My family, you can say they're poor, but I hope I'm hopefully going to make a change. So right now, I'm—I don't know how exactly to define myself, because I'm guessing college is the time where you can start to define yourself and see where you go.

While these students' material situations certainly position them as working class by many definitions, the notion of a working-class *identity* is not meaningful to these students, in part because they are invested in the transformative class function of higher education.

Similarly, some informants suggested that, under the right circumstances, a savvy performance can erase class difference. For example, Nick Price, a scholarship dorm alum, recounts learning to erase class difference in high school. Frustrated at being marked by class, he talks about his strategies for coping: "If you were an athlete, if you were good at school, if you had a nice personality, you begin to blend. But that was a hard thing to break through, and it still bothered me at times, that people looked at you as inferior. It was a great life lesson for me" (Price). Dan Little, also a white scholarship dorm resident, similarly describes how his class identity was not a sticking point for social encounters, testifying that "[it] just never dawned on me that I was in any way lower class. I mean, I, you know, I asked out the best-looking girls from high school." Having learned the cultural codes that signal status, these individuals are able to "blend" by imitation. However, these informants' racial positioning, gender, and sexuality also affect the ease with which they are able to "blend."

We might observe the limitations of performances of class passing for black students in my study, many of whom characterize their experience on a predominantly white campus in terms of alienation. Sadie Burton describes being asked to be the representative of the black race for her classes but otherwise, in classes or campus organizations, "to keep [her] diversity over there." Similarly, Olivia Bailey describes feeling hyper-visible in the dorms and being asked to be quiet when she and other black students were watching TV, even if another group were being louder. In both of these instances, we might observe the limits to performance—regardless of how well these students perform middle-class values, or how the university pays lip service to diversity, these students are still confronted with others' prejudicial gaze.

For some students, performing “good student” subjectivity also means compartmentalizing the stress they feel about what may be happening at home. For example, Rawlings describes how his family’s legal problems felt like they followed him to college, including being kicked out of his home by his mother, his stepfather’s and brother’s arrests, and an impending custody battle over his younger siblings. He says, “and I finally get here, and it’s just like now I’m supposed to pretty much turn all that—you know, flip that switch off and turn on this one, you know, be a student” (Rawlings). Here again we see a limit to performance, in this instance, located in how he must juggle competing home and school subjectivities.

Just as some students’ accounts demonstrate the need to perform or “blend” in middle class contexts on campus, some describe being expected to perform economic need, to justify their inclusion in the need-based scholarship programs or even among friends. Some scholarship dorm alumni point out that they were not allowed to have cars on campus because car ownership signaled a financial standing in contradiction with economic need at the time they were residents. And among current students, one woman describes how owning branded electronics (an iPad or “Beats by Dre” headphones) means that her friends call her out for being “rich.” She explains, when people ask where her nice things come from, “I either say my dad got it for me, it was a gift, or I actually bought it for myself. And, it’s not like I’m rich. There are nine people in my house, so we do struggle throughout the month. But I work for everything that I get” (Bailey). This frustration not only speaks to campus dynamics but also gestures towards a larger cultural problematic of policing poor folks’ property. Owning nice things, even if she worked and saved for them, runs counter to how she is expected to perform financial need.

These accounts not only demonstrate that processes of self-definition figure prominently in research participants’ navigation of difference on campus but also that these performances are constrained by material circumstance and subject to or contained within larger cultural narratives (e.g., what it means to be “poor” or being a “good student” when home commitments undermine that performance). In composition studies, Min-Zhan Lu’s pedagogy of repositioning and Donna LeCourt’s performative theory of class difference represent two models that suggest class phenomena is situated within a rhetorical encounter. These approaches address the field’s tendency to obscure how working-class and academic discourses are situated within dynamic economic and material conditions. Lu, advancing a pedagogy of class “that recognizes that it is always under construction, always being negotiated, and always felt and enacted in relation to other classes, discourses, and power structures,” invites compositionists to consider how class relationships are “produced *in our classrooms*” through the privileging of academic discourse and the marginalization of non-academic and working-class discourses (45). Foregrounding the “range of competing discourses” (18) students negotiate on campus, Lu’s pedagogy of repositioning calls for students to observe and respond to “dissonance in and between discourses without finally treating such dissonance as either a problem to be eliminated or a harmonious polyphony to be accepted but rather as a means to problematize the dominance of the hegemonic” (21).

Whereas Lu’s pedagogy of repositioning focuses on the role hegemonic academic discourse plays in reinscribing class difference, LeCourt argues that we should view “class as both economically

structured and culturally fluid” (45). Drawing on class theory by Michael Zweig, she writes that “we need a perspective on class that recognizes that it is always under construction, always being negotiated, and always felt and enacted in relation to other classes, discourses, and power structures” (45). Taken in conversation with student accounts here, we might observe that viewing class as positioning or performance, and seeing these performances as intentional, motivated, and persuasive, means taking note of how working-class students amplify or diminish their class identification on campus. In terms of FGC literate positionality, then, we need a framework that recognizes both the significance of self-definition and cultural performance while also accounting for constraining forces of material difference.

Conclusion

This article has sought to initiate a conversation about FGC as a marker of difference, observing its potential value to institutions and students while also placing the concept in the context of students’ broader experiences of difference—especially class difference—on campus. Working from the premise that individuals’ relationships with literacy and literacy sponsors intersects with but exceeds the relationship between self and community often characterized by “identity,” this article has explored the interplay between self-constitution through literacy—including observing student rhetorics of difference foregrounding mobility or self-definition through performance—and forces of other-constitution.

As a marker designating a relationship between students and institutions, and as a term that may be gaining salience but which is easily displaced by other markers of difference, FGC demonstrates rhetorical potential in interactions with institutional representatives, as Rawlings’s case study illustrates. The term’s “big tent” construction encourages FGC students to seek connections across difference, whether with institutional representatives who model commitments to institutional literacies or with students who are “in the same boat.” The potential for metaphoric identification, for students to find people who are “like” them, figures prominently in understanding how FGC literate positionality functions rhetorically among this study’s research participants.

While not necessarily a marker of economic need, research participants’ accounts of being the first in their family to attend college demonstrates how many of them grapple with classed expectations and phenomena. Although these classed phenomena exceed the constitutive function of the FGC marker (e.g., Harris’s challenge as an outdoors person on an urban campus or Griffith’s and Wilkins’s family resistance to college), they also reflect the ways that FGC literate positionality is intersectional, overdetermined, and subject to rhetorical processes that condition the ways students see themselves on campus. In this respect, understanding FGC literate positionality necessitates engagement with constitutive functions of classed phenomena.

The FGC marker—in overlapping with but also troubling the models for class influence—also encourages us to recognize that one social consequence of literacy is the constitutive process of naming, positioning, and regulating literate subjects. For the FGC marker, the rhetorical potential of this identifier depends on the circumstances in which one is identified as FGC; in the absence

of a constituting encounter, “first-generation college” will be displaced by more salient markers of difference or by a normative narrative of “the college experience.”

This article has explored the complexities facing attempts to reflexively engage with FGC identification and has sought to enrich our understanding of FGC as a literate positionality by examining the rhetorics of difference that inform some students’ strategies for navigating classed campus spaces. By placing these experiences in conversation with models for class in composition, we may become cognizant of the gaps between our models and our students’ models for understanding difference on campus. This awareness may serve us as we adapt our approaches to changing economic and social contexts for student literacies.

NOTES

¹See Cataldi, et al. (2018) for recent reports on enrollment trends among FGC students. See Hoxby and Avery (2013) for analysis of FGC college choice.

²Deborah Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19).

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Child Prodigies Exploring the World: How Homeschooled Students Narrate their Literacy in the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives

Alicia A. McCartney Baylor University

KEYWORDS

homeschooling; child prodigy narrative; literacy narrative;
Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN); active double-voiced discourse

Approximately 1.8 million students in the United States are homeschooled, according to 2012 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (Redford et al.). This group, which represents 3.4 percent of all K-12 students in the US, is growing increasingly more diverse, making it difficult to describe the homeschooling experience monolithically (Grady, “Measuring”). Researchers have only begun to examine how these homeschooled students reflect on their own literacy development, especially after these students enter college. From the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), I gather and analyze eighteen literacy narratives of currently and formerly homeschooled students. This article explores how these students reflect on their own developing literacies, especially as they contrast their experiences with those of their traditionally-schooled peers.

These narratives hold value for college educators, who are increasingly receiving formerly homeschooled students into their classrooms. As Phillip P. Marzluf notes, these students may hold literacy values and assumptions that conflict with those of their instructors (49). By examining these narratives, I intend to add more voices to the emerging conversation about homeschooling and literacy. Additionally, these narratives highlight the diversity of homeschooling experiences in ways that challenge common assumptions about the homeschooling community.

As homeschooled students enter college in increasing numbers, researchers have observed that prevalent myths and stereotypes about homeschooling and homeschoolers persist, though homeschooling is becoming increasingly common. In 1985, only sixteen percent of Americans believed homeschooling was a good idea (Lines 83). Although this approval rating has steadily climbed over time, Cynthia Drenovsky and Isaiah Cohen observe that homeschoolers are often assumed to be “backward,” “on the fringe,” or extremely conservative, and they note that strong pro- or anti-homeschooling biases in the literature skew data towards either this stereotyped picture or an overly positive one. Michael Romanowski highlights four common “myths” about homeschooling: that homeschooled children are “social misfits,” that their educational experiences occur in isolation, that they have difficulty being admitted to colleges, and “that most people homeschool only for religious reasons” (125-128). Though these myths persist, Romanowski argues that they do not

reflect the majority of homeschooled children or homeschooling practices.

Romanowski's final myth—that most homeschool only for religious or ideological reasons—finds its source in part from Jane Van Galen's 1988 binary model, which examines the reasons people homeschool. Van Galen divides homeschoolers into two categories: ideologues (those who disagree primarily with the public school system's ideology and wish to teach their own values) and pedagogues (those who disagree primarily with the public school system's educational methods or quality and believe they can provide their children a better education). Yet Kariane Marie Nemer argues that Van Galen's binary division between ideologues and pedagogues does not reflect the multiple, complex, and often overlapping motives of homeschooling parents. Nemer proposes an alternative to Van Galen's typology: a four-quadrant model that plots individuals' motivations on an X-Y axis to better represent ranges of overlapping ideological and pedagogical motives instead of artificially dividing them (9).

Because parents homeschool for different reasons, they also engage in a variety of literacy practices. Jennifer Altieri examines practices within a Catholic homeschooling group via parental interviews. She observes that the parents emphasize reading aloud, and incorporate media such as newspapers and magazines “in order to make reading relevant” (111). Literacy practices include real-life scenarios such as taking educational trips, “taking notes on the sermon at mass, keeping dialogue journals, and writing letters,” including letters to elected representatives to encourage policy change (112). Courtney Wooten finds that non-specialist homeschooling parents “engage in an imaginative construction of college writing” as they attempt to prepare their students for college (1).

The main societal measure of homeschooling literacy currently appears to be how homeschooled students perform once they enter college. Multiple studies have suggested that formerly homeschooled students who attend college equal or surpass their peers academically, emotionally, and socially. In a study of 408 students at a small Catholic university, Marc Snyder notes that the 129 formerly homeschooled students in the cohort had higher ACT and SAT scores and overall first-year GPAs. Drenovsky and Cohen observe that homeschooling stereotypes had no measurable effect on the self-esteem of the homeschooled students in their study. These homeschooled students were also less depressed and viewed their college experience more positively than did their traditionally-educated peers. Jeanine SanClemente's study of eleven formerly homeschooled female college students finds that they felt on par with their peers academically and socially. Though these women felt as if they had been “raised in a different culture,” they were more confident in their academic ability, believed they could be more self-directed in school, and felt closer to their families (SanClemente 4). Likewise, Karl Payton and Joyce Scott find that homeschooled students are no more likely than their traditionally-schooled peers to have social anxiety or communication apprehension.

However, homeschooling literacy practices—especially those practices of conservative, religious, ideologically-motivated homeschoolers—have also given rise to occasional concern. Phillip P. Marzluf argues that these students are less likely to engage with the ideas they encounter in college because they have practiced “frontier literacy” and because homeschooling involves “retreating from public institutions and constructing literacy and social boundaries of their own” as a flight from “vernacular voices” and “an objection to the social responsibilities mandated by the public

sphere” (“Literacy” 75). These concerns, especially because they directly affect instructors of college composition, merit further exploration.

As Nemer has observed, much more research still needs to be conducted on homeschooling and literacy, and this research needs to take into account “the rich and fascinating range that presently exists among homeschoolers” (4-5). With the exception of Marzluf, authors focus primarily on reasons for homeschooling, homeschoolers’ academic preparation for college, or their literacy practices while still homeschooling. There is a need for more research that explores how college students look back on their homeschooling literacy practices once they have entered a traditional school environment. Using the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) as a source, my current research seeks to fill this gap by examining how currently and formerly homeschooled students understand and narrate their homeschooled literacy acquisition.

To provide material for this study, I retrieved a body of literacy narratives from the DALN that reflect a diverse cross-section of homeschooling experiences. Accounting for keyword variants, I submitted a query in the database for “home school” OR homeschool OR homeschooled OR home-schooled OR homeschooling OR “home schooling” OR home-schooling. The search retrieved fifty results, though not all were relevant. I excluded false positives such as narratives whose authors had supplied the metadata tags “home” and “school” but were not homeschooled. I also excluded narratives by homeschooling parent-teachers, since my focus for this study is the literacy experiences of homeschooled students. I then limited the pool of narratives further by selecting only narratives that explicitly reflect on the authors’ homeschooling experiences. For the purposes of this study, I have accepted authors’ decisions to label their experiences as primarily “homeschooling”—even if they record participating in some activities associated with traditional schooling, such as public school athletics or community college classes, or if the experiences they describe seem to more closely align with accepted definitions of unschooling.¹

The body of eighteen remaining narratives includes a variety of formats: written texts, video and audio interviews, self-recorded video, and audio narratives. A majority of these narratives (fourteen) are written by women, with three written by men and one by an author whose gender is unknown. Most of these authors were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s; the oldest student who provided her age was born in 1979, and the youngest was born in 1999.

It is important to remember in any study of the DALN that the uploaded narratives are shaped by rhetorical context. Krista Bryson has noted that the DALN’s design unintentionally reinforces traditional representations of literacy as reading/writing. As a potential counter-bias, some of the narratives I examined appear to have been completed as assignments for college courses focused on literacy. Some even include names of assigning instructors or reference class texts and terms such as Deborah Brandt’s “literacy sponsors.” This suggests that at least some of these students may be producing the kind of “academically correct” literacy narrative that they imagine their professors will want to read, or that they are using tools and concepts from literacy studies to interpret their own experiences.

Bryson urges researchers using the DALN to remember that “representations of culture and identity can be analyzed for what they reveal about individual and cultural perceptions in one

narrative moment” and argues that “the construction of literacy narratives is further complicated by the fact that narrators are not only self- and culturally-positioned . . . they are positioned by their audience and the context in which their stories are elicited” (256). This complication can be coupled with the fact that the individualized nature of homeschooling makes it difficult to generalize about literacy experiences in the same way that one might generalize about public school or private school literacy practices and experiences. Additionally, it may not be possible to draw broad conclusions about homeschoolers’ contributions to the DALN because this study may exclude some narratives if their authors did not tag them with the searched keywords.

Because it is impossible to generalize from this small sample of a diverse population, I treat these narratives as “curious texts” (Hart 78) and apply a generative criticism model: coding the artifacts by noting interesting features and grouping them to allow similarities, patterns, and themes to emerge. The process of generative criticism, outlined by Sonja Foss, allows the texts themselves to suggest multiple interpretive frameworks, such as Bakhtin’s “active double-voicing” and the “child prodigy” narrative structure (411). These frameworks reveal several patterns that both reinforce and expand the current homeschooling literature. I find that these homeschooled students highlight a diverse network of “literacy sponsors”—which Deborah Brandt defines as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy” (19). These literacy sponsors, both inside and outside narrators’ families, reflect, expand, and challenge traditional ideas of where and how literacy is acquired.

Additionally, homeschoolers recall participating in a wide variety of literacy practices that both respond to and redefine those of the “traditional” classroom. Many writers frame their narratives using the “child prodigy” literacy structure, as identified and defined by Alexander and Paterson. Finally, four narratives reveal problems that can occur in homeschooling, such as a parent’s perceived lack of authority, and, in two cases, a tendency to trap students in unhealthy family environments. Despite these exceptions, most narratives reveal their authors’ family networks as places of vibrant literary sponsorship; and a few students narrate the “pedagogic violence” that may occur when they transition from these warm family environments into traditional secondary schools (Worsham 121).

Overall, I find that as participants in a non-dominant mode of education, these homeschoolers feel the need either to justify or to repudiate their literacy acquisition process against the dominant group. The authors of these narratives engage in an act of rhetorical positioning that Bakhtin describes as “active double-voiced discourse,” as they anticipate and preempt criticism from an imagined, hidden interlocutor (Baxter 32). In her summary and exposition of Bakhtin’s concept of “active double-voicing,” Judith Baxter notes that its defining characteristic is “a hostile or *antagonistic* intention as a reaction to the ‘threat potential’ of other people’s words . . . a linguistic shield, a form of speaker protection against the anticipated criticism of others” (32). Many narratives reveal the underlying sense that these students’ “homeschooling literacy” is illegitimate, on the margins, vulnerable to attack. Even after they have entered college, many students with positive homeschooling experiences still feel the need to defend the legitimacy of their literacy.

The World As Classroom: Literacy Outside The Box

The narratives I selected reveal that homeschoolers both participate in and redefine traditional classroom methods of literacy instruction. One of the most common traditional sites for literacy is the public library, mentioned in four different narratives. The library emerges as a key literacy sponsor in these narratives. It provides homeschooled students access to curriculum resources and also allows self-directed exploration.

Homeschoolers in these narratives recall reading with parents, surrounding themselves with library books, and taking frequent library trips. The library was an almost-daily destination for Stephen Carradini, who would complete math and science lessons at home in the morning and spend his afternoons reading self-selected books at the public library. He recalls being fascinated by cultures and geography and choosing to read books about countries like Moldova and Congo. Those who could visit the library less frequently often recount bringing home the maximum number of books they were allowed to check out. Muslimah Muhammad recalls that she and her siblings would share the fruits of these maxed-out library trips: “At the time, it was 50 books, max. So we’d get the 50 books, and we’d have them all read, switched back and forth, so there’s so many books that I’ve read that I can’t really . . . I couldn’t possibly give you an estimation of how many books I’ve read.” The library allowed Muhammad to access more books than her family would have been able to purchase. Library books also created a sense of public property rather than individual ownership: these books were meant to be shared among members of her family rather than simply belonging to one sibling.

Libraries may have particularly attracted these homeschoolers because they are “third spaces” that offer authority structures similar to traditional classrooms but with fewer restrictions. James K. Elmborg observes that libraries are not ideologically neutral spaces; rather, both library and classroom are “dominated spaces” with “educators’ conceptual structures and rules defining acceptable and right activities” (347). While the rules of these dominated spaces give many who enter a sense of “security and comfort,” Elmborg observes that these spaces can also embody a “spirit of freedom and adventure”: “Indeed, for many users the extreme orderliness of the library provides a thin veneer over an otherwise seemingly endless and sometimes chaotic context for discovery of the unknown” (347; 346).² Elmborg argues that libraries can be viewed in two ways: as either “a highly articulated and settled place, with librarians as enforcers of the codes and orders of behavior, or an indeterminate and open space with the potential for adventures and surprises. The distinction exists in the mind of the user and the librarians” (346). The homeschoolers in this study who mention libraries tend to view them as indeterminate, open spaces with potential for adventure rather than structured or restricted spaces. The fifty-book restriction at Muhammad’s library, for example, paradoxically encouraged her and her siblings to routinely take pride in maximizing the number of books they checked out, and it potentially caused them to make more frequent trips. Another student, Carlee Mabrey, focuses on the library as a sacred repository of knowledge: “After all, since church was sacred because it contained one book written by an all-knowing being, then certainly a library was sacred because it contained thousands of books written by people who were, although not all-knowing, at least a lot smarter than I was.” Mabrey’s narrative reveals that she used the library as a site for wonder

and exploration and that it became a key sponsor in her self-directed literacy adventure.

Though most of the students identify their backgrounds as middle class, the library also provided a free or cheap resource to students growing up in poverty. Amanda Joy, who narrates her experiences of homeschooling in Appalachia, found that the library was often the only sponsor of her literacy:

Books were my life. The local library often ran basement book sales – hardcover 50¢, paperback 25¢. I would fill cardboard boxes with new-to-me books – autobiographies, cast-off text books, novels, and the little old ladies who ran the sale would chuckle as they tallied up the totals. I had the freedom to explore whatever topic was of interest to me and I found myself writing reports on microeconomic theories, herbology and Anne Frank. We may not have had electricity or indoor plumbing, but we had books and it was in those books that I could escape the poverty of my surroundings.

Without the traditional structures of a classroom, these homeschoolers enter the library with a more open, exploratory mindset; the topics of Joy's reading, for example, centered around whatever interested her. As I discuss later, Joy's experience of homeschooling differs from many of these homeschoolers' narratives because of her family's poverty and the largely unsupervised nature of her homeschooling experience. Though she is the only author to mention her low-income background, she is also the only person who recalls buying books from a library book sale rather than checking them out for free. These library purchases gave her a sense of ownership and control over her own literacy. Joy—like Mabrey, Carradini, and Muhammad—records gaining agency from the library's literacy resources.

In addition to library visits, another traditional classroom literacy activity that homeschoolers often appropriate and re-define is the field trip. As opposed to the traditional classroom field trip, which happens rarely, homeschoolers recount more frequent, spontaneous, and varied field trip experiences. Homeschoolers often used these field trips as chances to interact with other homeschooling families or groups, and students distinctly remember these hands-on learning experiences.

Dallas Reynolds recounts field trips to museums and historical sites as a key sponsor in her literacy. "I became literate by interacting with my environment," she says, describing how she and her mother studied the American Civil War by visiting historic battlefields. Like Reynolds, Megan Cardenas describes taking field trips with other homeschoolers once a month. One of these, a day-long space museum trip, required her to "apply" for the job she wanted on the "spaceship":

Of course, I wanted to be the captain. I wrote a long essay explaining why I should be the captain and how I was a natural born leader, keep in mind I was only 8. I got the position and my duties included going around the museum with my co-captain and making sure that everything was running smoothly. I had a checklist and a big appetite for information.

I went around to all the stations and made sure everyone was on schedule.

This literacy activity gave her a sense of responsibility and also a sense that writing could bring real-life rewards.

In addition to the space museum field trip, Cardenas recalls learning history via a field trip to the Ohio Historical Society. On this trip, learning was a whole-body experience: "You dressed

up in clothing only from that period and packed a lunch that kids in that time would traditionally eat. We were taught in the school that was located in the historical village. We used chalk and chalk boards to learn and sat at the old desks.” Using her body to interact with a space allowed Cardenas to imaginatively participate in constructing history. Sitting in the historic school building, writing with individual chalk slates, she began to imagine what literacy was like for people of the past, and this memory stayed with her into college.

While many homeschoolers took field trips to traditional literacy sites (such as museums or historic landmarks), some took a more nontraditional approach. Lynn Simmons notes that an activity as routine as visiting a playground could become a field trip. During these trips, she learned social and writing skills by observing other people and describing them: “Everything was some kind of learning environment . . . we would go to like a playground, a park, and we would watch people doing their daily routines, and we would take notes of it.” The outside world offered limitless possibilities for learning; Komysa Hassan recalls taking her Audubon field guides outside her home to practice identifying wildlife. Field trips are broadly defined because any space can be a site for literacy development.

In addition to field trips and library visits, students recount creative ways their home educators would gamify literacy learning. For Julia Fleming, literacy learning came as part of a video game: her parents would allow her to play her brother’s Nintendo’s “Animal Crossing” as a reward, and she learned to read partly because the animals would talk in “lengthy paragraphs.” Lynn Simmons’ mom would assign her classic movies, such as *My Fair Lady*, in order to teach her literary terms such

“By re-shaping practices associated with the traditional classroom, homeschoolers move beyond the boundaries of both home and school. . . . Though many of these homeschoolers remember participating in some traditional classroom experiences, such as field trips or library trips, they also recall redefining these traditional practices in ways that fit their personalities and learning styles. Homeschooled students who recall creative learning practices are more likely to record positive experiences with literacy than those who recall learning from textbooks, worksheets, or flashcards.”

as climax and plot. She recalls taking notes on these movies and writing papers about them from fifth to seventh grade. For Simmons, there were no strictly defined boundaries between school time and free time; instead, their family would always be discussing what they had learned. Simmons’ “recess” was watching the educational television show *Reading Rainbow* during lunch, and her mom would quiz her and her siblings, “even driving the car on the way to McDonalds.” Elisa Johnson recounts enjoying spelling bee competitions with her older siblings. Her mother

would give a spelling word to her older siblings first, and if they both missed the word, Johnson would often be able to figure it out as the third sibling in line. All three authors associate reading and

writing literacy with play rather than punishment; literacy becomes a game (and sometimes a sibling competition), rather than a chore.

By re-shaping practices associated with the traditional classroom, these homeschoolers move beyond the boundaries of both home and school. Hassan writes, “The world was my classroom, everything and everyone was a study subject The biggest contribution of homeschooling to my learning was the number of ways things could be studied, and thus necessarily were.” Hassan’s description of the world as her classroom reflects the way that many of these homeschooled students perceive their homeschooling literacy practices. Though many of these homeschoolers remember participating in some traditional classroom experiences, such as field trips or library trips, they also recall redefining these traditional practices in ways that fit their personalities and learning styles. Homeschooled students who recall creative learning practices are more likely to record positive experiences with literacy than those who recall learning from textbooks, worksheets, or flashcards.³

Even as homeschooled students take pleasure in redefining traditional literacy practices, their non-traditional literacy practices could open them up to criticism, especially from mainstream educators, more traditional family members, or even people in the community who are skeptical of homeschooling’s viability as an educational option. Is a child people-watching at the park or watching movies—as Lynn Simmons did—truly gaining literacy, compared to a child who is learning in a public school environment? Anticipating potential criticism from an imagined audience, homeschoolers in these narratives often feel the need to engage in active double-voicing to defend themselves.

For example, Komysha Hassan responds to stereotypes about her learning practices by describing how her parents exceeded the standards they were legally required to meet: “Parents of home-schooled children who submitted their paperwork for school board or teacher review and took voluntary term tests, took pains to make sure that the body of work superseded that required by the public school system; and therefore it always did by lengths (case and point: a 56 page fictional story for my 11th grade English). It was hard work sometimes.” Her references to her parents’ efforts serve to justify the education they were providing her, and she assumes that many of her homeschooling peers are doing the same. Her use of the plural generic “parents of home-schooled children,” indicates that she feels the need to defend homeschooling itself as a legitimate method of acquiring literacy. She imagines herself as part of a group of homeschoolers, all of whom are taking similar pains to excel. Perhaps this need to defend homeschoolers as a group—generalized from her own experiences—comes from an underlying sense that any attack on homeschooling delegitimizes her own literacy acquisition.

Some of these students respond to an imaginary critical audience by using their or their parents’ success in traditional higher education—college—as a benchmark. Lynn Simmons, who recounts learning via people-watching and movies, writes that her mother, who was both a home educator and a college English professor, was a hard grader. Simmons considered it an achievement to earn a B on essays she wrote for her mom during her homeschooled high school experience. Thanks to her homeschooling education, Simmons states that she routinely received As in later college composition courses. Likewise, Megan Cardenas (who recounts her application to be spaceship captain) believes that college writing is too easy for her because of her homeschooling background. She asserts her

mom's suitability as an educator because she "majored in education in college and was fully equipped to teach her five kids." The words "fully equipped" anticipate criticism and respond preemptively.

Judith Baxter has observed that active double-voicing can indicate "linguistic insecurity," but also that it can serve as "a linguistic sword, a weapon in the battle of words to gain ascendancy" (32). Thus, active double-voicing paradoxically reveals both insecurity and expertise, as writers carefully use language to situate themselves in positions of control over what they perceive as a "difficult and threatening discursive encounter" (Baxter 32). In these narratives, active double-voicing reveals that the authors view themselves as rhetors on the margins and use their literacy narratives to speak back to dominant discourses about where, and how, literacy develops best.

Homeschoolers As Self-Identified Child Prodigies

Another of the common rhetorical strategies some students use to defend their education is the child prodigy narrative. Alexander describes the child prodigy narrative as one in which the subject "excels at reading and writing from an early age and is put on display for others to see his or her brilliance and intellectual acumen; [this type of narrative] includes tales of prolific reading, trips to the library or bookstore, abundant exposure to literate texts, and being read to by parents" (615). She notes that authors of child prodigy narratives depict their literacy acquisition process as "exceptional," and that these literacy narratives often highlight "joyful moments when reading and writing were fun, personal, and social" (619). The child prodigy narrative is a subset of the success narrative: one's success later in life results from one's early, recognized success with literacy activities. Of the eighteen narratives this study examines, six can be clearly categorized as "child prodigy" narratives.⁴

Sometimes these child prodigy narratives are merely stated, and other times they are more developed. Jeremiah Harbour, born in 1998 and homeschooled from first through third grade, attributes his success in public high school to his early homeschool literacy acquisition. He writes, "Reading and writing are simple concepts that define part of who I am. Being taught at the very early age of four and five, I was easily understanding every concept later on." Dallas Reynolds, who began reading at age 2, similarly argues that her early success with reading gives her an advantage over her college classmates: "Now I read everything I can," she says. "In a lot of English classes I've already read everything on the syllabus."

A longer example appears in the written narrative of Bethany Frantsen, born in 1997 and attending St. Olaf College at the time her narrative was published. Frantsen's narrative primarily focuses on her practice of journaling, which she sees as an opportunity to break free from the performative nature of literacy. She introduces her narrative by stating, "Throughout my academic life, unless I have been given specific instructions, I have always asked the question 'What do you want from me? What do you want me to do?' I aim to please." Frantsen contrasts structured and performative academic writing—writing to please others—with the free nature of her personal writing, writing only to please herself. In the final paragraph of her narrative, she discusses the "special" nature of her early acquisition of reading literacy:

Learning to read at home from my parents was something special that I realize that I now took for granted. I learned to read when I was 4 years old, by looking at the words of the books my mom or dad would read to me every night. My mind was captivated by the letters that turned themselves into words, and from there the possibilities were endless. I was dying to get to use these tools myself. These early memories of learning to read really matter, because it was where I began to develop my literacy. Little did I know then of how far I would come. And still, little do I know now of how much more I have to learn.

Though she “took for granted” her home-taught reading skills, she retrospectively constructs this experience as “special,” implicitly in contrast to her college peers. Her literacy acquisition was social, warm, and exciting, and those positive associations with both reading and writing continue into college. She acknowledges that she has more to learn, but implies confidence in her ability to do so because of her literacy skills.

The “child prodigy” narrative is associated not only with reading, but also with writing. Hassan recalls growing interested in writing when, at age six, she watched the O. J. Simpson trial on television. She writes, “An avid reader already, and not so occasional writer, this case was a goldmine of literary stimulation with its dizzying display of articulated arguments and flamboyant oratory flourishes; my perspective was permanently changed as a writer and reader Words were not simply recordings of observations or expressions of feelings but they were statements about events, conclusions and arguments, powerful enough to send a man to the gallows or set him free.” From the age of five, she wrote “legal letters” to her family and received both praise and critique: “They were always very receptive to it; encouraging me to continue and challenging me to be better.” As she grew older, she would write reports on various news stories for her family: “For every story I had a report, multiple ones even, which my parents would have me read aloud to the family, and they were always accorded generous praise.” The praise of her parents reinforced her position as a child prodigy and encouraged the continued development of her literacy skills.

In addition to support and praise, Hassan’s child prodigy narrative recounts competition with her older siblings. From ages 6 to 10, she would argue heatedly with them about current events. Literacy became a way for her to prove herself, to win. She recalls, “I was determined to validate my opinions not just to my parents but to my siblings as well. I needed to make an argument and bolster that argument with evidence, precedent. Make it irrefutable, unarguable. This was how I could compete and prove myself. This was how to win a case.” These early literacy displays were positive and communal, and key were the social recognition, rivalry, and reinforcement from her family’s literacy sponsorship.

An element of competition also appears in Carlee Mabrey’s literacy narrative, entitled, “Me vs. Everyone: Why Being an English Major Makes Me Smarter Than Everyone Else.” A college student at Ohio State University, Mabrey attributes her early literacy acquisition to her desire to compete with her cousin. She writes,

For instance, one of my earliest memories involves how my inability to read made me feel stupider and inadequate in comparison to my cousin. I had to have been about three years old when my cousin Tiffany took me and my siblings to a high school basketball game

and treated us to a few pieces of candy at the concession stand. I remember very clearly watching my cousin tell me what kinds of candy were available to me by reading them off a sign at the stand, and the fact that she could tell what they were offering and I could not bugged me I remember looking at what I now recognize as words on the sign and thinking “how does she know what that says? Why don’t I know what that says?” Even though I was over ten years younger than Tiffany, I still thought it was wrong that she should have control over knowing what kind of candy I could pick because she had a means of understanding that I didn’t. This memory imprinted the idea in my mind that reading was the key to understanding things that other people knew, so I learned at a young age to value the knowledge that reading had to offer.

Just as Hassan became a better writer at a young age to win arguments with her siblings, Mabrey learned to read in order to gain equal footing, to gain power. She explains,

I’ve always liked [to] be smart because when I know more than everyone around me, I have the upper hand in our interactions and therefore have no reason to feel shy, be scared of or feel intimidated by anyone else. When I know that I’m smarter than someone, I’m in control of the situation Maybe this makes me a competitive control freak with a superiority complex, but at this point I’ve just learned to accept that about myself.

Although Mabrey writes that she is aiming to be smarter than everyone else, the example that she provides reveals her at a position of inequity with her cousin, seeking a position of equality. In an example of active double-voicing, Mabrey’s narrative anticipates a reader’s potential criticism of her

“These students employ the child prodigy narrative to justify their literacy, positioning their accounts against real or imagined interlocutors who may believe their literacy acquisition is illegitimate because it deviated from the mainstream educational model.

These findings may challenge the research of Drenovsky and Cohen, who argue that stereotypes do not affect homeschoolers’ self-esteem. The level of justification that these six students found rhetorically necessary suggests that they perceive themselves as criticized in college by fellow traditionally-educated students or by their professors.”

attempt to gain power via literacy acquisition (“Maybe this makes me a competitive control freak with a superiority complex”) and preempts this criticism by owning the label: “I’ve just learned to accept that about myself.” She also defends her decision to major in English against an imaginary interlocutor whom she imagines to, “sneer and condescendingly claim that English is an artsy-fartsy major that has no real application.” Active double-voicing becomes a strategy for her to exert power over her own literacy narrative and its reception, even as she reveals that it was homeschooling that led her to love reading and

realize “the whole world was open to me.”

What does the subject gain by positioning themselves as “special” because of their early literacy acquisition? Stephanie Paterson writes that the child prodigy narrative is “a (perhaps) defensive, protective way to position the self against questioning or critique” (103). She observes, “Sometimes I think these narratives are written in a slightly defensive posture by students who are a little intimidated by the first-year composition class. By presenting a flawless self they attempt to posit at least a textual version of the self that is untouchable and invincible, or at the very least—powerful” (Paterson 118). I suggest that many students in this sample who employ the child prodigy narrative use it to justify their literacy, positioning their accounts against real or imagined interlocutors who may believe their literacy acquisition is illegitimate because it deviated from the mainstream educational model.

This study’s findings may challenge the research of Drenovsky and Cohen, who argue that stereotypes do not affect homeschoolers’ self-esteem. The level of justification that these six students found rhetorically necessary suggests that they may perceive or anticipate criticism in college from fellow traditionally-educated students or professors. Cardenas, for example, begins her narrative by defending herself: “Homeschooled: This word often scares people and is often associated with the phrase socially awkward.” This introduction indicates that she is aware of the ways that others categorize her and that she feels the need to address audience preconceptions before she can share a valid literacy experience. The perceived pressure to defend oneself increases students’ perceived need to perform well in college literacy activities and to classify their childhood performance as exceptional.

Literacy As Escape: Negative Experiences With Homeschooling

So far, a majority of the authors in this study defend homeschooling as a positive literacy experience. However, several authors associate their homeschooling literacy acquisition with unpleasant or harmful memories. In four of the eighteen narratives in this study, homeschooling exacerbated difficult family dynamics. Two of these students recall literacy as their only chance to escape from isolating and abusive homes.⁵

One barrier to homeschooling literacy arises when a student perceives their home educator as lacking authority or unworthy of respect. This disrespect causes the student to refuse to read or write, and their negative attitudes toward their parents transfer to hatred of reading and writing. One homeschooled high school student of unspecified gender, writing under the pseudonym “BabyPrikichi,” recounts failing to complete writing assignments when accountable only to their mother because she is not a “real teacher.” The student constantly fought with their mother over not completing schoolwork. However, in tenth grade, the student’s mother enrolled them in a writing class with other homeschooled students. In the classroom, the student’s motivation improved because the classroom’s authority structures and requirements became non-negotiable: “All of a sudden, I no longer had a choice. I had to write! I could not manipulate my mom any longer, and because I had a real teacher, I no longer had the option to not turn in papers. If I failed to turn in my work, I would

get a zero and fail the class. So, because I was proud of my grades, I swallowed the pill, and did my best.” The negative, extrinsic motivation—avoiding failure—is implicitly absent in this student’s homeschooling setting. The writing teacher’s perceived power to assign nonmanipulable grades inspires a respect that the student does not extend to their parent. In other words, BabyPrikichi looks to external authority structures to validate their literacy. The student does of course have the option of not submitting papers, but their own fear of failure (and the ways they associate grades with personal pride and identity) prevents them from even considering challenging this external authority. Though this student initially needs extrinsic motivation to begin writing, their fear of failure gives way to intrinsic motivation. After the class, BabyPrikichi and friends from the class begin to engage in spontaneous, ungraded literacy activities, independently creating a blog to publish their persuasive writing.

Tyler Eppley’s literacy narrative is not uniformly negative toward homeschooling, sibling competition, or his homeschooling parents, but it relates some difficulties, doubts, and frustrations. Like BabyPrikichi, Eppley’s narrative suggests some doubt about his mother’s chosen educational methods. However, unlike BabyPrikichi, who feels demotivated by a lack of structure, Eppley felt defeated by rigid requirements. He writes, “Home schooling was always difficult and frustrating for me as a child.” According to him, it was simpler for his mother to teach one grade, so she advanced him to the same grade as his brother, who was seventeen months older. Yet Eppley struggled, while his brother succeeded. Not feeling able to compete with his brother “caused me to turn my back on reading,” and reading began to feel like punishment. To encourage him to read faster, his mother would set a timer and make him complete comprehension questions; he felt like a failure when he could not finish the comprehension questions in time, and his brother left him far behind. Even though he “wanted to learn and remain in the same grade” as his brother and avoids directly blaming his mother, Eppley implicitly criticizes her methods: selecting “dreaded reading and comprehension books,” reading off “tiresome and repetitive” vowel flashcards, and creating a reading competition that caused him “discomfort and embarrassment.” While sibling rivalry can be a positive literacy sponsor (as it is for Muhammad, Johnson, and Hassan), those students also recall occasionally being able to win against their older siblings. Eppley’s feelings of failure in sibling competition, on the other hand, seem to stem from a sense of always being unequally matched.

In contrast, Eppley found writing freeing. He mentions the support of “the discourse community of my family” as a literacy sponsor alongside “dictionary.com” and “the synonyms application available in Microsoft Word.” Writing for him carries none of the same negative associations as reading, but rather gives him a “sense of release.” When this same feeling of freedom carries over into his reading, his hatred subsides into a more “relaxed dislike.” He recalls self-selecting and enjoying *The Lord of the Rings* during his homeschooled junior high years because “I distinctly recall opening up the massive thousand plus page book and never feeling a sense of rush or doubt that I would finish it.” Reading a book for fun, without the embarrassment of losing or failing in competition, frees him from his earlier feelings of defeat.

Like BabyPrikichi, Eppley finds a classroom environment with teachers and other students to be a motivating literacy sponsor. When he begins attending public high school, he encounters a variety

of literacy sponsors and opportunities:

Now all of the sudden I was surrounded by hundreds of fellow student[s], teachers, coaches, and faculty members that I never had met before. The opportunity for my literacy to take a major turn for the better had arisen. Being home schooled and growing up in a strong Baptist family meant that I was rather sheltered as a child. Now entering into high school I was exposed to numerous foreign words and phrases, that to be honest I hadn't heard or experienced before.

In addition to participating in mainstream school culture, Eppley also benefits from the opportunity to play football and baseball in high school. His newfound interest in sports acts as a literacy sponsor: "I began to read anything I could get my hands on about football." Eppley closes by taking responsibility for his early attitude toward literacy: "Looking back I would love to have a chance to change my literacy habits in elementary school. I believe that with a little more work and dedication I could have become an avid reader that was passionate about books, magazines, newspapers, and any other type of material I could lay my hands on." The communities and interests Eppley developed in public high school, and later college, motivate him to retrospectively take ownership of his homeschool literacy acquisition and allow him to look forward to a more positive relationship with reading: "Hopefully one day I'll find that person that I lost during my childhood years of fear and doubt."

My reading of Eppley's and BabyPrikichi's narratives suggests that the difference between students who had positive and negative homeschooling experiences may not necessarily be the amount of structure that students receive. While BabyPrikichi needed more structure to be motivated to complete work, Eppley found his mother's rigid structure, flashcards, and textbooks to be punishing and restrictive. The level of structure varies among students with positive experiences as well. Some students, such as Stephen Carradini and Megan Cardenas, describe homeschooling's lack of structure as freeing. Other students, like Lynn Simmons and Komysha Hassan, positively recount their parents creating a more structured homeschooling experience, with traditional motivators such as grades and portfolios.

One difference between positive and negative experiences in this body of texts seems in part to be the amount of perceived educational authority these students invest in their parent-instructors, and how much students buy in to their parents' teaching methods. Students with positive experiences often defend their parents' qualifications to teach, while those with negative experiences implicitly question their authority and methods. For both Eppley and BabyPrikichi, traditional classroom environments fostered motivation not present in their home education environments. In both cases, their parents realized the need for this shift and adjusted their education to best fit their children's needs.

Though many of these narratives recall family environments that were warm, vibrant, and nourishing places of literacy sponsorship, homeschooling could, in certain cases, exacerbate pre-existing problems of abuse or neglect. This is the case in two student narratives by Mary Katherine Swiantek and Amanda Joy. In these two narratives, however, homeschooling is not the cause of family problems—rather, it became part of a larger problem. Interestingly, both these narratives recount

homeschooling in rural communities. Because of their geographic isolation, both students lacked the resources and communities available to homeschoolers living in more populated areas. Nevertheless, in both of these narratives, literacy also acted as a way of escape mentally, if not physically.

Mary Katherine Swiatek's narrative describes how her mother's depression often left her to complete her schoolwork alone:

I was fortunate to have a great father figure in my life, but unfortunately I didn't have that same relationship with my mother. She was young when she had me, and my brother followed just eleven months later. She stayed home to take care of us while my father worked, but soon after I was born she was diagnosed with depression. When my dad was away, home wasn't always the best place to be. Sometimes my mother would lock me out of the house because she didn't feel like dealing with me, other times she would just lock herself away in her room.

Though Swiatek's home situation was already difficult, it became worse when her family moved to a rural community and began homeschooling. She and her siblings "were completely removed from the life [they] knew," and homeschooling felt like a form of imprisonment that she wanted to escape: "I remember feeling trapped, like Belle inside the Beast's castle, I couldn't escape. I couldn't just get in the car and drive somewhere at that age. I had no friends, and wasn't in school . . . I became very depressed, and felt very alone." As a consequence of her mother's depression, a week would pass where the family would not leave the house, and literacy became her only way of escape: "When my mother would yell at me, or hit me, I ran. Not from home, but into my pages. Books weren't just words on paper; for me, they were another world." Writing her own stories became a way of coping with an abusive family situation.

In high school, Swiatek decided to attend public school. On one hand, this transition improved her situation and lessened her social isolation: "I took drama, choir, and even became editor of my school newspaper. I made friends, went to football games and homecoming dances, but I never stopped writing." However, though public school provided a way for her to make friends and temporarily escape her home, it could not entirely compensate for the abusive home environment she returned to at the end of the day. She recalls beginning to look to people, rather than books, as her means of escape. This continued desire to escape translated into a marriage at an early age that she later regretted: "I fell in love shortly after and became so invested in my relationship that I never even made time to pick up a book. My relationship became my escape, just as books always had, and it was only until after I got married that I realized I wasn't myself. My prince had finally come to take me away, but instead he took all of me away." This realization caused her to turn back to writing as a way of reclaiming her voice, of telling her story.

For another DALN writer, the literacy acquired via homeschooling also became a method of empowerment and escape from her family situation. Growing up in rural Appalachian poverty, in a home without electricity, Amanda Joy's experience differs from other narratives in this study, most of whom identified their socioeconomic background as middle class. Unlike most of the other narratives in this study, Joy's impoverished background greatly limited the number of resources available to her, and she relied mainly on self-selected books from her library's book sale.

When Joy became a teenager, her mother remarried and joined what Joy describes as a fringe, fundamentalist group adhering to the doctrine of Christian patriarchy. Joy writes that this ideology contributed to her family's isolation: "Our lives were relegated to a tiny world in the middle of nowhere, our minds filled with the theology of Christian patriarchy and the doctrine of 'separation' from the world." Because Joy was "the eldest daughter in a family of 8," she writes, "My mother didn't have a lot of time to spend on my own home school education. Instead, I was given books with instructions to read them and write a report My mother was, thankfully, acutely aware of the benefit of literature for education."

Growing up in this fringe movement, literacy became a way for Joy to subvert the dominant discourse that she received. She describes literature as her "freedom—[her] escape from the loneliness, the sterility, and the maddening indoctrination of my environment." As a result, her literacy acquisition often took place in secret. She recalls burning the first "scary" story she ever wrote because she was afraid her parents would find out: "It was the fear of telling the wrong story, of not conforming to the proper narrative, and being judged for it." Yet when she attended Berea College, a tuition-free university in Kentucky, she developed the courage to present her creative writing to others and saw literacy as a way to understand, communicate, and critique her own experience. Literacy, and studying her own literacy, continued to be her way of escape and empowerment.

Both Swiantek's and Joy's narratives suggest that homeschooling can exacerbate and perpetuate existing problems in the family structure, yet it is not necessarily the cause of those problems. Though public school brought some temporary relief for Swiantek, it did not immediately solve the problems within her family unit. Literacy, however, provided a way for both women to escape, critique, and better understand their situations.

Pedagogic Violence: Transitioning To Public School

While some narratives recount a positive transition from homeschooling to public school, others recall traditional schooling as a site of pedagogic violence. Stephanie Paterson describes the shift that can take place in students' attitudes toward reading once they transition from home to school. At home, learning is warm, imaginative, and encouraging; and then students experience a shift where reading becomes cold, hierarchical, fearful and evaluative:

These are stories marked by the presence of loving, attentive parents who offer nourishment in the form of "hot cocoa," imaginative stories and physical and emotional warmth. In the early years, reading is self-sponsored and imaginative, and it is reading conducted in relation to another person. And then, inevitably, the shift occurs in parental goals. Schools reinforce this shift in their linear forward-marching notion of literacy lessons that are divided up into hierarchical groups. Students remember the shift from storytelling to reading-for-evaluation with fear and trembling. (119-120)

In the DALN narratives this study examines, writers who had positive experiences with homeschooling especially struggle with this transition because it often happens for them later in life. While they are still being homeschooled, their parents read to them for fun, and self-sponsored

and imaginative reading continue through high school. Writing is playful, and literacy activities are less about evaluation than about creativity and encouragement. But this sense of adventure fades for some upon entering traditional school.

This is Megan Cardenas' experience with writing: "My mother taught me how to write with passion and connect with my audience on a deep personal level. She used to say, write for you, not them. She found different ways to teach us so we would really learn rather than just remember information for tests." Though Cardenas initially "begged" to go to public school the summer before she entered seventh grade, she found that it was quite different from what she had imagined. She became one among many, and she recalls feeling surprised and constrained by the rules and authority structures used in the traditional classroom to contain and patrol students' bodies: "During classes, I had to ask to use the restroom and I was assigned a seat as if I couldn't be trusted. This was new to me." She felt that her more advanced literacy background immediately marked her out from the rest of her peers in seventh grade. This made her feel smart, but also like an outsider:

As each student read his or her paper, I realized how most of the students could barely construct a simple sentence. Grammar was a disaster, sentence structure almost didn't exist, and spelling was just horrible. As I read my paper my teacher told me that it was absolutely splendid. She also asked me what school I transferred from. I told her that I had been home schooled. I was very confused. How was it that all these kids who were the same age as me, did not receive the same education I had?

Though Cardenas enjoyed some aspects of public school, she recounts that one teacher told her not to correct other students' papers "too well" and discouraged her from differentiating herself:

She also said that I had to stop writing such intricate and intelligent papers so the other classmates could understand my writing. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. My schoolteacher wanted me to 'dumb down' my writing. I don't like this idea because, if I was such a good writer, I should be challenged and pushed to be an even better one, but apparently that was not the case in public school.

In high school, she began to believe that she "had to write for my peers and not for myself" and she stopped pushing herself to improve: "I had lost my passion for writing and I could feel my technical aspect of writing slowly disintegrate. Since I was not being challenged, I scraped by with average high school 'A' papers." In college, she recalls being told that she was "too intelligent" to peer review other students' papers, and her learning became a source of shame. She concludes, "Public school confined me into what they thought was appropriate knowledge for a student of a certain age. The whole 'No child left behind' is great in theory, but it also means 'No one march ahead.'" In Cardenas' case, at least, she perceives public school, and even college, as holding her back from her full literacy potential.

Elizabeth Kent's narrative also recalls the jarring difference between her home and school learning environments. At home, she and her mom used to play a "dictionary game," where they would look up words and try to guess their meanings. When she entered public school in third grade, she announced to the teacher on the first day that her favorite word was "antidisestablishmentarianism." The teacher responded by discrediting her literacy. "I don't think that's your favorite word," she said.

Kent recalls feeling “like even more of an outsider” as her home literacy was delegitimized: “And all of a sudden, I realized that school, and that learning, wasn’t always a safe place. But at home, learning had always been a safe place, a place of adventure and discovery, but all of a sudden I’m in this place that’s very combative, with a teacher who is supposed to support you in a discovery of new knowledge [and who] was in some ways attacking me in front of the entire class.” When she went home from school, her mother worked to undo the teacher’s damage, but Kent had already received the same message as Cardenas: “I have to fit in.”

Even if a student does not narrate a teacher’s discouragement, some tie their entrance into the traditional classroom to a change in their feelings about literacy. Maria McNeill entered private school at six years old as a result of trauma; her mom, who had begun homeschooling her, passed away. Though “learning to read with my mom was one of [her] many favorite childhood memories,” she marks her entry into private school as the time she began to dislike reading because it “began to feel like a punishment.” In her narrative, she struggles to pinpoint exactly why this change took place: “Reading was one of the most valuable memories I had with my mother as a young child. Now, the only reading I do is for school. I do not enjoy it anymore, and I have not for a long time now. How is it possible to go from loving reading so much to hating it? By this I mean to the point where the only time I truly read is when it is required.” McNeill’s transition resembles the move that Paterson describes from the “physical and emotional warmth” of early childhood reading toward the structure of the traditional classroom, where reading begins to feel like punishment. As Paterson observes, schools’ focus on assessment, testing, and “forward-marching” can deprive some students of the love and motivation they once possessed. The trauma of this transition for McNeill is amplified by the loss of her mother, whom she identifies as her primary literacy sponsor. Yet McNeill nevertheless describes her loss of love for reading as mysterious, perhaps inexplicable: “Why reading felt like a punishment to me, I still do not know.”

In some cases, homeschooling preserves a love for reading through early adulthood—which may explain why Cynthia Drenovsky and Isaiah Cohen find that the formerly homeschooled college students have a significantly more positive view of their college experience than do their traditionally-educated peers. Though still structured, college allows for much more self-directed learning than the typical high school, and homeschoolers may be able to flourish because they are already accustomed to an environment that encourages creativity and self-direction.

Conclusion

From eighteen narratives, it is of course impossible to generalize about the 1.8 million students currently homeschooled in the United States. However, these stories do add data points to the range of literacy activities and experiences that homeschooling enables. In these narratives, homeschoolers often operate in reference to the dominant educational discourse; yet they redefine this discourse in creative and memorable ways. Many homeschooling families cultivate a rich environment of literacy sponsorship, blending literacy with daily life activities rather than creating a divide between “home” and “school.” Those who report negative experiences with homeschooling did so primarily because

they perceived their home educators as lacking the socially recognized authority of a traditional classroom. While homeschooling also has the potential to isolate children and exacerbate negative family environments, the two narratives that record this experience seem to be an exception rather than a rule. In fact, more students record a negative experience transitioning from homeschooling into traditional school environments, where they feel that they lost their creativity, freedom, and joy in literacy activities.

As many young adults from homeschooling backgrounds pursue undergraduate and graduate education, their experiences with literacy provide fertile ground for further research. Do homeschoolers disproportionately pursue higher education partly as a way to further legitimize their literacy? Is there a correlation between homeschooling and a need to defend one's literacy, and what are the long-term effects of this urge? Are there common threads among homeschoolers' rich and varied experiences with literacy? How can we protect children like Amanda Joy and Mary Katherine Swiantek from abuse? And how can we promote the positive homeschooling literacy experiences of students like Muhammad, Hassan, and many others? More quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to begin to answer these questions as we seek to better understand the literacy of 1.8 million American students.

“Those who report negative experiences with homeschooling did so primarily because they perceived their home educators as lacking the socially recognized authority of a traditional classroom. While homeschooling also has the potential to isolate children and exacerbate negative family environments, the two narratives that record this experience seem to be an exception rather than a rule. In fact, an equal number of students record a negative experience transitioning from homeschooling into traditional school environments, where they feel that they lost their creativity, freedom, and joy in literacy activities.”

NOTES

¹Kristin D. Jones et al. define “unschoolers” as those who entirely “reject the structured learning of schooling, formal curricula, and testing” in favor of an unstructured, child-directed approach to learning (392, 397).

²Elmborg also recognizes that the rules of these “dominated spaces” restrict access for “borderland students whose cultural pasts are shaped by social structures that differ from the school norm” (347); however, he argues that the library has the potential to bring discourses into dialogue in order to “challenge and reshape both academic content literacy practices and the knowledges and Discourses [*sic*] of youth’s everyday lives” (347).

³One example is Tyler Eppley’s narrative, discussed in the third section. His mother relied on more traditional educational methods, like flash cards and timed comprehension questions, and he views his homeschooled education more negatively than students whose educators revised traditional tools.

⁴The narratives that I categorize as “child prodigy” narratives are those by Dallas Reynolds, Bethany Frantsen, Jeremiah Harbour, Carlee Mabrey, Elisa Johnson, and Komysa Hassan. Two others portray their learning as exceptional but received punishment for displaying this learning in public because it was far ahead of others (Megan Cardenas and Elizabeth Kent); these are discussed in the final section. Other narratives, such as that of Gingerich Destiny, discuss reading advanced works at an early age (*Jane Eyre* at 11), but I do not consider them “child prodigy” narratives because they do not mention performing these literacy skills for others.

⁵The narratives that reflect negative experiences with homeschooling are those by Tyler Eppley, BabyPrikichi, Mary Katherine Swiantek, and Amanda Joy.

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Resisting and Rewriting English-Only Policies: Navigating Multilingual, Raciolinguistic, and Translingual Approaches to Language Advocacy

Katherine S. Flowers Mississippi State University

KEYWORDS

language policy; writing studies; advocacy; monolingualism; multilingualism; economics; raciolinguistics; race; translingualism; English-only movement

While language policies may be difficult to enact, they can be even more difficult to undo. When Frederick County, Maryland, repealed its English-only policy in 2015, for example, it marked the first community-driven repeal of its kind since 1993 in Miami-Dade County, Florida (Associated Press). This 22-year gap reflects the fact that while institutions may tacitly reinterpret language policies over time, or alter them due to external pressure (Dick), actively working against them from the inside is relatively rare. Many people and institutions remain committed to what Suresh Canagarajah calls a “monolingual orientation” towards language (20), and this commitment grants English-only policies a certain inertia. A monolingual orientation can make using only one language or language variety seem more natural, normal, correct, efficient, or otherwise authoritative than other ways of communicating. In a study that points to how pervasive this understanding of language is, Juan Guerra writes that over his forty-plus years of teaching diverse groups of college students across the country, the “most salient” pattern has been “the degree to which an overwhelming majority of the students in both groups have bought into the rigid ideologies of monolingualism and monoculturalism” (118). The persistence of this orientation is understandable, given the relationship between language and politics in the US. In and beyond the classroom, English-only policies often marginalize and conflate people of color, immigrants, people who do not use English, multilingual people, and people who use marked dialects and registers of English; and they glorify the figure of the white, monolingual citizen-taxpayer, or what David Bleeden, Caroline Gottschalk-Druschke, and Ralph Cintrón call “the hypercitizen” (179). Despite a robust body of work documenting and critiquing the monolingual orientation, there are few accounts of how people actually navigate and adopt policy alternatives.

This article draws on a recent ethnographic, discourse analytic study of local language policy in order to address that gap. I focus specifically on the campaign to repeal Frederick County’s English-only ordinance. Activists and politicians worked in concert to dismantle the ordinance, both in terms of actually passing a repeal bill and by marshaling community support more broadly. I find that people used three approaches to argue for resisting and rewriting their community’s English-only policy, each of which emerged from a particular, alternative orientation towards language: flipping the economics script (multilingual), linking language to race (raciolinguistic), and questioning the nature of English (translingual). At the same time, focusing on the economic benefits of

multilingualism nearly eclipsed the other approaches, with the end result that the policy text itself and the public discourse of the bill's two co-sponsors offered a more limited vision of language policy than the rest of the campaign and the interviews. Ultimately, I argue that there are advantages as well as risks to cultivating and combining multilingual, raciolinguistic, and translingual orientations towards language. The Frederick County campaign thus offers a critical window into how language policies emerge and change in practice and a possible model for future language advocacy.

“English-only policies often marginalize and conflate people of color, immigrants, people who do not use English, multilingual people, and people who use marked dialects and registers of English. . . .”

Monolingualism And Its Alternatives

Monolingualism is a global, multifaceted phenomenon that shapes how people approach language in and beyond writing studies. As Missy Watson and Rachael Shapiro argue, monolingualism typically refers to four intertwined phenomena in US contexts: “Standard Language Ideology,” “Tacit English-Only Policies,” “the Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity,” and the “Myth of Linguistic Uniformity, Stability, and Separateness.” While I would argue that English-only policies are often more explicit than tacit, I do adopt Watson and Shapiro’s definition of monolingualism as encompassing the ideas that Standard English is superior, that it should be the only official language, that it is the norm, and that it is a discrete object. These phenomena are not so much inherently connected as they are historically and politically connected. For much of US history, people have periodically sought to make English the only official language of civic life and education (Baron 185), particularly under the auspices of colonialism, racism, and xenophobia (Spack; Pavlenko). These policies have gained traction not just in government and K–12 education but also in higher education (Horner and Trimbur). Yu-Kyung Kang finds that even at a university that touts its commitment to diversity, “dominant monolingualism” persists (101), and the Korean students she studies come to embrace “quite traditional language ideologies,” like the association of one nation with one language (102).

Monolingual policies and ideologies matter not just because they are common but because they reflect and shape people’s views on both language and language users. In terms of language policy in the US, English-only discourse not only marginalizes other languages, but it also draws attention away from other aspects of communication. Instead of considering communication in all its nuance and complexity (including the roles of things like literacy, genre, rhetoric, repertoires, practices, and style), conversations about language lapse into judgments over whether someone has English, or they don’t, or whether they are literate in English, or not. Although my focus is on US policy, it is also important to emphasize that monolingual approaches are global (Lillis and Curry). For example, in a study of first-year writing in Lebanon, Nancy Bou Ayash writes that language use is often still “refracted through a monolingual structuring principle and regulated by the monolingualism of

academic gatekeepers” (555). The kinds of “structuring” and “regulat[ing]” that Ayash foregrounds can seriously limit how people learn, use, and view language.

Scholars have theorized several alternatives to the monolingual orientation. One possibility is a more multilingual orientation, which emphasizes the existence and the value of using multiple different languages. That orientation is foundational to bilingual education and other additive programs, like English Plus in the US, the European Union’s language policy, CCCC’s own 1988 National Language Policy (Wible, *Shaping* 89), and academic fields like second language writing (Jordan). However, additive approaches to language carry the risk of re-essentializing the languages and identities involved (Horner et al.). A more translingual approach offers a way to reconcile some of the issues with both monolingual and multilingual orientations (Canagarajah). Translingual theory has emerged in response to growing awareness that “language mixing is the norm and does not need explanation, that communication occurs across what have been thought of as languages, that speakers draw on repertoires of semiotic resources, and that language is best understood in terms of social practices” (Pennycook, “Mobile” 212). Communication in this framework is about drawing on a range of semiotic resources that transcend tidy categories.

However, neither multilingual nor translingual approaches tend to center identity and inequality. There are bodies of work that tackle questions of power more directly, particularly around race and racism. For example, scholars like Geneva Smitherman and Valerie Kinloch have focused on language rights, while others have begun to develop a new kind of “raciolinguistic” inquiry into how language and race shape each other (Flores and Rosa; Alim; Rosa and Flores). In the introduction to the first edited collection on raciolinguistics, H. Samy Alim describes how this emerging field stems from his work with Geneva Smitherman in *Articulate While Black* and aims to “ask and answer critical questions about the relations between language, race, and power across diverse ethnoracial contexts and societies” (3). Raciolinguistics has the potential to name and bring together existing work, encourage future work on language and race, and connect conversations in writing studies to those in the related fields of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and education. This framework has not yet been widely adopted in literacy studies, which I see as a reflection of what Carmen Kynard calls the field’s “still-dominant white center” (63).

To be sure, I am not suggesting that raciolinguistics is completely distinct from theories of multilingualism and translingualism. Indeed, some of the most fruitful work on language issues in the past decade has focused on how people could and should synthesize these different approaches. In his work on the promise of code meshing and the problems with code switching, for example, Vershawn Ashanti Young shows how “code switching is all about race” and is “steeped in a segregationist, racist logic” (51). More recently, scholars have pushed translingual theory to be more engaged in questions of race. Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner have tied translingual theory to questions of agency and matters of “racial and ethnic prejudice” (598). Keith Gilyard calls for acknowledging translingual performance while also centering linguistic competence, race, and rights. What I am suggesting is a need to build on such work, particularly in the form of inquiry into how people navigate these alternatives to the monolingual orientation in their advocacy work. In this article, I look to public policymakers and activists in order to answer the following question: how do people

resist and rewrite English-only policies?

Researching Language Policy In The Making

In designing this study, my aim was to capture the dynamism and complexity of language policy in the making. Language policy is not just about “stand-alone documents” (Wible, *Shaping* 169). Creating, circulating, and changing a policy involves a range of other texts, people, practices, events, organizations, and institutions. However, language policy has rarely been studied this way: Alastair Pennycook laments the “bland” nature of much of the existing research on the topic, which treats language policy as a stable, macro-level phenomenon (*Language* 54). Pennycook argues that “[w]e need to understand how language planning often builds on small local actions, on decisions made in communities, on local publications” (*Language* 54). Like Pennycook, I am interested in language policy as a local practice that emerges and unfolds over time and across situations. To take this more situated approach, I draw on methodologies of ethnography and discourse analysis. Synthesizing these methodologies into what I call ethnographic discourse analysis allows me to foreground people’s perspectives, to triangulate multiple kinds of data, and to reflect critically on my own role as a researcher (all hallmarks of ethnography); while also focusing specifically on how people use and view signs (as in sociocultural approaches to discourse analysis). This interdisciplinary approach is informed by Pennycook’s work in applied linguistics, as well as scholarship in the overlapping areas of situated studies of literate activity (Prior), ethnographies of writing (Lillis and Curry; Sheridan), discourse studies (Bakhtin; Wortham and Reyes), and sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz and Hall).

This article is part of a larger IRB-approved study, in which I collected data on four Maryland counties that had proposed or passed English-only policies during 2008–2013, as well as the Washington, DC-based organizations ProEnglish and U.S. English. Frederick was the only county in the study to repeal its policy, but it is otherwise typical of English-only communities in terms of politics, economics, geography, and demographics. Compared to the rest of the United States, the population of Frederick County is relatively high-income, white, and likely to speak only English at home (US Census Bureau). After a local politician first proposed an English-only ordinance in 2008, the county government finally succeeded in passing a similar ordinance in 2012, thanks in part to the support of ProEnglish. The government used a lightly edited version of ProEnglish’s model template, as is common with contemporary English-only policies. In 2015, the County Council¹ passed a bill repealing that 2012 ordinance by a narrow margin, 4-3.

I collected data on Frederick County’s shifting language policy both online and through fieldwork. In 2012, when the county passed its English-only ordinance, I began collecting publicly available writing and video. Because contemporary language policy campaigns tend to be sources of controversy and matters of public record, they have a significant digital footprint. This discourse includes government records, organizations’ websites, news coverage, social media, and publicly accessible videos of government meetings and hearings. Then, beginning in 2015, I visited Maryland and interviewed 24 people; collected more policy texts and other records; took photographs; and wrote field notes. The people who shape language policy tend to be what Deborah Brandt terms

“everyday” writers, or those who may write prolifically and influentially, but who do not necessarily identify as writers or authors (12). These writers often work collaboratively and anonymously, which necessarily influenced how I recruited participants. I was interested in both the most public-facing policymakers and people who played more behind-the-scenes roles, and so I sought interview participants in three ways. First, I contacted all the politicians who had voted on the policies in question, as well as several people who had spoken at public hearings or written relevant blog posts or news articles. Second, I distributed a flyer describing the study to people I met and in several local businesses and libraries. Finally, I asked participants if there was anyone else they would recommend I interview. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions were tailored to each person’s role and their prior public discourse on the topic. Participants had a high degree of control over whether their interview was connected to their real name or a pseudonym, whether and how I could record the interview, and whether and how I could share the contents of their interview. Ultimately, of the nine participants highlighted in this article, everyone requested that I use their real name, or the real name of their blog or social media profile, and consented to my recording the interview (one video, the rest audio).

Data analysis began with transcribing the audio/video interviews and footage of government meetings, with an eye towards transcribing not just people’s words but also non-verbal activities like laughter and gestures (in the case of video). Data analysis was a “recursive” process (Sheridan 76), as I continued to collect and compare data, take notes, follow up with participants, and revise my research questions. While this kind of iteration is typical of ethnographic writing research, the process was amplified by the fact that when the study began, Frederick County’s English-only policy seemed thoroughly entrenched, and so I only came to focus on questions of resisting and rewriting as the repeal campaign began. Finally, during the revisions stage, I sent a draft of this article to the participants for comment.

As a researcher in Frederick County, I was an outsider in ways that significantly shaped my findings. I had never spent time in Maryland (except Baltimore) or Washington, DC before this study. I am not a politician, activist, or blogger. This outsider position was not necessarily a problem. For example, once people realized I was unfamiliar with the area, they would go into greater detail about local history and politics, in a way that I doubt would have happened if we had shared more points of reference. On the other hand, I do not have the same perspective or access as someone studying their own local language policy (Tardy). I move now to the study’s findings, beginning with how people identified the potential value of multilingualism over monolingualism (see Figure 1 for a synopsis of the three approaches).

Approach	Criticisms of the English-only Policy	Orientation towards Language
Flipping the Economics Script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ not saving taxpayer dollars ▪ harming the local economy 	Multilingual
Connecting Language to Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ racist ▪ xenophobic ▪ depicts white people as unwelcoming 	Raciolinguistic
Questioning the Nature of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ oversimplified ▪ unenforceable 	Translingual

Figure 1. Three approaches used to advocate against the English-only policy, criticisms they elicited, and underlying language orientations.

Flipping The Economics Script

Economic arguments had propelled Frederick County's English-only policy to success, and much of the repeal campaign focused on flipping that economics script. Flipping the script entails taking a relatively established kind of discourse, reproducing some of the formal features, but doing so with a different goal (Carr 3). In this case, the established discourse involved linking language to the economy. One of the original policy's stated aims was to "reduce costs and promote efficiency." Supporters of the original ordinance had argued that a monolingual government would be best for the local economy, saving money on translation and interpreter services. For example, at a public meeting in 2012, one county commissioner had explained his English-only position this way: "This is truly a business decision. [...] This is about dollars and protecting taxpayer dollars. When it costs \$170 to translate an 8½" x 11" memo, we have to be sure that we're doing the right thing with taxpayer dollars." This was a popular sentiment in the community, and it echoes Scott Wible's findings regarding the "common argument that public and private organizations—and by extension, taxpayers—incur significant financial costs" when they allow for multilingualism ("Rhetoric" 187). Many people who were critical of the English-only policy nevertheless took this economic angle seriously. These politicians and activists argued that money does matter but that multilingualism would be more lucrative than monolingualism.

The repeal bill itself exemplified this strategy. When County Council member Jessica Fitzwater introduced co-sponsored Bill No. 15-08 at a June 2015 public meeting, she read the first section aloud to the audience. According to the opening lines, the purpose of the bill was to

Repeal Ordinance No. 12-03-598 [the English-only policy], for the purpose of promoting a competitive business climate for Frederick County's existing 6,200 businesses which employ 79,000 workers; attracting new life science businesses and jobs that will move Frederick County closer to becoming the State's bio-tech hub; ensuring that non-English language speakers are not deterred from reporting crimes, seeking medical care or other human

services; and generally relating to Frederick County's encouragement of multi-linguistic acceptance, tolerance and multi-cultural diversity in an increasingly global economy.

There are several themes present, from crime to healthcare to multiculturalism. The overarching strategy, however, is to frame the English-only policy as antithetical to a "competitive business climate." Specifically, the bill argues that repealing the English-only policy matters to the county's thousands of businesses and tens of thousands of employees and hinders the county's ability to become "the State's bio-tech hub." Even the concepts of "acceptance," "tolerance," and "diversity" only appear in the immediate context of "an increasingly global economy." Importantly, the preamble does not focus on all economic activities equally: it is primarily about science, technology, engineering, and medicine. In other words, lower-paying jobs and other kinds of industries are not the priority. Finally, the focus on the "increasingly global" has a significant temporal and spatial component and frames multilingualism as a new incoming factor, in contrast to monolingualism, which comes to seem more traditional and more provincial by comparison. This dichotomy, with English-only tradition on one end and emerging multilingualism on the other, elides histories of local multilingualism, heritage languages, and indigenous languages. This bill is actually quite similar to English-only policies: the strategy of linking the fate of the economy to new multilingualism permeates both.

At the same time, this policy also has a twist: its authors used the possibility of multilingual people moving in to argue *against* an English-only policy, rather than for it. They flipped the script. I asked Jessica Fitzwater how she and her colleagues decided to take this approach:

Flowers: How did you all decide to, like, sort of foreground, like, the business community and different industries that

Fitzwater: So, we really felt that for some of our more, um, conservative colleagues, whereas for me, like, this is the right thing to do, and that's enough of an argument for me, um, making the economic argument was, we thought was really important, and it is a

Flowers: Valid

Fitzwater: It's a powerful, valid argument, so.

In this exchange, she answers carefully, by explaining that although "for me, like, this is the right thing to do, and that's enough," economic arguments offered a more "powerful" rationale for the repeal for her "conservative colleagues." She also echoed my interjection that the economic argument was "valid"; she could marshal substantial quantitative and qualitative evidence to support this argument. In other words, flipping the economics script was the rare, possibly the only, strategy that she, her supporters, and her skeptics could all find persuasive. They used the same kinds of economic terms and sources, but with a more multilingual orientation towards language, in order to advance their goal of repealing the English-only policy.

Among Frederick residents, there was real fear of multinational corporations skipping over Frederick for being too provincial and instead planting their offices in some other part of the state or country. Again and again, I encountered descriptions of entrepreneurs being nervous to come to Frederick, out of fear that their diverse employees would either quit, be miserable, or never take a job there in the first place. Some of these narratives focused on interactions beyond the county's

borders. For example, Jessica Fitzwater told me that when the county's "economic development staff" traveled to "trade shows," many recruitment attempts would be met with a skeptical question: "Aren't you guys the ones that just did this English-only [policy]?" The ordinance was not a selling point. People wanted new businesses to stay and thrive, but they worried that the English-only policy was a repellent to more cosmopolitan corporations and employees.

One way participants yoked economic success to multilingualism was to unyoke it from monolingualism. Fitzwater, the bill's co-sponsor M.C. Keegan-Ayer, and others all did so by critiquing the original promise of the English-only policy to reduce government costs. Crucially, they also cited county budget data and a fiscal report to support the idea. The county's finance director prepared a fiscal report that asserted that repealing the English-only policy would result in "No fiscal impact." In other words, whether the policy were in place or not, it would not make any difference to the government's bottom line. Once this report came out in July, council members brought it up during council meetings, media interviews, and to me. In addition to that government-produced report, they also provided quotes on the county budget in an interview with the local newspaper (Loos). These literacy practices of sponsoring, citing, and interpreting this fiscal report are examples of flipping the economics script. At no point did these writers suggest that money does not matter, or that language rights are priceless, or anything along those lines. Instead, granting that money does matter to nearly everyone, they concluded that the most effective way to criticize the English-only policy's economic discourse about multilingualism would be to offer their own.

Making the connection between economic development and accepting multilingualism became central to the repeal campaign. For example, in the midst of a longer explanation of why they thought the repeal happened, one of the writers for the tongue-in-cheek blog Frederick Local Yokel explained

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that while the English-only policy was "specifically targeted at Hispanics," one of the consequences of the policy was that "biomedical firms" which employ "a lot of Asian workers," would also be alienated. The misunderstanding they describe here is painful to contemplate: that "biomedical firms" might not care about the English-only policy if only they understood that it was *really* targeted at "Hispanics," and not their own "Asians." Furthermore, this story only makes sense if one recognizes a dichotomy between Latinx people, on one hand, and people who contribute to the economy, on the other. This dichotomy is flawed, of course. Perhaps for that reason, as they fleshed out this awkward narrative, they also distanced themselves from all the parties involved by adding that for them, "it's not justifiable on any level." After all, this account flatters no one: the English-only policy is racist, and business owners only care if it might affect their own employees.

The Frederick Local Yokel blogger's caveat echoes Fitzwater's aside at the beginning of this section, where she stressed that "whereas for me, this is the right thing to do." Both are conveying that they understand English-only discourse but do not endorse it. I interpret such statements as acknowledgments of the difficulty of flipping the script. On one hand, they knew the economic arguments were important and evidence-based: the English-only policy *did not* result in obvious government savings, there *are* large companies who consider moving to Frederick because of its proximity to military bases and bigger cities, those companies *do* tend to employ a more transnational and multilingual workforce than currently exists in Frederick, some of these potential transplants *were* openly expressing fear of the English-only policy, and repelling potential STEM workers *could* threaten the area's fragile economic success. And yet, for all the promise of economic arguments, the repeal's supporters knew that there were other facets of the policy that mattered, too.

Jessica Fitzwater encapsulated up some of these other facets as the more "emotional side of it." When I asked if there were ever any disagreements over how to frame the repeal bill, she responded by saying that while they did not disagree, *per se*, she did have "discussions" with activists and non-profits about how much to emphasize the emotions surrounding the English-only policy. She explained that while organizations like Casa de Maryland and the Frederick Immigration Coalition had held protests in the streets in the past, her view at the time was, "let's not. We're not going to have a rally beforehand, we're not going to have, like, signs." She added that "we didn't want it to [...] feed into the potential kind of, like, emotional side of it, even though, obviously emotions came out at the hearing, because it is emotional for people on both sides, but we didn't want to add fuel to that fire." This statement suggests that on one hand, there are reasonable, linguistically tolerant people just looking out for the economy, and on the other, there are immigrants and people of color who are too emotional. While the repeal bill did successfully pass, this moment shows one of the downsides of trying to isolate multilingualism and the economy from the broader language policy situation. It is unfortunately tempting for policymakers to pit rights and resources, race and the economy, affect and logic against each other. I turn now to those conditions that made some people so eager to protest in the streets with signs in the first place.

Connecting Language To Race

The English-only policy's racism played a significant role in animating the repeal campaign. From many people's perspectives, the original policy exacerbated ongoing racism against black, Latinx, and Asian American people in the area; and it made white residents look like unwelcoming Frednecks (a well-established local portmanteau for Frederick rednecks). Participants drew attention to all these connections and tried to offer alternatives. A community activist named Jay Mason emphasized the policy's particular resonance with anti-black racism. When he first contacted me about the study, Mason explained that the term "English-only" reminded him of what his and other black families faced during the Jim Crow era.

In preparation for our upcoming interview, I watched streaming footage of Mason speaking at the public hearing about the repeal bill, where he described this analogy to Jim Crow in depth. In

his statement, he explained what his parents used to experience in Frederick, before connecting that history to the present situation:

They had to walk around and see a lot of signs that said “whites only” ((makes sign-sized rectangular gesture))². That word “only” speaks unacceptance. “English only” speaks unacceptance.

As he spoke the phrase “whites only,” Mason raised his hands to shoulder level and moved them in unison in a rectangle, as if to trace one of the signs that characterized so many businesses and institutions before and during the 1960s civil rights movement (Figure 2). He then tied that phrase to the second phrase, “English only,” not just by listing both, but by emphasizing the word in common—“only.” Later, during our interview, he said that during the public hearing, he had “felt like we were back in 1950 all over again.” In response, I asked him why he thought people felt more comfortable speaking about language-based exclusion than about “explicitly” racist exclusion. He laughed, sighed, and paused in quick succession, which made me realize that, as a white person, I had already assumed too much in the way I asked the question. I tried again: “Although maybe there was some explicitly racist stuff?” This time, he did reply, by saying, “I felt like they were explicit.” Mason was not alone in connecting language policy to racism.



Figure 2. Jay Mason gestures in the shape of street sign while comparing Jim Crow-era “Whites Only” signs to English-only policies. He is facing the County Council, with audience members in the background.

While Jim Crow policies like the ones Mason describes were common around the US, their legacy in this area is particularly potent in conjunction with local histories of slavery and, into the present, Ku Klux Klan activity. While the Klan peaked in 1920s in some parts of the country, Maryland and

a few other states saw a resurgence in the late 1970s (Sims 267). In the 1990s, the Klan was so well-established in the town of Thurmont, in northern Frederick County, that a resident could identify a business “known as the local Klan bar,” where one could find members “there every Saturday night and most others” in two specially reserved booths (Davis 33). Several of my participants either remembered Klan activity first hand or through their parents’ experiences. These phenomena are not just rooted in history but are continuing to unfold. During my first week in the county in 2015, I heard about and attended a protest against the KKK in the town of Braddock Heights. Shortly after, someone poured a can of red paint over a bust of Justice Roger Taney to call attention to the statue’s continued, controversial display in downtown Frederick. Taney was a one-time resident who later wrote the 1857 pro-slavery opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. The city (not county) government had vacillated over what to do with the bust for years, but it was not removed until March 2017. These ongoing struggles against racism made Mason’s public hearing statement all the more resonant.

At the same time as these anti-black-racism-related issues continued to play out, the past decade had also been a time of heightened local xenophobia and immigrant rights activism, particularly in the context of Latinx and Asian immigrants. Maryland had narrowly passed its version of the DREAM Act in 2012, county law enforcement had partnered with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement through the 287(g) program, and former County Commissioner Blaine Young had explicitly expressed a desire to make Frederick “the most unfriendly county in the state of Maryland to illegal aliens” (Anderson). A writer for the organization Occupy Frederick (a riff on Occupy Wall Street) found Young’s policies to be particularly galling. Throughout summer 2015, they wrote several posts on the Occupy Frederick Facebook page about their own views on the issue, linked to posts by Jessica Fitzwater (July 9), summarized what happened at County Council meetings (August 18), and drafted a “sample email” message that people could send to the government in support of the repeal (July 21).

When I asked the Occupy Frederick writer why they decided to tackle this issue, they identified the English-only policy as part of the local Tea Party agenda and then continued:

The county has always had a problem with race, OK. Blaine Young’s an opportunist. He’s also a racist. But he sees an enormous political opportunity for himself here. So he immediately moves into this English-only stuff, which, you’ve read is meaningless on the surface³, but it’s like a little check box. “Blaine Young opposes illegal immigrants,” which means, in, in Republican code, “He’s a racist,” OK?

In this interview excerpt, they connect Young (who led the original English-only campaign) to racism, to opportunism, to opposition to undocumented immigrants, all in one utterance. They also suggest that the policy was a “check box” for Young to prove his Republican ethos. In his framework, all these concepts are nearly synonymous, and they all point to each other.

While Mason and the Occupy Frederick writer were acting relatively independently from the local government, connecting language to race was also an important strategy within the county’s Human Relations Commission (HRC). Like many similar commissions around the US, this Human Relations Commission (HRC) emerged out of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, first as the “Inter-Racial Committee,” and then later in its current form. In February 2015, Jessica Fitzwater asked the

commission to “create a package to present to the council in the future” about repealing the English-only policy (“Minutes”; Spencer). The resulting two-page resolution touches on race, rights, language, the economy, and history. The authors contend that the English-only policy is inconsistent with their mission “to monitor and recommend civil rights policy,” and with the “belie[f] that one of the most vital and valuable aspects of daily life in Frederick County is its diversity and cultural heritage where all races, religions, ages, and cultures are welcome, as should be all languages.” The history of European immigrants also gets a mention, in a clause recognizing the county’s “long history of multiple languages over the last three centuries, including our rich German heritage.” Finally, the text includes a description of the local economy that is both more accurate and more elegant than most: “governments, businesses, and individuals in Frederick County communicate freely and openly, most often in English but in many other languages as well.” In contrast to Fitzwater’s concerns over allowing any of the “emotional side of it” into the conversation, this document openly brings together multilingual and raciolinguistic arguments. Audiences seemed to appreciate the resolution, both out in public, by reposting it on several social media pages, and within the County Council, by copying select passages directly into the repeal bill (I discuss the details of the copying below). And yet, while some parts of the resolution did reappear in the bill, the parts about racism and civil rights did not.

Instead of naming racism and xenophobia explicitly, some of the people involved, particularly white people, preferred to focus on how the English-only policy harmed white people’s reputation. Specifically, I repeatedly encountered white people expressing how they did not want to be seen as unwelcoming rednecks. For example, a July 21 Frederick Local Yoke! blog post briefly mentioned that the policy “makes us look like uneducated, backwoods . . . rednecks,” and in our interview, one of the writers added, “this looks unwelcoming.” At a public hearing, one man (who I did not interview), expressed concern that outside corporations would not want to come there if it meant dealing with “Frednecks.”

This kind of concern over how English-only policies might make white people look is why I consider the orientation underlying this approach to be “raciolinguistic,” rather than more narrowly “anti-racist.” A raciolinguistic perspective is broadly about examining connections people make between language and race (Rosa and Flores 622). Everyone in this section is calling attention to connections between language and race, but that could mean anything from criticizing racism to trying to recuperate white identity. There is a serious limitation to this discourse about unwelcoming Frednecks vs. welcoming white people: people

“Anxieties over white identity (rather than racism and racial justice) thus threatened to oversaturate the discussions about this language policy’s connection to race. While Frederick County did successfully repeal their English-only policy, more widespread policy change may be difficult until discussions of language are driven more by people of color, transnational migrants, and multilingual people, and less by monolingual white Americans worried about whether they appear unwelcoming.”

of color only appear as people to invite in or keep out, rather than as people with agency. The centuries-long presence of indigenous people, black people, and European immigrants does not easily fit into this framework. Anxieties over white identity (rather than racism and racial justice) thus threatened to oversaturate the discussions about this language policy's connection to race. While Frederick County did successfully repeal their English-only policy, more widespread policy change may be difficult until discussions of language are driven more by people of color, transnational migrants, and multilingual people, and less by monolingual white Americans worried about whether they appear unwelcoming. I now turn to the strategy focused not on the economy, or on race, but on language itself.

Questioning The Nature Of English

In addition to advocating for multilingualism and against racism, participants used a third strategy: questioning the nature of English itself. Unlike the economic discourse about multilingualism, which argued for the value of multiple different languages (each associated with different nations around the world), this move was more about articulating the problems with taking such boundaries for granted. The difference is between a multilingual orientation towards communication in multiple languages and a translingual orientation towards the ways that “communication transcends individual languages” (Canagarajah 6). In this section, I discuss how one participant employed this strategy at a public meeting to local acclaim.

A county council member named Jerry Donald exemplified the translingual strategy by deciding to use his speaking time at the final public meeting to interrogate the English-only policy's underpinnings. In doing so, he was taking advantage of the fact that people in the English-only movement generally “fail to define English” (Horner et al. 309). He began by asking the county attorney (who had helped draft the original English-only ordinance) a number of questions about how the policy was defining the English language. In other words, while other people had focused on the “Only” half of the English-only law, he was asking about the “English” part. At one point, he asked, “How are we defining this? Oxford Dictionary? Webster's Dictionary?” Donald went on to add that the ordinance did not even specify any one dialect of English, like “American English.” The county attorney tepidly responded that they have used a 2007 edition of Webster's Dictionary to clarify definitions in the past. Donald wondered aloud how the government was supposed to handle words that had come into use after 2007. After some more exchanges back and forth, the attorney grumbled that he did not “appreciate” being singled out for questioning. He may have been frustrated because Donald was asking questions that they both already knew the answers to: the government did not have a perfect definition of what English was, because there is no perfect definition. Donald eased up on questioning the county attorney, but he continued to lay out his issues with the ordinance.

Donald made the case that English is not really controllable by anyone or anything and that therefore an English-only policy is untenable on practical grounds. He described how English is “a complete free market,” where “things come and go and move on” beyond our control. “English moves,” he argued, and trying to legislate language is like “trying to nail currant jelly to a wall.” Using

the example of the word “burrito,” he suggested that it is not clear what is and is not English. Later, in our interview, he made it clear that he was not just describing a contemporary phenomenon of globalization; he cited the way Middle English grew out of Old English and French, and the long history of language contact in the United States between English, Yiddish, Spanish, and other languages. When I asked how he developed this perspective, he mentioned his general knowledge of US and world history, as well as Bill Bryson’s book *Made in America: An Informal History of the English Language in the United States*, which devotes space to language contact among indigenous people, enslaved black people, and early settlers. His description of English’s impurity rang true to other participants, and reflects several increasingly accepted theories about the impossibility of drawing clear borders around the English language (Nero 137; Mufwene 107; Pennycook, *Language* 68; Canagarajah 57), and the promise of a “border-crossing model” in writing studies (You 201). Donald’s strategy also echoed ones used to question the purity of languages other than English or outside the US, like “de-essentializing” indigenous languages (Lyons xii) and “defanging” English in Canada (Heller 183). In other words, Donald made a persuasive argument not by eliding the linguistic complexity of the issue but by articulating it in all its messiness.

Other people in the community welcomed Donald’s discourse, whether they were in the room that night or watching the live stream. The bloggers I interviewed singled out his performance as particularly persuasive. The Occupy Frederick writer told me that the way Donald “broke this thing down” was “beautiful” and “the most compelling argument against this English-only law that I have ever heard.” This compliment is an example of how open some people were to different strategies: the Occupy Frederick writer focused mostly on economics, race, and immigration in their own discourse but went out of their way to bring up and endorse Donald’s angle, too. The bloggers for Frederick Local Yokel also singled out Jerry Donald’s performance. In a post from the night of the repeal vote (August 18), they attributed his rhetorical abilities in part to his background in education. They wrote, “Props to Jerry Donald for pointing out that the English-Only ordinance was a loser from the right hand side, in that it created unnecessary and meaningless legislation to govern a free-market and constantly evolving language environment. Leave it to a teacher to go all debate team on it and show us he can rock it from the other angle.” Aside from the praise, what is notable about this blog post is how it repeats Donald’s own use of the term “free market” in his public statement. This finding resonates with other recent work on how policymakers, scholars, and teachers can associate both multilingualism and linguistic fluidity with a capitalist framework, in settings ranging from European Union language policy (Flores) to the field of TESOL (Kubota). The translingual approach may have appealed so strongly to people precisely because it synthesized a more familiar understanding of language as a resource with an incisive new set of questions about how language is defined and quantified in the first place.

Narrowing Possibilities for Language Advocacy

While the previous sections have showed the wealth of literacy practices people used to change an English-only policy, I now turn to how the campaign’s most official discourse started to home in

on flipping the economics script, potentially at the expense of other possibilities. This narrowing process began with a community-wide petition, which had been one of the first topics people discussed at early planning meetings (Fitzwater; Spencer). In Spring 2015, Angela Spencer told me members of the Human Relations Commission started collecting signatures in support of repealing the English-only ordinance, both on their own and by sharing the petition with “civic groups, faith-based groups, community and neighborhood” groups. According to minutes from the April 28, 2015 HRC meeting, “everyone was asked to fill at least a page and bring them to the next meeting.” This was a collective effort to show community support. Later, at the final public hearing before the vote, a community activist came up to the podium and held up the petition so that the council and the audience could all see it. She said the petition had 1,000 signatures, and as she lifted it up, she asked anyone in the room who had signed to stand up. In her statement, she also talked about the English-only ordinance’s potential to harm local businesses and dissuade new businesses from moving to town, and its lack of potential to save the county money. She emphasized the collective action behind this position, as manifested by the thick stack of paper and at least three people coming to their feet. Over time and across different situations, then, the petition helped build grassroots support, demonstrate that support, and, finally, highlight the strategy of flipping the economics script.

Like the petition, the repeal bill was the result of collaborative writing but also of narrowing the focus of the campaign. When I asked the bill’s two sponsors who wrote the bill, they both listed many people and sources. A “county attorney” (Keegan-Ayer) and “some county staff” helped write the bill, both by expanding on “bullet points” that Fitzwater provided and by doing additional “research” on what the “typical arguments” against English-only policies might be (Fitzwater). Jessica Fitzwater’s position as government liaison to the Human Relations Commission was key. Early on, Fitzwater had suggested that the HRC propose something about the possibility of a repeal to the council. At that time, the HRC and she had sustained “conversation about the document [and] what exactly our statement would be,” and then the text was “compiled together” (Spencer). As I discuss in the section on race, this resolution made a holistic argument against the English-only policy by deftly weaving together ideas about the economy, race, diversity, culture, tolerance, and general quality of life in the community. Afterwards, Fitzwater, Keegan-Ayer, and county staff used this resolution as source material for the final draft of the bill. In other words, Fitzwater created a sort of policy loop by encouraging them to write the resolution, then incorporating some of it back into her bill.

As content moved through this loop, though, its meaning did become more cramped. For example, both documents include a statement about how the “[o]rdinance, and the perception it has created, [is/constitutes] a barrier to...” However, the sentences end quite differently:

- HRC Resolution: “this Ordinance, and the perception it has created, is a barrier to making Frederick County the very best place to live, work, and raise a family.”
- Repeal Bill: “the Ordinance, and the perception it has created, constitutes a barrier to good business and impedes the growth and development of business and commercial endeavors in Frederick County.”

In the Resolution, the barrier is at once social, cultural, and economic. The meaning of “barrier” is much more specific in the bill, however. There, the sentence ends with “a barrier to good business and

impedes the growth and development of business and commercial endeavors in Frederick County.” In this version of the clause, the focus is purely on the economy. The point is that while the bill is transparently intertextual and coauthored, it is *not* just a more concise, or more polished version of the HRC resolution, or any of the other discourse from the campaign. Rather, flipping the economics script clearly became the most enshrined strategy in the bill. The robust local discourse about race appears only obliquely, in words like “tolerance,” “diversity,” and “multi-linguistic acceptance,” and there is no mention whatsoever of questioning the nature of English. As a policy becomes more streamlined, it may also become more limited. At the same time, an official policy’s narrow focus does not, and indeed cannot, erase the more expansive vision of a long-term, community-wide campaign.

Conclusion

In Frederick County’s repeal campaign, politicians and activists countered their local English-only policy’s monolingual orientation by adopting multilingual, raciolinguistic, and translanguaging orientations to language. They enacted these alternate orientations in three ways: flipping the economics script, linking language to race, and questioning the nature of English. People like Jessica Fitzwater and M.C. Keegan-Ayer flipped the economics script, by arguing that the English-only policy was actually hurting, rather than helping, the local economy. Others, like Jay Mason and the writer for Occupy Frederick’s Facebook page, argued against the original ordinance on the grounds that it is racist. Jerry Donald and the bloggers for Frederick Local Yokel took a more translanguaging approach, by questioning the very premise of English-only policies, which rests on assumptions about English being completely unitary and separate from other languages. At the same time, flipping the economics script risked overshadowing the other strategies. The bill’s co-sponsors seemed to perceive the economic strategy as the most likely to win over skeptics, and in a predominately white, middle-class community, this was a shrewd move to make. Because discourse about race and the nature of language appeared more on the margins of the campaign (on anonymous blogs, in audience comments at public hearings, and from a politician who was not an official sponsor), the notion that language policy is merely about how to maximize economic and communicative efficiency remained largely intact.

This study has implications for broader conversation in writing studies and related fields about how orientations towards language develop and change. I address several of these implications: the affordances of each of the three approaches, the added potential value of combining multiple approaches, and the benefits of centering policymakers’ perspectives in future research. Each of these findings opens up space for future inquiry in language and literacy research, as well as future language advocacy in teaching, administration, and publishing. In terms of the individual approaches, engaging with economic arguments, showing how language and race shape each other, and questioning the ontological status of “English” are all applicable to a range of language policy situations. For example, the willingness to take economic concerns seriously echoes Tom McNamara’s findings about Chinese international students on a university campus, and his argument that compositionists “must rethink advocacy work that has traditionally relied on a language of rights”

(32), and turn their attention instead to “exploit[ing] the revenue-oriented values of the corporate university” (21–22). In this study, I have examined how this dynamic plays out in public policy, and I have shown what this sort of engagement with “revenue-oriented values” can look like in practice, including both its power and its potential to draw attention away from other possibilities. Future research might explore how this approach to language advocacy plays out in writing program administration. In terms of the more raciolinguistic and translanguingual approaches, I have highlighted the ability of these kinds of arguments to move people to action. As part of the language policymaking process, and in activities like faculty development and assessment, it is important to be explicit about the racist histories and logics that make English-only policies seem normal and desirable, and to pose questions about who benefits and who is marginalized by such policies. Similarly, it is crucial to keep in mind the theoretical problems with monolingual language policies: they purport to isolate and elevate one code above all others, despite the fact that communication is always more fluid in practice.

In addition to their individual strengths, there is an added advantage to meshing all these alternatives to monolingualism. I would argue that a meshed approach is ultimately more effective than trying to purify and deploy any one in isolation. Communication is translanguingual, multilingualism has economic consequences, and language cannot be separated from race in the United States.

“[A] meshed approach is ultimately more effective than trying to purify and deploy any one in isolation. Communication is translanguingual, multilingualism has economic consequences, and language cannot be separated from race in the United States.”

Meshing different approaches does not necessarily have to be an individual undertaking, or something that happens in one communicative event. In other words, there is no need for the language policy text itself to cover all possible bases, there is no need for one person to stand up and weave together all these

approaches in one definitive speech, editorial, or mission statement, and there is no need for a group of like-minded people to present a united front. In Frederick, people unevenly distributed their discourse strategies across genres, audiences, and situations, which may actually be more likely to lead to policy change than any steady drumbeat of talking points, even if that change is always partial.

A final insight is that plenty of people have already moved away from a monolingual orientation to language, if they ever were there in the first place. My participants did not so much choose to work on language policy as they were thrust into language policy work by the fact that they all lived in a community with an English-only ordinance. Nevertheless, they were able to navigate the policymaking process. In light of my participants’ savviness, we would be wise to regard public policymakers and activists as potential resources, rather than merely people in need of scholars’ expertise. To be sure, writing studies has made significant contributions to US language policy, particularly through the organizational efforts of CCCC. I agree, too, with Scott Wible’s argument that “[l]anguage policies position compositionists as public intellectuals who can provide leadership

in public debates on linguistic diversity” (*Shaping* 173). However, the methodology I developed for this study, particularly the ethnographic component, opens up the exact opposite possibility as well. Tracing, listening to, and centering how people engage with language policies in their own communities, from their own perspectives, towards their own ends, can provide writing studies with novel models of what it means to resist and rewrite English-only policies.⁴

NOTES

¹In 2014, Frederick County shifted forms of government, from a County Commissioner structure to one with a County Council plus a County Executive. The terminology used to describe county-level politicians thus varies over the course of the article.

²Transcription convention: double parentheses are used to mark non-verbal activity.

³The phrase “meaningless on its surface” refers to the fact that the 2012 English-only ordinance included a number of exception clauses. For example, the ordinance would not apply in situations of “public health, sanitation, and public safety.”

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Of Rights Without Guarantees: Friction at the Borders of Nations, Digital Spaces, and Classrooms

Stephen J. Parks University of Virginia
Ahmed Abdelhakim Hachelaf Syracuse University

KEYWORDS

community; partnership; politics; literacy; neo-liberalism; critical pedagogy;
transnationalism; decolonialism; digital spaces

It has become a truism that over the past decade, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have been in a period of political transition towards (or perhaps away from) democratic structures. Within that truism, we believe, has often rested a false sense that the United States is somehow not also in a similar state of transition, not involved in a movement towards (or away from) its own democratic heritage. The election of Donald Trump has surely changed this sense of stability. Today, a shadow of authoritarianism lingers over both regions. Thus, despite one of us hailing from Algeria and the other from the United States, we now find ourselves consistently invoking a similar mission for education—the creation of classrooms focused on concepts of civic leadership and human rights that can support democratic social/political change within our respective nations. And we find ourselves consistently wondering how, despite geographical distances, we might combine our pedagogical efforts to confront authoritarian practices, enabling the next generation of democratic leaders and activists to see themselves in alliance with other such advocates across the globe.

Our collective hopes are occurring within a disciplinary moment where the ability of social/digital technology to support such transnational pedagogies is often also optimistically aligned with arguments about the creation of new politically liberatory spaces for those involved (Rice and St. Amant). Within this framework, arguments about a hybrid embodiment have also emerged, where digital spaces become linked to off-line activist practices for expanded democracy in both local communities and national contexts (Bridgman; Ghonim). Experience has taught us, however, that national, digital, and personal borders are not so easily crossed (Scott and Welch); that democratic alliances are not so easily embodied (Parks, “Sinners”); and that concepts of “justice,” “progress” and “rights” exist within a pluriversity of histories and standards (Mignolo and Walsh). Indeed, we have come to believe it is in the friction caused by such transnational dialogues, in the differences in technology access, in educational framings, and in politics through which the seeds of an alternative future will first be articulated; and it is in the resulting locally embodied conceptions of activism that actual change will first emerge (even when such embodiments “contradict” political framings of our global allies.) (See Lawton, Cairns, and Gardner; McDonough and Feinberg; Demaine).

It is within this contradictory and complex context, then, that we intend to discuss the genesis

of the Twiza Project. Initially premised on the imagined ability of a seemingly seamless transnational digital space to foster an online dialogue focused on justice, rights, and democracy, our initial partnership (out of which Twiza would emerge) hoped to link such dialogues to the work of writing classrooms already focused on civic engagement/leadership. We intend to use the *hope* that initially informed the beginnings of our work to discuss how the *reality* of differing political contexts and traditions provided an alternative sense of what a transnational dialogue might produce among students. To do this work, we will begin with an overview of how Composition/Rhetoric has imagined its relationship to concepts of justice, rights, and progress. We will then provide some background on Algeria's political/education context. At that point, we will discuss the experience of our linked classes, ending with how this experience led us to create (and then expand) the Twiza project.

Ultimately, we will argue that while the instantiation of such an alternative transnational framework might create unresolvable contradictions for those involved—disrupting the idea of borderless space—it simultaneously points to the demanding work that must be undertaken. Our current work, then, has turned to creating out of such inherent contradictions the possibility of a relationality and collaboration under the banner of multiple forms of “truth” and “traditions” and pointed toward multiple forms of justice (Mignolo, “Delinking”). It is that shift in action that we hope to document in what follows.

Justice, Democracy, Rights, and Progress

It is difficult to announce an origin point for when the field of composition and rhetoric associated itself with concepts of justice, democracy, rights, and progress. While it is possible to claim roots as far back as ancient Greece (Corbett and Connors), for our purposes we will situate this claim within the post-World War II period in the United States, when there was an attempt at a national consolidation on the meaning of “democracy,” as well as its consequent exportation as an economic/political model globally. As has been discussed elsewhere (Parks, *Class Politics*), this initial post-war articulation of our field as a nationalized entity is best encapsulated in the 1960 *NCTE The Teaching of English and the National Interest*, a document which positions the field as fully supportive of the Cold War politics of the time. Indeed, even when the field later drew upon social movements to create progressive classrooms as a counter-model to such politics, invoking the *Southern Christian Leadership Council's* Civil Rights campaign and *Students for a Democratic Society's* anti-war activism, such pedagogies often remained predominantly couched in a sense of American exceptionalism—often eliding or misrepresenting anti-racist/anti-colonial framed movements, such as elements of Black Power (Kynard, *Vernacular*) and later stages of anti-war activism (Parks, *Class Politics*).

Indeed, as a model to justify the simultaneous critique of US democracy from the inside (Civil Rights Movement/anti-war protests) while also being broadcast as an international model of democratic idealism (Marshall Plan, Peace Corps, etc.), this framework of democracy, rights, and justice was seemingly able to balance contradictory forces, demonstrating how the US could critique its own democracy while “fighting” for democracy elsewhere. For in each case, the field of struggle focused on reforming nation-state structures (US government and Viet Nam) within a

sense of the American “ideal.” And within the field of Composition and Rhetoric, it is possible to understand many of the field’s progressive turns during this period as occurring within this “rights” framework—consider the *Students Right to Their Own Language*, an appeal for including more voices in classrooms/society within an argument about the “promise” of the United States (Parks, *Class Politics*).

We choose this moment, then, to highlight the extent to which the field of Composition and Rhetoric in its modern period initially established its democratic ethos (and sense of rights) within a particular sense of “justice.” Here we are aligning our argument with Nancy Fraser, who has argued that appeals to justice have typically occurred within nation-state structures where the “who” making the appeal was assumed to be the citizen, and the endpoint was either economic improvement or cultural recognition by the nation-state (*Fortunes*). (Again, think *Students’ Right*.) In this regard, Fraser stands in relationship to other scholars, such as Wendy Hesford, who understand the concept of “rights” to be premised on the fact of nation-states articulating and enforcing them (Hesford). Working within these scholarly paradigms, we are arguing that justice within our field has been understood as the moment when articulated rights, emerging from contexts of equal/expanding participation (i.e., social movements) are implemented within nation-state contexts.

And if you look at the genesis of justice-oriented service-learning and community partnerships within predominantly white US-based universities (the unique histories of HBCU/HSI/Tribal Colleges excepted; see Sias and Moss for part of this history), there is a clear emphasis on creating programs where formerly under-recognized communities were positioned to argue more effectively for justice, for the right to certain types of economic and cultural participation within assumed nation-state structures (Flower). Parks’s own work, along with the powerful work of Paula Mathieu and Eli Goldblatt, might serve as representative examples. In each case, the discussed projects are pointed toward intervening in local discourses, enmeshed within cultural and legislative power networks, with the aim of opening up participation rights of local communities in public decision-making practices (Mathieu; Goldblatt; Parks, *Gravyland*). This was an important articulation of democracy, rights, and political progress in post-WW II Composition/Rhetoric. And in the case of Goldblatt and Mathieu, important contributions were made.

Situating our work on democracy, rights, justice, and progress within an historical context, however, also exposes the underbelly of such desires, an underbelly premised on colonialism’s drive to define the “world” within a singular framework of what constitutes progress, as well as an economic and knowledge production framework premised on legitimating systemic exploitation of workers, both industrial and rural (Quijano; Spivak). Under this particular articulation of justice, democracy, and rights, for instance, two-thirds of the world were seen as essentially lacking the rhetorical, intellectual, or political skills to successfully integrate themselves into what is defined as a singular, unified concept of “progress”—a progress here defined as nation-states’ acceptance (forced or not) of US versions of democracy supportive of global capitalism. And as Hesford has argued, more often than not, arguments to “recognize” or “identify” with victims of human rights abuses, often from failed nation states, are typically premised on these very categories of what counts as “progress” (Hesford). (Our field’s accountability in such narratives is a topic for another essay, but

we would point you to Mignolo and Walsh for a possible lens of interpretation, as well as the work of Ruiz and Sanchez for how these paradigms have impacted key terms in the field.)

Today, the original post-WWII instantiation of global capitalism, premised on strong nation states moderating its excesses, has been replaced with a neoliberalism premised on weak nation-states abandoning any role in moderating capitalism as well as any protection of public sectors/workers' rights, all in the name of supporting transnational corporate profit. In such a world, a rhetoric of transnationalism, border crossings, and flows has infiltrated how classrooms are framed as well as how our "justice" work is understood. As Tony Scott and Nancy Welch have argued, one result of a lack of focus on the materiality that produces "open borders" is that our students' "bodies" are being divorced from their "writing," particularly as they are asked to imagine themselves as writers within this new transnational and traveling community (Scott and Welch). Instead of locally situated bodies, their identities become recoded as floating signifiers of the possibility of global communication, seemingly placing them in collaboration and partnership with individuals/communities across the globe (Sanchez, as cited by Scott and Welch). It is out of this context that the imagined hope of "transnational dialogues" appears.

By focusing on the "flow" of voices and ideas, however, Scott and Welsh conclude, our field has turned away from (ignored) the actual bodies that make such "flow" possible—the underpaid workers who mine the minerals which support cell phones, the non-union workers who have to fix the cables on which conversation travels, and, the nation-states held in an unequal relationship with first-world countries whose citizens (we use that term deliberately) enjoy the benefits of the immediacy of global communication. In such a framework, concepts of "justice" need to be reattached to the embodied needs of these exploited workers; "rights" need to be recast in ways that recognize the transnational community of laborers being exploited; and new models of civic engagement/democratic activism need to be formulated which can situate students in relation to (and in alliance with) other understandings of what "progress" might entail that support the liberation of locally oppressed bodies across the globe.

Clearly, then, we want to argue that another sense of "rights" and "democracy" is possible, one premised on a community's local and historic practices, drawn from residents' personal experience of living in historically colonized spaces as well as their experience of having their historic spaces colonized through the western models of nation-states existing within a neoliberal global economy. Here we are thinking of the work of Mignolo and Walsh, who argue that there exist regions where, admitting the lack of any pure space, populations have maintained cultural/ethical practices that draw primarily from non-capitalist/colonialist communal standards. As examples of such practices, we would point to the resistance practices of Indonesian communities confronting "loggers" who want to describe the forest as "empty" despite generations of families having practiced traditional farming technologies on that land (Tsing) and to the feminist collective *Tejido de Communication para la Verdad y lad Vida*, who invoke local concepts of *palabrandar* to resist strategies designed to take their land and co-opt their leadership (Mignolo and Walsh). Focusing on more disciplinary-based research methods, we would point to the work of Ellen Cushman and Lisa King et al., who draw upon indigenous practices premised on relationality to talk about how Native American communities

are structured and should be represented in archives and scholarship (Cushman, “Wampum”; King et al.) and, finally, to the work of Adam Banks and Cristina Kirklighter, who actively listen to the traditions of African-American and Latinx communities as guideposts for how to proceed, how to align their work with definitions of progress emerging from the community (Banks; Kirklighter).

For us, the importance of these other models is in their attempt to articulate a sense of rights and political participation that emerges from histories/epistemologies that do not originate within US/European modernist frameworks. In this sense, they are “otherwise,” attempting to move toward a relationship *with* a colonial history instead of existing *within* such a history, i.e., indirectly invoking liberatory frameworks that participate/emerge from that very colonial history such as “progress,” “economic rights,” and “globalism.” What we are suggesting is that as the field moves toward a sense of itself and its classrooms as “transnational,” there is a consequent danger of encoding the colonialist models of “rights” and “democracy” into our students, models which were initially used to steal land/resources from existing societies as well as to invoke nation-state models (premised on US versions of democracy) that allowed an elite segment of that society to retain/gain power over the needs of the mass of the population (Butler and Spivak).

Aligned with the work of the above scholars, we argue that a “transnational” disciplinary effort (research, community, and classroom-based) must exist within a “pluriversity” of epistemologies and practices. Such an argument, however, poses questions to a field imagining itself within a “transnational” context but typically deploying US-generated concepts of democracy and state-protected rights:

- How do western-originated concepts of “human rights” fracture when articulated within global contexts? Do these alterations also fracture the meaning of a “transnational” space?
- How might the new forms of relationality created through embodied local histories and epistemologies also potentially reframe the goals of student transnational collaborative dialogue/work?
- How might such relationality be enacted by students outside of the writing classroom in local communities? How do we make sure decoloniality does not become a metaphor instead of an interventionary practice?
- How do such actions stand in relationship to the concepts of rights and democracy that have framed progressive work in composition and rhetoric?

Heading into our collaborative project, these were not the research questions we imagined. Initially, the Twiza project was premised on an Algerian concept closely aligned with a “barn building,” where a rural community joins together to build an important structure for a neighbor. The initial thought was that the students in our classroom would mutually build a new, online dialogic space that would enable a common vision across national borders to be developed on the meaning of justice, democracy, and rights—a vision that could then be deployed in local acts against existing cultural and government structures embedded within neoliberal policies. Just as practice norms theory, however, so implementation humbles hope. And the above questions emerged as each of the students’ local and national contexts created friction, demonstrating an inability to create a seamless

transnational framework which could circulate online as well as in the streets and neighborhoods of a community. The dream of a unified space, that is, conflicted with the necessity of a pluriversity of knowledges. Traditional disciplinary concepts of dialogue began to falter, demanding that new ones emerge. We ultimately moved from a modernist-Composition premised in post-WWII frameworks to a new space, premised on a pluriversity of possibilities. We are not arguing the project became “decolonial,” but rather it began to rest on the edge, the promise, of such options.

It is to the importance of that theoretical and political movement that we now turn.

Collective Trauma and the Goals Of Democratic Education

Democratic education necessarily occurs in what, to echo John Dewey, might be called the unconscious influences of the environment, the emotional, political, and historical resonances that form a “national identity.” Within the context of Algeria, this unconsciousness is infused with a colonial legacy that shapes the inter-relationship of concepts such as identity, knowledge, and heritage, often within the current context of sectarian conflicts. This complicated landscape is further infused with a collective memory of trauma—initially by colonialization, then with the struggle for independence and, most recently, with the violence of the Black Decade, a decade which saw over 200,000 civilians killed and entire villages massacred (Evans and Phillips).¹ Within such a fraught context, the production of a post-colonial education focused on civic engagement and democracy is being articulated within a space where the political borders drawn around the meaning of human rights and democracy has also become a restrictive force to their very implementation, rights being simultaneously announced and rendered mute.

Indeed, such a framing can help us understand the current leadership of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (elected four times since 1999), who in response to the Black Decade invoked a discourse of reconciliation through initiatives focused on “healing” and “dialogue.” That is, the government represented itself as the bulwark against violent and “traumatic” possibilities seemingly inherent in large-scale citizen political participation as well as the endorser of certain limited forms of civic dialogue concerning the future of Algeria. Here it is worth citing the argument of Wendy Hesford, who has argued the image/framework of trauma often removes the historical complexity of events like the Black Decade, substituting a “universal subject” who is then rescued by Western-originated concepts of human rights, rights often articulated through neo-liberal models of economic growth and governance policies (Hesford). In the case of Algeria, it is possible to understand the move to politically define this historical event as “traumatic” as a means to step outside the complexity of events (which might lead to attribution of guilt for parties involved in the Black Decade) and implement political rights that are framed in the service of such global economic trends.

And here the Algerian Ministry of National Education should be seen as a primary vehicle to instantiate this political and civic culture, using its centralized authority to mandate common curricula as well as standards (and thus civic values) for primary and secondary classrooms across the nation. Within the Algerian education system, for instance, the curriculum is generally geared towards the formation of the citizen, with this term often being preceded by terms such as good,

active, decent, responsible, effective, and global (Hachelaf). Yet the Orientation Law of 2008 also situates this “good” citizen within larger national and international contexts that align it with neo-liberal frames:

Since the end of the last millennium, Algeria has undergone rapid transformations at both the political and economic levels: democracy, citizenship, human rights, individual and collective freedoms (which have gradually become concepts in our daily lives), market opening, globalization of the economy, internationalization of information and communication are no longer mere slogans but concrete facts. The task of the school in the face of these developments is essential. In addition to its traditional task of transmitting knowledge, the child should be taught how to become a responsible citizen, able to understand and contribute to the changes in the society in which he / [she] lives.

Within such a context, the “good citizen” becomes the individual who embeds their understanding of political rights with the neo-liberal paradigm of market openings and the globalization of the economy. Markers such as race, ethnicity, social class, language, gender become erased within such a national discourse and within such policies of economic liberalization. That is, a focus on the individual, not communal identity, dissipates the importance of collective action for economic/ political change (Brown; Davies). In such a framework, then, Algeria’s educational mission is articulated into a global neo-liberal identity, with firm parameters on the meaning of democratic activism to produce change.

Both elements of this curriculum (neoliberal attitudes/limited democratic possibilities) can be seen in two sample student assignments. Consider the following example from an official First-Year Secondary school which invokes values distant from the traditional and current Algerian culture (Riche et al):

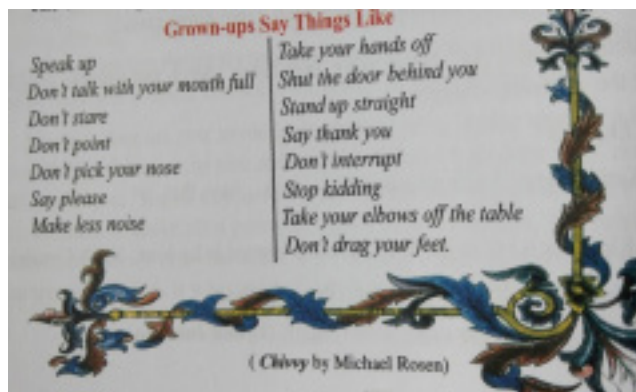


Figure 1. Teaching Civic Values, Students’ Book: At the Crossroad.

The example of “take your elbows off the table” implies an Algeria where all communities use (or should use) tables, while, in fact, many cultural groups still sit on a carpet to take their dinner. The objective of this “poem” seems to be to socialize learners according to the values of the dominant

socioeconomic group or class: those most benefitting from a globalization premised on Western (white) middle class civility (Auerbach). Thus, while it is important to acknowledge progressive trends to introduce global citizenship, through themes such as tolerance and intercultural understanding, it is equally important to understand the economic endpoint of such efforts often work systemically to further divide citizens economically. For, in the model being taught, traditions that are “otherwise” to global capitalism, offering alternative models of community/democracy, are moved to the side in the name of progress. A history of indigenous communal values captured in a dinner held on a carpet is replaced with a Westernized dinner table.

Within this framework, political critique or civic engagement is also mutated into limited visions of democratic activism. Ideally, that is, a democratic education produces informed citizens with a collective political voice in public life. Yet in one of the few examples of such education in the Algerian curriculum, only limited channels are offered for such public engagement in political change. When students are asked to write a persuasive essay for their imagined campaign to be a mayor committed to reforming corruption (see below), that is, the suggested pathways imagine a “leader” who can dictate solutions, a leader who does not also consider the larger economy of laws/regulations that foster an inequity that works in concert with limited access to networks of power.

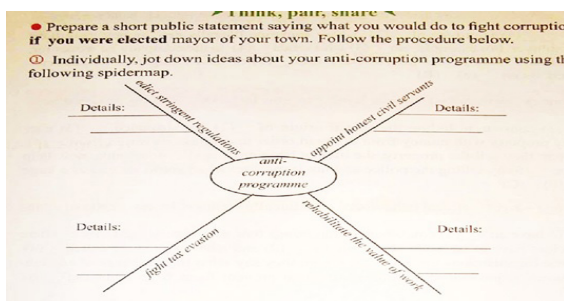


Figure 2. Teaching political engagement: Students’ Book, New Prospects.

That is, how *open* can an authoritarian system become when considering “corruption”? To what extent might such corruption ensure a continuance in political power at odds with democratic practices and norms? Indeed, within the MENA region, the actual result of a nation’s movement toward free market policies has been the creation of a clique of individuals, aligned with the government, who reap the rewards of privatization, further removing the government from being responsive to the will of the people (Achcar). Speaking broadly, then, if neoliberal economics fail to foster actual collective democratic rights and a robust civic culture, longer traditions of communal decision-making/justice might offer an alternative. As evidenced above, however, such alternatives are effectively removed from the curriculum.

Negotiating “trauma” for educators/activists in Algeria, then, means exploring how to ensure such moments are not invoked in support of policies that promise safety at the cost of economic justice. Instead, education should exist within a complex history, one framed upon pre-nationalist traditions and arguments that demonstrate the value of dialogue and engaged citizenship practices

to produce peaceful change. And such pedagogies, such curricula, should present an alternative vision that is wide enough for all identities, across indigenous histories and irrespective of their geographic location or racial/linguistic background, to flourish peacefully in ways separate from economic imperatives. In Algeria—and as will be seen below, the US—educators must work to produce a pedagogy that positions their students not only as “otherwise” to dominant culture but with the tools to foster actual change.

Democratic Work in the *École Normale Supérieure*, Algeria

It would be incorrect, however, to imagine that such pedagogies are not emerging or already in practice in Algeria. Hachelaf’s pedagogy is a case in point. His classroom practices emerge from a lesson concerning the Arab Awakening: drastic change can easily be confiscated. As a result, he came to believe the classroom offered a site for sustained support of broader conceptions of civil/civic society. And he came to believe that for such a classroom to be enacted, students needed to become publicly engaged in their own communities. Hachelaf joined the *École Normale Supérieure*, then, with the aim of training future teachers to show how their classrooms could produce leaders focused on such systemic and sustainable change. That is, he wanted students (both his own and those of the future teachers) to learn that the duties of citizenship transcended the limited visions of civic behavior and democracy dominant in MENA political culture, that if there was to be a counterbalance to authoritarian impulses that currently limit the meaning of good governance in the MENA region, educational institutions could enable a generation to move towards a broader conception of rights and justice than neo-liberal economic/political paradigms allow.

Since that time, Hachelaf has attempted to use the limited autonomy available to him as a university lecturer within a centralized system to design courses focused on producing the next generation of democratic leadership. His courses aim to provide students with a different perspective to reactionary pedagogies (discussed above) that have prevailed within education, where curricula objectives were too often intended to integrate students into the economic limitations of a “post-traumatic” state. In that sense, his class strives to be a reflective space to create a counterbalance focused on democratic education, civic engagement, and participatory leadership. Here the classroom is understood as a micro-version of the larger society, where teachers and students inhabit (and are not divested of) their personal, political or indigenous identities. The goal is to see how, out of an alliance of such identities, collectivities for change can be created.

With this in mind, one of the key concepts discussed is power distribution. In Hachelaf’s university classes, students engage in reflection activities such as designing circle diagrams representing factors such as gender, age, tribal, and sectarian affiliations that dis/able them from moving freely up social, economic, and political ladders. The discussion leads to a deep understanding of how the classroom is also socially stratified, opening up insights into how seemingly small pedagogical policies that teachers feel are benign or even good teaching practices may be harmful. For instance, a teacher who decides to design a social media project or a website to exchange course materials might hinder a segment of the classroom population that lives in an area without access to Internet,

thereby privileging those already favored by society. Echoing Paulo Freire, Hachelaf's class comes to understand that being critical in everything teachers do as educators forms the first step to a democratic and just society.

Hachelaf also creates spaces where teacher authority can be challenged. Outside the classroom, he encouraged future teachers to support and allow their students to form civil society groups. To this end, he presided and founded an "English Club" that offered students opportunities not only to practice this second language but also to debate local and international issues through student-student debates, excursions, magazines, environmental campaigns, and mock United Nations sessions. Unlike the traditional Algerian university classroom, where lecture dominates, these clubs provided the give-and-take of public debate, allowing students to enact the forms of critical and civic dialogue discussed in class through the lens of their own personal/cultural/regional histories. Here it should be noted that such clubs are highly unusual within Algerian universities. And it is also important to note that these *École Normale Supérieure* student clubs have inspired similar efforts at dozens of campuses in central/southern Algeria. The growth of such clubs represents a proliferation, then, of spaces for civic debate to occur outside the knowledge frameworks of the mandated curriculum and other than the accepted viewpoints taught in schools.

We recognize that such efforts may appear somewhat ordinary to teachers outside of the Algerian context. They may not appear to enact the political work stated as necessary in the earlier section of this article. We want to highlight, however, that framing the work of teachers as facilitating students learning collective leadership skills, asking students to understand themselves as citizens fostering public debates outside of accepted paradigms, all within classrooms situated within a community context, are seen as radical departures by those in authority. In fact, in response to these practices, colleagues placed serious pressure on the university to re-assert traditional teaching models focused on teacher-centered/lecture-based pedagogies, their argument being that it was not possible to share power with students and effectively teach.

The clubs were seen as particularly objectionable as they allowed students to enact genres of debate and discussion that stood outside of accepted civil dialogue, moving beyond limited notions of what it meant to be an active citizen. Parents and authorities actually challenged these efforts, often seeking to eliminate any form of support. Unsurprisingly, then, when university students recently went on strike for increased educational/financial support, they were harassed. They were picked up, driven into the country, and left there to fend for themselves. Perhaps unlike the US, civic education in Algeria is not so much seen as neoliberal volunteerism but as a political commitment to citizen's collective rights to organize and reform civic culture. And as the recent strike has shown, perhaps somewhat expectantly, such an education is seen as both disruptive and dangerous for those involved.

Diminishing Discord at Syracuse University

An English Club?

When Hachelaf visited Parks' advanced writing class at Syracuse University, Donald Trump had

been President-elect for approximately eight weeks. In the class period immediately after Trump's election, a somber air of trauma and fear seemed dominant. In a course that had been focused on social movements, from Students for a Democratic Society to Black Lives Matter, the fact of President Trump seemed to take the wind out of our discussions, leaving many rudderless as they looked ahead. Hachelaf's visit, then, focusing on the radical nature of sponsoring English Clubs in Algeria at first, seemed out of place, too moderate, not speaking to the current US context.

It was only in the following weeks that Hachelaf's argument about creating alternative spaces for democratic practices and values gained increased relevance—particularly as proposed travel bans and ICE actions swept across the nation. Where, Parks's students wondered, would be the safe spaces through which democratic dialogues could be fostered, expanded upon, and eventually acted upon in the public sphere? In many ways, it seemed to Parks that the students were adopting Nancy Fraser's argument (an assigned text) about the need for subaltern counter-publics as a tactic to create collective platforms for intervening in dominant discursive political structures (“Rethinking”). In Fraser's case, the focus was on women's rights; for Parks's students, the focus was on creating arguments about the political rights of all individuals in the US, regardless of race, heritage, gender, or legal status. At that point, Parks's students could not be aware of future policies, such as those which would separate refugee children from their parents at the US border. They could not be aware of the future need for such expansive defenses of political/human rights.

Yet in those immediate weeks after the election, and echoing Hachelaf's vision, the classroom became a space in which to frame concerns, to seek support and consensus on the value of collective deliberation, and to use the pedagogical space as an incubator towards a pathway forward. As discussion continued, it became clear that some of the students' everyday experiences of racist encounters, sexual harassment, and anti-“immigrant” attacks demonstrated that the pre-Trump era was less a pivot point than a moment exposing deep historical “wounds,” suggestive of some alignment with Mignolo's invocation of “colonial wounds” (“Delinking”). That is, it became clear that the public rhetoric on campus (perhaps in the larger culture) that framed these current encounters as “traumatic” had smoothed over a complexity that spoke to different historical legacies of colonialism and slavery into which the legacies and unique trajectory of sexism was often articulated. As both a means to frame their own experience, and a way to build a different collective identity together, “trauma” came to be seen as an inadequate conceptual tool for forward movement.

The writing produced for the remainder of the course can best be described as uneven as students struggled to locate themselves within that current moment, attempting to reinvent the history we had studied around political activism—with its own legacy of blind spots—into a productive space for dialogue. Academic theories intended to help students “invent the university” were twisted into “inventive” strategies to protest campus culture. And visual rhetoric assignments would be used to bring these conflicting histories, theories, and experiences into clashing images that attempted to articulate a future in which their voices would be heard. Unlike many of Parks's courses, which often include producing a publication, none of this work would circulate outside class. For many of the students, in fact, there was a sense that there was no space on campus that would move their fledgling formation of an intersectional alliance and discourse into productive action. (On a local level, the

students had seen such a formation at collective action against oppressive university structures, the General Body, be threatened with expulsion in the midst of a sit-in at the Chancellor's office building (Mettus).

It was not until the following academic year, almost eight months into Trump's presidency, that a vehicle emerged through which such student dialogues might be supported and concepts of intersectional alliance/community building developed. And in many ways, it was the digital version of Hachelaf's English club. Parks' new course was an advanced rhetoric/composition course focused on the rhetorics and practices of human rights advocacy, a course which included partnerships with local and international human rights activists. The local partner was a refugee resettlement project, where the students would work with young adults to record their experiences of living in Syracuse. Instead of Hachelaf, the international partner was based in a different MENA country and hoped to establish projects which foster progressive discussions about education and community building. Before the class even began, however, the MENA partner had to withdraw over concerns about the nature of such work in the current context of her country. Concepts of rights and justice, it seemed, did not flow smoothly across borders. Indeed, the classroom (which consisted of many students from the earlier class) had become enmeshed in global struggles over the meaning of education, human rights, democratic dialogue, and political progress. The question became how to respond.

Enter Hachelaf, his students, and the seeds of the Twiza Project.

The Hopes, Reality, and Post-Trauma Work of the Twiza Project

This article began with our belief that that while each of us work within different geographical locations, we began to see ourselves as facing a similar pedagogical issue: how to create a classroom which would enable a more expansive nuanced sense of civil/civic society as the basis for public engagement and activism. And as our conversations continued, we began to realize that both of our classes appeared to be situated within contexts publicly framed as "traumatic," the limitations of which our students were trying to move beyond. When the withdrawal of the first MENA partner opened the opportunity to join our classes together, our hope was that such seemingly similar experiences might generate a virtual community that could lead to productive and material work by our students on expanding civil society rights/practices in their local communities, one that supported students attempting to create a "non-traumatic" future.

It is important to note that unlike the Twiza Project that emerged later, our initial collaboration was decidedly ad hoc. Parks's course had already started; Hachelaf's would begin in several weeks. Hachelaf's students, who initially would respond as a collective group, not as part of an assigned class, would move to working primarily through a classroom focused on education theory; Parks's students would continue to work outside the classroom with the previously mentioned refugee project and focus on literacy theory. In addition to different readings, there was also little to no coordination between the classes in terms of assignments. In fact, as the collaboration among students began, Parks altered the assignment expectations to include the work of developing specific writing prompts to initiate dialogues as well as building a website to archive the dialogues. At the outset, it was thought

common prompts would be used by all students, including those in the refugee project. This idea was abandoned as it became clear the intensity of the US/Algerian student dialogue organically moved to a focus on the situated nature of human rights discourse (see below).

To meet this need for shifting and emerging strands of conversations, Parks's students developed an online discussion tool using the platform *Discord*, which is more typically used as a gaming platform. *Discord* enabled the possibility of group conversations, specific topic conversations, and "closed" conversations among select students. The goal here was to enable a discussion on "human rights" featuring all the students in our class. As specific side discussions emerged, a unique conversational thread would be developed, and, when necessary, "closed conversations" would be created for students who wanted to speak privately with each other. In this sense, the discussion seemed premised on a concept of rights that was defined as transnational at its foundation—a belief in a common set of values and practices from which the needs of local circumstances could then be analyzed and public engagement created.

The initial prompt (used by all students in all locations) to introduce students to each other was "Describe a meal which represents your country"; this somewhat broad framing changed as US/Algerian dialogues became focused on the students' current educational and political situations. At this point, abandoning "prompts," the conversations began to focus on questions such as "What are human rights? What do they look like?" Perhaps if the course had been more formally prepared, different conversations might have occurred. But within this loose structure, Parks's students almost instinctively entered such a discussion focused on the possibilities inherent in the new transnational dialogic "space" to support human rights—a move Hesford would have probably predicted. For instance, one student wrote:

When I think of a basic human right, I think about freedom of speech. I'll admit, being in a first world country, I take food, water, clothing, shelter and medical care for granted. However, the reason why I think that the freedom of speech should be an essential human right is because of what this *Discord* symbolizes. We are all equals here, with no one voice being treated as "better" or "more valuable" than another. We all exist in a community that talks about huge global issues that need solutions. These issues have immense challenges caused by the powerful and the wealthy who want to keep the status-quo. I can't imagine how much harder it would be without the ability to communicate with one another.

An example I would give would be North Korea (as it's covered in the media today). It's described as a place where the Kim family have reign over a starving country, filled with people who cannot express their wishes for a change in government. It doesn't surprise me that North Korean citizens have fled for China or South Korea when the rights to protest or democratically vote on policies don't exist. I can only imagine what North Korea would look like right now if the Kim Il Sung (the first premier and dictator of the country) had established freedom of speech and democracy for its citizens.

Long story short, so many ideas, talents and energy can work together in incredible ways

when everyone is allowed to speak freely and their communication is valued equally (SU Student).

Here the framing of digital space as a utopic geography of equality is clearly articulated. Such a framing is immediately complicated by other Syracuse students who contrast the imagined free digital space of the dialogue with individuals who lack the right to a good education in “real life.” This alternative framing of unequal access to (or implementation of) rights within the United States, however, is then presented not so much as a result of the failings of the US but as individual communities not valuing such rights: “My community only had families like mine who gave their children no choice but to graduate high school and earn a higher education. So, I can’t even imagine growing up and education not being a priority” (SU Student). “Other” countries are then discussed as lacking similar commitments to fundamental human rights such as education. A Syracuse student, who was working with a child that was a refugee from North Africa and now living in Syracuse, wrote: “One of the students I was with pointed out that having a free education was one thing that she didn’t have back in her native country. Ignorantly, I never really thought about all kids not granted a free education.”

The failings of these other countries to support human rights was then expanded to political rights. After a discussion on how the United States has expanded voting rights, for instance, a Syracuse student writes: “There are plenty of countries who do not encourage or allows [sic] voting by either/any people at all or just a select few. . . A government must create opportunities and regulations that favor all, not just one person or group.” This final comment not only erases the current efforts to deny citizens voting rights in the US but also frames the current commitment to voting rights in the US in terms that slide into neo-liberal arguments about government creating “opportunities” to enact rights, not guarantees of such rights being enacted/enforced. If the US is marked by communities who fail to take advantage of their rights, “other countries” are marked, then, by the failure to “encourage” or even “allow” such rights.

To some extent, this framing of rights confirms Hesford’s argument that human rights discourse tends to work on a model of “empathy.” In using this term, Hesford implies not only personal concern for individuals who are denied voting in other countries but also an implied judgment that such failures speak to a lack of communal values and functioning governments. Note the empathy of the Syracuse student towards the young refugee child coupled with a judgment about her country, for instance. There is, Hesford argues, an implicit value judgment with echoes colonialist arguments that regions such as MENA countries lack certain Western traditions, traditions which might be profitably exported to these regions—perhaps with a dash of economic exploitation as well. Indeed, what this set of student comments demonstrates is how the embedding of such arguments within a transnational digital space demonstrates how such Western values are now being spread across regions. To reiterate the comment that began student discussion: “We are all equals here, with no one voice being treated as ‘better’ or ‘more valuable’ than another. We all exist in a community that talks about huge global issues that need solutions” (Syracuse student).

Here it should be noted that in the opening moments of the dialogues, students participating from other universities, such as the University of Djelfa students, also stepped into this discursive structure, this habitus of human rights. These students affirmed both the empathetic narrative as

well as invocations of “trauma” from which citizens have a right to be protected. One student wrote:

Human rights cover all aspects of life, but for me one right stands for them all, and that is the right to live. Some people can't even dream about healthcare or education, their only wish is to live to see another day. No one has the right to take an innocent life, but that's something we hear every day especially in wars or other places where people are killed for no reason whatsoever. My heart aches whenever I see the news, or just hear about an incident in my city. We all have the right to feel safe, to live a stable life, to sleep at night without having the fear of someone breaking in and hurting us or our families. All in all, and to put it in fewer words to show how important it is to fight for this right, is that no other right can exist without it. (École student)

In this contribution, the right to safety is the fundamental premise on which all rights are based. And within the context of Algeria, the student notes how her “heart aches whenever I see the news, or just hear about an incident in my city.” Within a discussion of the government's role to secure the opportunity for “rights,” this intervention also articulates the logic of the state protecting its citizens from such “trauma,” while often, as noted above, not placing such trauma within complex historical frameworks. Given the historical context in which the students were writing as well as the rights discourse in which they were situated (ala Hesford), these opening comments should have been predictable. The creation of a “We” premised on the spread of Western-based human rights as a buffer to the trauma and lack of political democratic rights facing non-Western countries seemed to be where the conversation was leading.

The students, however, soon began to try to actively disrupt this emerging empathetic relationship, “unsettling” it to invoke Hesford's use of La Capra (2011). The lever that led to this disruption emerged through a discussion on how gender rights were (or were not) articulated as fundamental to human rights. In discussing the importance of education as a right for women, in particular, an École student wrote:

As a woman sometimes I think of what if I haven't been sent to school, how would my life be now, how do girls in my age manage to live a life that doesn't include any studies, any cultivation, or any plans for a future job that would give her an independent life to do something in the world no matter how small it is; therefore, I believe that for women to defend their rights they need to be educated and cultivated. (École student)

This fracturing of the universal subject of human rights, initially splitting into types of gender, led to a series of further articulations of identity categories which began to argue how any universal claim to a “We” had to be implemented through intersectional politics. A Syracuse student wrote:

Because I am a woman of color, specifically a black woman, these problems are only amplified. The stereotypes of being an “angry black woman” are constantly being thrown my way regardless of how passive or submissive I may choose to be in a particular moment. That reality is what has evolved me into the kind of thinking that makes me say women are to live their lives as they want them. Society will find a problem with an outspoken woman. They'll call her “bossy” or “rude”. . . This mentality is something I have to continuously reinforce as I navigate throughout various spaces but it is the only way to exist in the way

I would like, while being conscious of my positionality relative to the person or space I'm interacting with at the moment. Being a woman of color in the United States includes a miscellany of emotions and politics but it's the intersection that most frequently informs who I am.

In response, an *École* student writes:

To be yourself, that is a woman in a world that is dominated by the male population is very difficult. . . . As for harassment, women are always the ones who are blamed for this act. We are always that one's "at fault." Even rape is regarded today as not that "important of an issue" anymore. I think the only way to solve all these problems of sexism and harassment is [for it] to be treated as a "disease." It needs a diagnosis, prognosis, and preferably a cure. Some men out there can do with a dose.

I know and I've heard of many examples of women being assaulted, harassed, or in the act of being abducted by some man in the street. Thankfully, at the time of these [incidents], things did not get that bad and the women were rescued. The big part in these stories is that the women in question did not file or complain about anything to the police. Most of them could describe the assaulter perfectly, but they didn't because she was afraid. They know that the man in question can get back at her and do worse things and no one would be the wiser. We are, in some cases, really afraid of some men because they are physically stronger than us. And men know that and sometimes they use it against us because they know we, in most cases, can't retaliate, especially when they give you that smirk which says: "I can hurt you woman, and you know it and I dare you to act on it." It is the bitter truth.

Within this emergent dialogue, there is neither the invocation of a universal subject of human rights nor the creation of a binary West/non-West geographic context. What emerges is a framework that demonstrates how human rights discourses can co-exist within structures that oppress/fail to account for locally specific acts of gender discrimination across borders. And unlike the initial articulation that began the class dialogue, these students are no longer in a transnational digital or geographic space where "We are all equals here, with no one voice being treated as "better" or "more valuable" than another. Instead, the question becomes what other traditions might be called upon to establish greater justice and rights for women. Indeed, it is at this moment, during this conversation, that students entered into a group conversation (as opposed to class-wide conversation). Instead of a transnational "free space," then, a "digital hush harbor" for women students was created (For the concept of "digital hush harbor," see Kynard, "From Candy Girls").

Human Rights as Locally Enacted

A conversation premised on a universal sense of human rights, enacted within an imagined "free" transnational space, had initially enacted what Hesford calls the empathetic rhetoric of rights discourse. As that conversation continued, however, students began to push back against a binary center/periphery framing, arguing that gender discrimination existed as an undercurrent in both

students' local experiences in the US and Algeria. While this critique was initially premised on individual experiences of harassment/assault, the conversation began to step outside of the personal concepts of an essentialized identity politics to a concept of rights as the creation of a locally created habitus from which gender discrimination could be confronted. The series of comments from which this transition occurred gained initial articulation from *École* students. In discussing the role of the state in supporting gender rights, an *École* student wrote:

One example of women gaining power in Algeria, as far as I'm concerned, has to be [one of our current Ministers]. . . She studied abroad, so she uses French instead which sounds ridiculous to me; not to forget her controversial ministerial decisions, because of which she is constantly being criticized. She's a great example of women misusing their only chance to show how influential and powerful they can be, and it still amazes me how her being a woman combined with her wrong choices still didn't affect her very important position in the ministry, which sheds light on how the whole topic of women's power and equality is pretty messed up here in Algeria.²

It should be noted that here, again, the identity of the individual in question is fractured from a universal identity, first to a gender position, then to her linguistic/educational positioning, and finally to her ministerial position. For our purposes, it is also important to note how this comment separates the "identity" of the individual's gender from a particular political stance. What becomes clear is that her failure to support gender rights exposes how the habitus created by the state was a weak/inadequate response to reform structures to enable women to recognize both the extent of their discrimination and the ability to argue for their rights. This recognition of the need for systemic change within the state then expands from the government to political parties. A different Algerian student wrote:

The Constitution of Algeria in 1976 incorporated the rights of women in the political, economic, cultural and social spheres. With regard to item 42, the Constitution emphasized gender equality. But honestly it is not enough. I had a last discussion with my friends and we were talking about political women, because last Thursday we saw the legislative elections. [One person] said, political women does not exist in our community, women are just tool under the use of men. I really do not care about her life or what people say about women's success. In no way will people criticize. I really appreciate political women although I hate to be one of them.

Here the student demonstrates how cultural attitudes limit the ability of women to enact a gender-rights politics within the state or political parties, even when the structure or "politics" would seem to be open to such transitions. Within these comments, gender rights are seen as emerging out of particular political/cultural contexts and, importantly, the discursive and material field of action seen as most relevant is not an abstraction to "human rights" but the local work within these complex cultural/political contexts.

As a result, what begins to occur, then, is a new model of rights arguments. There is less emphasis on appeals to human rights as a universal and more towards local traditions, whether emerging from religious or cultural traditions, as the seeds from which an increased enactment of "rights" is possible.

And increasingly in the dialogue among the students in the two classes, an argument emerges which utilizes terms such as “allyship” and “intersectional.” One example of this is from an Algerian student, who had been writing about the importance of Islam to tackle gender discrimination in Algeria; this student writes to the African-American SU student:

The prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said: There is no difference between the Arabic on the precepts and not between black and white except by piety. We are equal in the eyes of God, and people always criticize whether you are white or black, don't forget you have beautiful heart and beautiful soul. Although I don't know you but I imagine that so don't care what they say be yourself and don't pretending for them. We all face things that make us angry not because black women are always angry, you know Oprah is a black woman and a successful woman I like her. Believe in yourself that's all you need to convince them about your presence and important in life.

What is important about this moment is that while there is an alliance imagined among the two students, there is no call for both to share the same essentialist grounding in their local struggles. Working within the framework emerging from her fellow *École* students, the argument for gender rights will be premised on the Koran, invocations of women's previous struggles for human rights (of which the Algerian constitution is one example), and a continued attempt to stitch together gender rights arguments across political/cultural institutions. In doing so, this student positions herself against the universal/government frameworks enforced by the United States' foreign policies, policies often linked to neo-liberal and unacknowledged “Western” concepts. For the African-American student, as the student herself states, the work will be equally intersectional, only for her focusing on US based histories/arguments of feminism, Civil Rights, and a sense that government should “ensure that the citizens' basic needs can be met,” here inclusive of economic rights. In doing so, however, she is also invoking frameworks that when enacted internationally by the US have actively worked against the collective rights of her “transnational colleague,” given how these rights campaigns are often also used to justify US intervention in other nations to enforce such “human” rights (Spivak).

Both students imagine constellations of ideas, identities, and institutions that expand the ability of women to move through society as equals, free from violence. Both argue from a position premised on the complex possibilities of their local/national environments. Yet in doing so, both produce contradictory appeals in the international rights-based context. To a great extent, the values invoked by the US student are exported in a fashion which only furthers the neo-liberal contexts and supports limited democratic states that the *École* student is positioning herself against. Ultimately, these students seemed to positioned in contradictory fashion to each other, even while imagining themselves as allies.

To reach an intersectional understanding between them, more work would need to be done. At this point, however, the term ended.

Still, however embryonic they were, these dialogues enabled students to re-imagine their digital transnational space as no longer moving from a disembodied position, flowing across borders. Instead, they began to recognize how “human rights” masked over legitimate political claims by specific populations, as well as how ultimately such claims should be based less on an essentialized

identity and more on an alliance-based restructuring of positionality. In this very process, however, students also began to see how locally/regionally based frameworks ultimately pushed against transnational appeals to universal human rights, leading to potentially contradictory or conflicting local strategies and protests. And it is from this perilous moment of possibility and conflict upon which our new work will attempt to build.

That is, as our collaborative work moved forward, we formalized our efforts under the title of the Twiza Project, a term that invoked communal efforts to build important structures and also expand the classrooms involved, drawing in university students from not just the US and Algeria but Morocco and Kurdistan/Northern Iraq. We have redefined the classroom to include NGO educational programs in rural areas within the MENA countries, often disconnected from digital spaces but impacted by transnational flows of capital. The curriculum is also becoming more organized, moving from readings premised in Western concepts of rights to include a focus on indigenous communal practices within each country. Indeed, it became clear as the initial dialogues occurred that the epistemologies and communal legacies that students could draw upon were limited; they seemed divorced from the histories of the peoples who populated the land in which their classrooms were located, the communities that populated the land prior to neo-liberalism and colonialism. If the Twiza Project is to help students create a space “otherwise” than a Westernized framing of human rights, elsewhere than a framework supporting a neo-liberal flow of global capital, then we believe the students must understand the complex and powerful histories that have informed the geography upon which they will make their alternative future.

Finally, we intend for the Twiza project to directly provide training in the material skills of community organizing—the nuts and bolts of calling meetings, developing agendas, building campaigns, and assessing successes/failures. Too often, we have found that “dialogue” serves as an alibi for action; alternative futures remain metaphors, not disruptive practices. In this effort, however, we work with the realization that bodies move differently through local and global environments. The same act done by a US male citizen-student will not have the same ramifications as that of an Algerian woman student; nor can the political safety of any student of color in the United States be assumed or the willingness of governments in the MENA region to allow such civic activism be considered a given. If democracy is a “contact sport,” we act with the understanding that any education in activism also has to be an education in safety. To do otherwise, for Parks at least, would be to assume the privileges accorded to a white gendered male body, a body also named as a citizen of the US, could be the model upon which all activism can be premised. It would be, in short, a move back to a universalism that works against an “otherwise” future.

And at this historical moment, the world could surely benefit from something other than the status quo.

Enacting Pluriversality: Of Rights Without Guarantees

Since the initial drafting of this argument, traumatic events continue to occur—witness as one example children being separated from parents at the US/Mexico border, an act that in many ways

moves beyond the ability of the word “trauma” or any other word to describe. At such moments, broad appeals to human rights certainly have their place. And within such a context of human rights abuse, we understand that a project such as ours might seem too small, too limited, or too insubstantial to meet the current need of this moment.

Perhaps, however, the Twiza Project can serve a purpose for our students, here and abroad, who see trauma invoked as a way to mask a political complexity which must be articulated, addressed, and resolved. Perhaps, students who are placed within a rhetoric of transnationalism and open borders, but whose daily life is seeing political borders hardened through racist appeals or imagined threats by democratic collective action, can use the Twiza Project to begin to find an alternative path forward. As the small sampling discussed above demonstrates, the power of a space to think through how their identity is being constructed, positioned, and actualized in this current moment begins the process of allowing another conversation to begin: a conversation premised on a knowledge of their local context, of the levers that might produce change, and of the possibilities a collective response might provide. Such conversations allow students to find an agency which moves beyond a traumatic response to concepts (and eventually actions) which realign political dynamics for a future that speaks to their aspirations and those of their generation.

It is a conceptual move, however, that leaves behind the seeming guarantees of a universal declaration of human rights, leaves behind a sense that the instantiation of such rights would even create the expansive definition of equality to which they seem to be heading. Such a conceptual move requires increased focus by our classes on the local traditions/frameworks of justice, historical moments of local activism which pointed toward a greater sense of equality. It would demand an education that provided the organizing tools which would enable material alliances to be drawn, collective bodies brought together, strategies that could produce change formulated, and plans to ensure that change does not quickly evaporate. It would require us, as teachers, to support our students’ aspirations for something better than this current moment.

This is the generation of the Arab Awakening and the Obama presidency, of Egyptian crackdowns and Trump Border Walls. It is a generation that has seen hope turned to despair, seeming progress followed by retrenchment. Our belief is that this experience has not left our students traumatized but determined to actualize what was momentarily glimpsed. Twiza is one attempt, however small, to keep open a space for such conversations, a space where local knowledges can be drawn upon to expand justice, democracy, and political rights. It clearly is not enough, but we have come to believe it is also not nothing. Perhaps at this moment, such a hint of possibility is enough to continue to move forward.

NOTES

¹For our purposes, it is important to note that the Black Death massacres occurred within the above cited collective historical memory of trauma and violence. As Franz Fanon argues, the impact of trauma and past struggles are defining features in the history of the nation, that such traumas live in the present and define tacitly or explicitly many aspects of the lives of the citizens. In his “*Les Damnés de la Terre*,” Fanon argued that trauma and violence can serve as a unifying force and that, in Algeria, it was the violence that arose in response to the colonists’ first violence that mobilized the people, throwing them collectively into “one direction” towards independence (Fanon). Writing decades later, Rahal sees the resort to such violence from that moment onward “as a form of Algerian fatality” (143), a central pillar of national identity. Unlike the independence struggle, then, the violence of the Black Decade became seen as something to be repressed, a symbol of the need to control mass movements for political freedoms which might spin out of control.

²As is well known, Algeria gained its political independence from France as a result of a fierce seven-year war. At the dawn of independence, however, schools were still staffed with expatriates using French materials. Through the introduction of an Arabization policy, Algeria restructured and re-staffed schools as well as universities with materials created by Algerian educators. (Kohli, 1987). Indeed, Arabization became a process of converting all French-dominated disciplines and sectors to Arabic and, as such, was “a reaction against the cultural and linguistic domination of France” (Aitsiselmi, 2006). In this sense, Arabization and the Algerianization of school materials were also part of a widespread movement to regain a national identity, reclaim natural resources, and participate in the production of a pan-Arab unity (Kawmia Arabia; Evans and Phillips). In critiquing a government official, the student is invoking the history of such educational efforts, indirectly positioning the official as little better than the colonizing educators who previously directed Algerian students’ educations.

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Book Review *Coding Literacy: How Programming Is Changing Writing* by Annette Vee

Antonio Byrd University of Wisconsin

In *Coding Literacy: How Programming Is Changing Writing*, Annette Vee observes that evoking programming as a literacy is more than rhetorical flair to convince politicians and administrators that they should expand computer science curricula in public schools. She argues that when we bring to bear the theoretical concepts of literacy studies on programming, we discover that programming really is a part of literacy. Vee notes that using the tools of literacy studies leads to two new understandings about writing. First, programming becomes less a skill practiced in computer science and software development and more a *historically* and *socially* situated “species of writing” used in different ways for different purposes (5). Second, programming and the materials of writing are the foundational tools for writing, and as these tools change, so too does writing; the vast capabilities of programming augment traditional ways of reading and writing texts.

Vee draws historical, social, and theoretical parallels and comparisons between programming and literacy across four chapters to show how programming is becoming a part of literacy. In addition, she argues that the ways that programming and literacy have been linked historically and theoretically help us understand how to “account for new modes and technologies in literacy” and “the ways that computer programming is changing our practices and means of communication” (4). *Coding Literacy* offers literacy studies scholars and writing instructors a thoughtful analysis of how writing has evolved and may evolve in the future; the book is essential reading for its breadth of historical and theoretical application to computer programming that updates our notions of writing for a swiftly changing technological landscape.

In the first chapter, Vee recalls a rhetorical history of campaigns for universal reading and writing and extends that timeline into the mass programming movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. By doing so, Vee explains that programming promotion since the 1960s has used rhetoric and ideologies similar to literacy campaigns: economic productivity, individual empowerment, and creative expression. In the process of arguing for universal coding literacy, advocates reveal “which technologies and skills and ideas are now included under literacy’s rubric” (46). As these early campaigns for coding literacy flourish, Vee cautions, they, like reading and writing, “reflect contemporary concerns” (91), and those concerns inadvertently (or perhaps purposely) determine who gets left behind or left out from learning programming.

Following the necessary historical overview in Chapter One, Vee continues her argument with an ontological angle on programming and writing in Chapter Two, drawing from theories of speech act, language-in-use, and *grammatization*. Vee explains that these concepts help us understand how programming works as a type of writing in clear, accessible sentences; however, readers unfamiliar with these theories may need to slow down to comprehend the parallels. In addition, Vee draws on material intelligence and sociomaterial theory to explicate the common affordances that

programming shares with writing that “help us build knowledge” (105). As a “sociolinguistic system,” programming both describes and performs “to different degrees” depending on audience, social context, and “the human language” (115). Programming immediately acts on explicit instructions, abstracts contextual information about those instructions, and both reduces and transforms information. With these affordances, programming can create complex software, share pieces of its procedures or all of its procedures across space and time to multiple communities, and translate information from procedure to text and vice versa. Writing and programming are not only parallel, Vee notes, but also “intersectional” (138). The kinds of communication available to writers include speech, writing, and now coding, Vee concludes. Each kind of communication allows writers to create and share different kinds of information.

Establishing programming as a type of writing creates a pathway for exploring the similar social histories of programming and writing in Chapters Three and Four. Across these chapters, Vee observes how writing evolved from a technology that government and church institutions used to manage the overflow of information to the foundation for individuals’ everyday life. This history, the author argues, can be a model for understanding how coding builds on and replaces textual writing practices as the new basis for our societal infrastructure and to see why coding may become a necessary generalizable skill. Among other theories, Vee returns to material intelligence, introduced in Chapter Two, to guide her central argument in Chapter Three: the physical materials of writing circulating in bureaucracies and businesses and then trickling down into people’s homes helped solidify writing’s essential role in organizing society. Chapter Four picks up where Chapter Three leaves off, tracking how widespread availability of writing materials led to a “literate mentality”— a shared cultural awareness that writing influences every aspect of life and is thus a necessary skill that every individual should know (Vee 182-83, 196). In both chapters, Vee shows how computation’s history overlaps with and mirrors this history of writing; the ways ubiquitous computer technology re-structures our lives, our associating our thinking and values with computation, and rising anxieties about the status of our literacy in our current technological moment direct us toward a “computational mentality” (183). Predictions of the future require some skepticism, mostly because the future never turns out the ways we expect, but Vee links historical trends to our present so well in her analysis that the chances of a computational mentality seem likely.

Scholars in rhetoric have studied programming’s social and cultural functions, but *Coding Literacy* brings programming directly to literacy scholars and offers a model for how they can extend their interests in sociocultural theories of writing into programming. Chapter Two leaves ground for further research on the sociomaterial and ontological nature of programming in multiple situations. Meanwhile, the concluding remarks in the book raise useful questions on how to teach a more diverse population of students. Based on Vee’s argument, there’s potential to bring together computer science education’s own ongoing research on teaching diverse students (Guzdial; Kross and Guo; Cooper et al.) with Writing Studies’ interests in the ideologies of literacy education and the material consequences those ideologies create. This collaboration is necessary as both fields have a unique opportunity to redirect writing’s role in continuing social inequity.

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Damián Baca
University of Arizona

Guillaume Gentil
Carleton University

Jessica Restaino
Montclair State University

Kirk Branch
Montana State University

Diana George
Virginia Tech

Rebecca Richards
St. Olaf College

Kevin Browne
Syracuse University

Mary Goldschmidt
University of Scranton

Suzanne Kesler Rumsey
Purdue Fort Wayne

Rebekah Buchanan
Western Illinois University

Juan C. Guerra
University of Washington

Jennifer Sano-Franchini
Virginia Tech

Gerald Campano
University of Pennsylvania

Michael Harker
Georgia State University

Donna Scheidt
High Point University

Michelle Navarre Cleary
DePaul University

Asao B. Inoue
University of Washington, Tacoma

Mary Scott
University of London

Marilyn Cooper
Michigan Tech University

Kim Jaxon
California State University, Chico

Tony Scott
Syracuse University

Mary Jane Curry
University of Rochester

Zandra Jordan
Spelman College

Mira Shimabukuro
Highline Community College

Daphne Desser
University of Hawaii at Mānoa

Rochelle Kapp
University of Cape Town

Christian Smith
Coastal Carolina University

Dylan Dryer
University of Maine

Tim Laquintano
Lafayette College

Heather Thomson-Bunn
Pepperdine University

Donna Dunbar-Odom
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Rhea Estelle Lathan
Florida State University

Karin Tusting
Lancaster University

Janet Eldred
University of Kentucky

Katie Malcolm
University of Washington

Annette Vee
University of Pittsburgh

Jenn Fishman
Marquette University

Moriah McCracken
St. Edward's University

Amy Wan
Queens College, University of New York

Tom Fox
California State University, Chico

Vivette Milson-Whyte
The University of the West Indies

Anne Elrod Whitney
Pennsylvania State University

Alanna Frost
University of Alabama—Huntsville

Michael Pennell
University of Kentucky

Scott Wible
University of Maryland

Bronwyn T. Williams
University of Louisville