Writing Centers
and the New Racism

A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change

Edited by Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan

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INTRODUCTION
A Call to Action

Laura Greenfield
Karen Rowan

At the 2005 joint conference of the International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, Victor Villanueva (2006) challenged the writing center community to examine the language, rhetoric, and material reality of racism that shapes our work. In his exegesis of the "new racism," which "embeds racism within a set of other categories—language, religion, culture, civilizations pluralized and writ large" (16), he reminded participants that writing centers, like the institutions in which they are situated, are not racially neutral sites of discourse and practice. His keynote address, later published in *The Writing Center Journal*, earned him the longest standing ovation of his career. Conference chair Frankie Condon (2007) writes that conference organizers "wanted a sea change in the conversation about writing center theory and practice such that the matters of race and racism would no longer seem strange or tangential to conversations about our writing centers, but central and pressing" (19). Indeed, the halls of the conference hotel were quickly abuzz with excited conversation about Villanueva's energizing performance, and, in the weeks that followed the conference, many members of the writing center community turned to a popular writing center listserv as a venue for continuing conversation about Villanueva's talk and its implications.[1]

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1. Listserv quotations cited throughout this collection come from posts made to the WCenter listserv, primarily in 2005–2006, which is widely read by writing center tutors, administrators, and scholars. The archives of those posts are no longer available; our accounting for the contents comes from our notes during that time. The citation of listserv posts remains contentious in the writing center field. To be sure, a person's informal comments in a mass e-mail are not intended to constitute a person's formal scholarly position on an issue. A listserv does, however, represent a significant discursive space in which ideas about language, practice, and—implicitly—ethics, circulate. Our decision to bring in quotations from and references to the listserv is therefore meant to demonstrate the kinds of ideas about race pervasive in the public sphere, not to single out an individual person for her or his views. For that reason, we have chosen not to cite the individual writers by name.

However, as Condon (2007) also notes, after the initial flurry of discussion subsided, something peculiar happened. Listserv members retreated into a form of rhetorical silence that exposed the writing center community's (in)ability to sustain critical and difficult conversations about race. Villanueva's address had challenged writing center tutors to expose the rhetoric of racism that appears in student writing. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's "Four Master Tropes," Villanueva (2006) furthered Burke's well-known argument that "rhetoric is epistemological"—that it shapes our understandings of "truth"—by exploring how racism is born of and perpetuated by rhetoric as well. This "new racism" is an ideology shaped rhetorically not only through tropes but also through silence. Observing that the consequence of "political correctness" is not merely good etiquette, Villanueva asserted that "if we no longer speak of 'racism,' racism gets ignored" (5). Ironically, we argue here, the writing center listserv conversation invoked the same rhetorical tropes Villanueva had analyzed, which served, in effect, to shut down the conversation. We find it useful and necessary to examine the ways in which that listserv discussion invoked these tropes because the rhetorical silence such tropes enable is the very silence this collection seeks to disrupt. In so doing, we choose not to identify individual contributors but rather to speak to patterns of responses because these patterns point to the general discursive practices of one significant forum in which the everyday work of writing centers is shaped and made visible.

METAPHOR

In lieu of engaging in conversation about racism, some listserv members focused on rhetoric itself, arguing that people were reluctant to participate in an online discussion of Villanueva's speech and the implications for writing center practices because the term *racism* was problematic, that it evoked a negative connotation (as if there were a positive kind of racism available for discussion), and that different terminology might have been more appropriate so as to alleviate discomfort among the people posting. Few, however, expressed a desire to talk about how conventional racism—connotations and all—may still be institutionalized in our profession. Listserv posters, invoking metaphor, tried to make "the word 'race' [drop] out" (Villanueva 2006, 6).

SYNECDOCHE

Other members, not willing to completely stamp out the term *racism*, went the route of suggesting that people really could not have this

conversation without considering the bigger picture, without also discussing how factors like gender and sexuality play into discrimination in the writing center. In one sense, this suggestion was apt: other forms of oppression certainly exist, and they certainly overlap inextricably with race. Scholar-activists such as Audre Lorde (1984) have written eloquently about the intersections of systems of oppression and argued that, because fighting one form of oppression while ignoring others is counterproductive, we must grapple with those intersections head on. In that vein, writing center scholar Harry Denny (2010) has described his own experience of witnessing the consequences of focusing on one system of oppression to the exclusion of others. Reflecting on his grassroots advocacy against an antigay referendum in Colorado, he observes that the gay community's failure to fight visibly and forcefully for the civil rights of people of color, immigrants, and poor and working-class people resulted in indifferent, if not hostile, responses to gay activists' request for support from those very same communities (9–11). But while Lorde, Denny, and other scholar-activists interrogate their multiple and conflicting identities in ways that more deeply complicate and bring to light matters of race, the listserv was able to maneuver away from a discussion of race by bringing up other identity markers as a distraction. Indeed, moving from the "represented part" of racism to the "whole" of all discrimination did not inspire further discussion. Instead, participants tried to avoid discussing the question at hand in an attempt to "carr[y] it all" (Villanueva 2006, 9). As a result, few had anything to say about racism.

METONYMY

Some members made postings about the readings they give their tutors and the discussions they have in tutor education courses to prepare tutors to work with different students. But members did not talk about how the writing center field or rhetoric and composition as a whole stand to be interrogated as fields whose discourses and practices sustain racism. Institutionalized racism, here, was reimagined as racial prejudice. Villanueva (2006), who interpreted this trope as an "ultimate reduction," observed that if "everything is reduced to individual will, work, and responsibility, there's no need to consider group exclusion" (6). In other words, the exclusive attention to individual practice serves to deny recognition of the systemic. Likewise, listserv members chose to see racism not as a problem inherent in our academic community, but as

something that can be neatly resolved among individual tutors, students, and tutor education classes.

IRONY

As the conversation progressed, some members took up defensive postures by talking about their own colorblindness, their own respect for difference, their own attempts at multicultural understanding, or their own contentment in simply being good people without having to take part in these conversations. In doing so, they took as personal a problem that is in fact systemic and used their personal feelings as reasons for not doing more. As Villanueva (2006) emphasized, claiming colorblindness is absurd in a society highly structured around racial inequality, where admitting consciousness of race is mistaken for evidence of one's racially prejudiced views. Rather than examining the structure within which we are all necessarily implicated, many deny the structure and instead focus energy on proving to one another that we are not racially prejudiced. Villanueva writes, "Those of us dedicated to anti-racist pedagogy, to addressing the current state of racism find ourselves every day trying to convince folks that there really still is racism, and it's denied" (11). Such an observation played out exactly on the listserv as some members looked to the past by talking about the "old days" of overt racism and resented the implication that they had not already thought through these concerns or that more work needed to be done. Even though Villanueva insisted that we "can't buy into the silencing of what we know is still racism, even if the lynchings are now few, even if we know that Jim Crow is now Manuel Labor, even if we know that the jails represent an exclusionary political economy" (18), few wanted to consider how covert racism in the writing center still needs exposure. Despite Villanueva's pointing out what should be obvious about our profession in the simple statement "We do rhetoric" (18), few of us wanted to do rhetoric.

Most alarming about the listserv discussion (or lack thereof) was the overwhelming silence. In fact, most people stayed silent. There was a conspicuous absence of postings from the typically most-active posters. Some members shifted the conversation to a defense of that silence, arguing that people felt uncomfortable, needed time to think things through, or were doing this kind of work on their own time already. Other members, not satisfied with a defense of silence, demanded the cessation of such questioning and attacked those posters who continued to ask for discussion. Donaldo Macedo and Lilia Bartolomé (1999)

observe in *Dancing with Bigotry* that the condition of fear in speaking about racism often "gives rise to a form of censorship that views the aggressive denouncement of racism as worse than the racist act itself" (2). Such a condition of fear was certainly tangible on the listserv, as evidenced by the fact that some participants were only shown support for their attempts to sustain conversation in back-channel responses sent to their personal e-mail accounts, away from the public and judgmental eyes of the listserv. Few were willing to recognize, in contrast, that choosing to avoid questions of racism in our field is an effect of the white privilege driving a white-dominated field. A refusal to make that truth visible is a function of racism. Nevertheless, many listserv posters still catered to their own discomfort and defended their silence, arguing that the listserv was not an appropriate forum for this discussion, that the listserv was intended more for discussion of mundane, day-to-day writing center concerns—racially neutral ones. In contrast, few were open to tackling the racism underlying such an assumption. For example, on the same day that a post was made imploring members to talk about "whiteness" and "normalcy" in the center and was met with zero responses, more than thirteen people were quick to respond to a different posting asking for statistics about tutors. On this point, Villanueva's question warrants repeating here: "*How many coincidences do there have to be to make for a pattern?*" (2006, 10). In short, the listserv carried out precisely those tropes Villanueva critiqued, effectively concealing the racism still entrenched in our field.

These rhetorical moves, problematically, represent a stark contrast to the sort of critical engagement and rigorous debate central to academic work. And more shamefully, such divergences, resistances, and silences on the listserv were a microcosm of what we observe to be happening in the academy writ large. We observe that many scholars, directors, teachers, and tutors consider issues of race and racism to be "strange or tangential" to the education system, broadly, and to writing center work, specifically. Drawing on the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva to describe current manifestations of racism, Condon (2007) observes that "perhaps most notably this new racism is marked by the notion that it is possible and desirable to be 'blind' to race and that if individuals, institutions, and systems refuse (pretend) not to see racial difference that they are, therefore, incapable of enacting racism" (20). In the writing center community, this refusal to see racial difference often manifests in claims that race and racism lie outside the boundaries of "normal" writing

center work and that we must only attend to race in those instances when a person of color is present or in an isolated moment when overt discrimination is visible. For people who find refuge in such claims, the case must still be made that race and racism are "central and pressing" issues, that the work we do in writing centers has never been and never will be racially neutral work, that there is no "normal" writing center work that can be seen apart from race and racism. What's more, because our field lacks both explicit articulations of how the intersections of education, literacy, and race are situated in and shape the context of writing center work and sustained examples of what a productive dialogue about race might look like in our field, we simply don't know how to have such a conversation.

Our inability to engage in sustained and productive dialogue about race is reflected in the absence of a rich and cohesive body of scholarship in which to ground such a conversation. Despite producing a solid and growing body of scholarship and research, the writing center field has to its credit only a handful of published writings that explicitly address race. In 1992, Anne DiPardo's *Writing Center Journal* essay, "'Whispers of Coming and Going': Lessons from Fannie," explored the ways in which a Native American student's racial and cultural identity affected her experiences in college and how her African American tutor's perceptions of and assumptions about the student influenced the outcomes of their tutorials. Later reprinted in the *St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy and Sherwood, 2011), a common text in tutor education courses, this essay has become a go-to source for directors who want to address questions of race and identity in staff-development workshops and/or tutor education courses. A decade later, Nancy Barron and Nancy Grimm (2002) wrote their collaborative essay "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center: Stories and Lessons from Two Beginners" to consider, among other things, how the experiences of students of color at predominantly white institutions affect their willingness to discuss race with white teachers or tutors and to commit those ideas to paper. In 2007, Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet devoted a chapter of their book, *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*, to an extended discussion of how race, racism, and antiracism shape writing center practice, and Condon's (2007) "Beyond the Known: Writing Centers and the Work of Anti-Racism" appeared in *The Writing Center Journal*. Most recently, Harry Denny's 2010 book, *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of*

One-To-One Mentoring, includes a chapter-long analysis of the intersections of race, ethnicity, and identity politics, an analysis that begins with Denny highlighting his own uneasiness with difficult discussions about race and racism (32–33). In the intervening years, other scholarly works, including Nancy Grimm's (1999) *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* and Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski's (1999) "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center," have implicitly addressed race as part of their larger arguments about writing centers and institutional oppression, but have not focused solely on race.

Each of these articles and books, as well as the many conference presentations we have not cited here, represents an important contribution to writing center scholarship, but each represents only brief and isolated moments of reflection in a field that is in need of a substantial and extended exchange of ideas and deliberate collective action. Contemporary literature reveals this scarcity of attention. The field's oldest print publications, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*, have each published but a handful of essays on race and diversity since they were founded over three decades ago. Recent writing center anthologies such as Michael Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead's (2003) *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*; Paula Gillespie, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, and Byron Stay's (2001) *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation*; and, perhaps most egregiously, Jane Nelson and Kathy Evertz's (2001) *The Politics of Writing Centers* include no chapters focused on race. In fact, not only did the editors of the latter collection confess in their preface that they had never considered including a chapter on race, they also, as Jill Pennington (2002) noted in her review of the collection, chose to offer a preemptory *mea culpa* rather than delay the publication in order to rectify this ironic oversight (68).

Problematically, in the sporadic moments when racism *is* mentioned explicitly in the literature, it is often minimized and misrepresented by what Geller et al. (2007) describe as a "commonsense" understanding of racism: in lieu of interrogating the institutionalization of racism in our academic practices, writers instead hone in on individual tutor and student prejudices, thus sustaining a willful myopia—the metonymy Villanueva (2006) called to our attention. More insidiously, discussions of race and diversity are all too often synecdochically subsumed and elided by conversations about ESL and basic writers, as is evidenced by the content of many of the field's most widely used tutor handbooks.

Although matters of racism certainly intersect in important ways with questions of language and conceptions of "preparedness," the writing center community's inability to maneuver through such complex, integrated discussions results not in an enriched understanding, but in an abandonment of race all together.

As a result of the paucity of explicit and critical dialogue about race in our journals, books, and listservs, writing center tutors, administrators, and scholars who are interested in race and antiracism have had to look to sister fields for sustained, critical, rich (and often also inadequate) inquiries into the intersections of education, literacy, and race. Such sister fields include but are not limited to critical race studies (Catherine Prendergast's influential writing, for example, has shown how literacy historically has been constructed as white property); whiteness studies (Tim Wise, Peggy McIntosh, and Gary Howard, for instance, challenge white people to recognize the privilege inherent in their everyday assumptions and experiences); sociolinguistics (Geneva Smitherman, Keith Gilyard, and John Rickford and Russell Rickford, while differing in their political and pedagogical views, collectively demand that educators critically examine how racism intersects with assumptions about the speech of students of color); cultural studies (Judith Butler, Henry Giroux, Homi Bhabha, and Michel Foucault compel scholars to denaturalize presumably fixed phenomena, including assumptions about race); composition (scholars such as Min-Zhan Lu, Bruce Horner, and John Trimbur explore how the English-Only movement and conceptions of "Standard" or "American" English are informed by a desire of white America to maintain the power to define what counts as American); New Literacy Studies (James Paul Gee, Shirley Brice Heath, Brian Street, and others have argued that literacies are socially situated practices both shaped by and constitutive of specific community values and discursive values, beliefs, and practices); and critical or radical education (Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, bell hooks, and James Sledd, for instance, compel educators to be responsive to the inherently political nature of education and the possibilities for resistance when power is theorized effectively).

Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change seeks to contribute to the foundation necessary to sustain the kinds of conversation, research, and scholarship that we believe Condon and her colleagues were hoping for in planning the 2005 conference, that Villanueva's keynote called for, and that the writing center field can and should be engaging in. Grounded by the assumption that race is not

a neutral factor in language and literacy education broadly and in writing center work specifically, this collection addresses a series of related questions: How does institutionalized racism in the American education system shape the culture of literacy and language education in the academy and in the writing center? How does racism operate in the rhetoric and discourses of writing center scholarship/lore and how do writing centers cooperate, however unintentionally, in racist practices? How can we meaningfully operationalize antiracist work in our discourses and in our centers? How do we persevere through the difficulty and messiness of negotiating race and racism in our writing centers? In their efforts to answer these questions, the essays collected here offer the writing center community and its sister fields new ways of understanding the intersections of education, literacy, and race, with particular attention to writing center discourse and praxis. Further, the explicit and nuanced attention to race in each of these essays is meant both to model, however imperfectly, what it means to be bold in our engagement with hard questions and to spur forward the kind of sustained, productive, multivocal, and challenging dialogue that has otherwise continued only in fits and starts and in small pockets of our community until today. We have titled the collection *Writing Centers and the New Racism* not because each chapter necessarily engages explicitly with the idea of a "new racism," but because, taken together, the chapters provide language and tools for furthering a conversation about race in our professional community. The greatest barrier to dismantling systems of injustice, as we and many of our contributors see it, is our rhetoric; and the silencing/blinding rhetoric of our discourses *is* the new racism.

As editors, we began work on this project with the recognition that the writing center field needs more than a listserv discussion to move our conversation about race forward. We recognized the need for a book-length text to take up the complex intersections of education, literacy, and race in the writing center context. However, we saw far more value in developing an edited collection rather than a single-authored monograph, for several important reasons.

First, at this historic moment in our discipline, the voices of multiple writing center scholars, administrators, and tutors attest to the importance of the issues this collection raises. For readers who continue to resist the relevance of race and racism to writing center work, dismissing the arguments of nearly twenty colleagues will be far more difficult than dismissing the work of a single author—as is often the case when a lone

scholar speaks out about race. The themes that emerge from the heterogeneity of contributors' perspectives are all the more powerful because they reveal a "pattern" that can no longer be dismissed as "coincidence." The gaps that remain between contributors' perspectives are instructive because they reveal the work yet to be done. We recognize that while the collection is multivocal, it is not comprehensive in its representation of all scholars, all views, or all experiences of race and racism. For example, one reviewer noted that this collection fails to attend substantively and specifically to the experiences of Latino/as. We suspect a similar critique could be made of the text with respect to any number of racial groups. Given our contemporary context, a compelling case could be made that the omission of extended discussion about a certain racial group—such as Latino/as—fundamentally alters how we might theorize or come to understand institutionalized racism. At the same time, while we sought diversity in both the authorship and content of the collection, we believe that a single text cannot—nor should it—represent the voices of all people. To broaden our scope so widely would undoubtedly result in the sort of synecdoche we are criticizing. The question remains as to whether we have achieved a meaningful balance of range and specificity such that this single text can, through its stories and arguments, support a claim that institutionalized racism is alive and well in our profession. From the work found here, we aim for scholars to have a robust foundation from which to engage in further argument with respect to many specific experiences not accounted for explicitly in the collection. Ultimately, our goal is to incite meaningful momentum towards future conversations about race and writing centers, not to provide *the* text on race and writing centers by accounting comprehensively for all the racism in our field.

Second, if the writing center field is to continue as a community to engage in difficult conversations about race, racism, literacy, and education—conversations about who we are, what we do, and to what ends—then we must have models for how to dive into, rather than turn away from, the fear, conflict, and uneasiness that often accompanies such discussions. So, too, must we have models for the intellectual, pedagogical, personal, and political insights and rewards of such dialogues. For those reasons, this collection does far more than bring together a group of independent essays loosely related around a theme; instead, its chapters develop purposefully in a progression of arguments, building from historical and theoretical foundations towards critical re-examinations of our everyday practices and individual experiences.

To that end, the collection's first section, Foundational Theories on Racism, Rhetoric, Language, and Pedagogy, establishes the theoretical foundations from which the rest of the book will build or depart, providing—through the lens of writing instruction—an overview of the history of racism as rhetoric, arguments about the relationships between race and language, and critiques of progressive contemporary pedagogies dealing with race and language education. This section provides grounding for readers who are encountering this subject for the first time, but also offers new arguments to challenge those in the field who are already deeply invested in theorizing race. Chapters in the second section, Towards an Antiracist Praxis for Writing Centers, extend this theoretical framework to critique the existing discourse and practices that configure writing center work as somehow innocent of or outside of institutionalized racism and offer possibilities for reflective antiracist action in response to these arguments, thereby articulating new visions for writing center scholarship, discourse, and practice. The third section, Research, Critical Case Studies, and the Messiness of Practice, provides much-needed studies of some of the writing centers where conversations about race and attempts at antiracist work are taking place, studies that reveal not only that the answers to our questions will be as diverse as our local contexts but also that the processes for developing such answers are complicated and, often, messy. Finally, the fourth section of the collection, Stories of Lived Experience, offers narratives from individual writing center professionals, including directors and tutors, that humanize the messiness of practice and underscore an assumption that threads throughout the book: that writing centers are not racially neutral sites of literacy education and, further, that turning a blind eye to race and racism does not serve us, our students, our tutors, or our centers well.

Not only have we carefully crafted the structure of the book to demonstrate, implicitly, how the arguments of various scholars stand in relation to, build off of, and diverge from one another, but the drafting and revision process of this manuscript was an exercise for each of us in thinking critically, being vulnerable, responding directly, making forceful arguments, seeing connections, and asking hard questions about race. When reviewing chapter drafts, we put contributors' arguments in dialogue with one another, asking them to revise their pieces to better account for the kinds of arguments we saw happening elsewhere in the text—not to smooth over differences, but to more productively recognize, engage with, or explicitly depart from them. Notably,

our questions and suggestions for contributors were more directive than is typical for such a collection, our feedback to each author often rivaling the length of her or his draft itself in an effort to ensure that each writer had the opportunity, indirectly, to engage with the views of her or his peers. This process, undoubtedly, was itself racialized, as our reviews and the contributors' responses to them were unavoidably bound up with our various perspectives on the arguments being made about race as well as our views about who we are as writers, scholars, and collaborators. Indeed, this process provoked different reactions from contributors. Some engaged with our questions and offered substantial revisions; others put us on blast for the bias in our critiques or our appropriation of their texts; some sought council from one another, working through their reactions to our readings and their feelings about our racial dynamics; others withdrew their pieces altogether; and yet others resisted more covertly, offering some changes and not others. Necessarily, as editors of this collection we had no choice but to engage deeply with questions of race—questions we asked not only of ourselves and our field, but also of the racialization of this book project. We had to grapple with questions about how our lenses as white women would impact our work as editors of a book about race; what it means for the contributing authors to represent a particular range of racial identities (and what it means for those not represented); what it means that most of the particular stories about race focus explicitly on white, black, and, to a much lesser extent, Latino/a identities, and not others; what it means that a strong focus on language emerged; what it means as editors to request certain kinds of revision in light of the critiques of the racial particularity of academic discourse. We had to struggle with devising fair criteria for deciding which pieces were accepted and what our expectations were for authors—what it means to ask people to be a certain kind of expert, to reveal a certain kind of vulnerability, or to perform a particular kind of writing/discourse, recognizing that each of those requests reasonably could be understood in racialized terms. And we had to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones to include chapters making arguments with which we do not wholly agree but which represent ideas important to the broader conversation. This project, then, through the exercise of its creation, represents a significant process within the writing center community in which a large cohort of colleagues has engaged in a sustained and purposeful exchange about race and writing centers over the course of

several years. Such a process could not have happened on nearly this scale through the creation of a single-authored text and speaks to the importance of an edited collection. Likewise, this process suggests that the collection itself, despite the fixedness of its pages, represents but a snapshot in time of what was—and hopefully will remain—a dynamic and energized exchange. Indeed, our hope is that the collection will contribute to the field's forward momentum.

Finally, an important reason for creating this text as an edited collection rather than as a single-authored book is that there are far too many students, tutors, administrators, and scholars who recognize the importance of talking about race in the context of writing centers but whose concerns have repeatedly fallen on deaf ears. It is our hope that a multivocal collection such as this one will inspire them to continue the conversation and extend the work of the book. Too often antiracists feel defeated in the face of what seems an impossible task—dismantling a system of oppression—without a coalition of like-minded colleagues who can bolster each other. The need for both dedicated peers and critical dialogues was underscored at the landmark Race in the Writing Center: Towards New Theory and Praxis conference hosted by the University of Illinois-Chicago in winter 2008. Participants at that conference were energized by the shared hunger for conversation about this subject, humbled by the challenge of the work that remains, and hopeful that the momentum being built would carry and spread. Like that conference, this book can serve both as a reminder and as proof that indeed our professional community is full of antiracists eager to effect change and as reassurance to those who have long felt devastated by overwhelming silence that there is hope.

If we as editors have done our job well, then this collection and the conversation it represents and provokes will be challenging, even for those in our field who have long been committed to and active in antiracism work. We imagine that critiques of the text will prove just as instructive to the field in furthering this conversation as do the explicit arguments of its chapters. We further expect that the conversation this collection provokes will be messy, as our practice and theory are always messy and imperfect. And it will be incomplete, revealing what has not yet been said and what needs to be explored. Thus, it is our most profound hope that *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change* will be met not with silence but with dialogue and, most importantly, action.

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ONE

Foundational Theories on Racism, Rhetoric, Language, and Pedagogy

1

THE RHETORICS OF RACISM
A Historical Sketch

Victor Villanueva

I want to make a convoluted claim. The claim is that though there has always been a distinction that contemporary eyes might view as racism, racism is relatively new. There have always been ways of distinguishing the usses from the thems and of ranking the usses as superior to the thems, but racism in the ways we tend to think of the concept hasn't always been the means whereby that discrimination has been made. A claim I don't wish to make is that there has been some evolution or devolution that has led to racism. Whereas George Frederickson sees something of a circle—a bigotry that begins as theological, develops into the biological, and returns to the theological in contemporary times—I will argue that the matter is more like Antonio Gramsci's sedimentations, that elements from prior historic blocs are never quite lost. I argue that the first distinctions were rhetorical, even prior to the theological, and that today's racism, though very clearly having material, economic effects, is again more steeped in the rhetorical, though now containing the sedimentations of the theological, geographical, biological, and the like. This, in effect, is an argument laid out as sketch of racism of the West.

NOMOS AND THE BARBARIAN

A standard gambit in the classroom is to assert that it's no coincidence that racism, the Enlightenment, capitalism, and trans-hemispheric expansion all coincide. Some student will invariably say something like, "Wait a minute! Are you saying racism is two hundred years old?" To which I'll say something about maybe 500 years but formalized about two hundred years ago, yeah. And then, some really smart student will bring up classical Athens.

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The argument is that the Athenians had their own brand of bigotry. And that's true. That's what gave rise to imperialism and to slavery, but Athens's form of bigotry wasn't tied to more contemporary notions of "race." Though the "Greeks" did distinguish by means of something like phenotype, those visual, physical markers are not what distinguished superior from inferior, civilized from barbarian. There might not have been a unified Greek state (giving rise to my use of scare quotes), but there was a unified distinction, likely reified by way of the Delian League, so that those holding allegiance to the central political power of Athens—by way of language—would be separated from the barbarian. It will take the Romans to convert the word *barbarian* to a physical reference—the wearers of beards, hairy ones. But the Greeks coined the word from the Chinese, according to Edith Hall (1989, 4), a term originally onomatopoetic for nonsense speech, a Chinese version of *blah-blah-blah*. And Frank Snowden (1970), in *Blacks in Antiquity*, pointed out some time ago that though Athenians recognized the physical characteristics of sub-Saharan Africans as those with burnt faces—Ethiopians—that was only an identifier of place: the burnt-faced ones were the people from that place down there. In *Before Color Prejudice*, Snowden (1983) notes that though there were all kinds of associations between blackness and evil, none of those references carried over to people. For the Athenians, the measure of superiority was language, the language to rise above *physis*, the language of *nomos*, the language of *arête*, terms we have come to associate solely with the Elder Sophists, thanks to John Poulakos (1983), Harold Barrett (1987), and others, but which applied to the whole of Greek culture as centered in the Athenian city-state. We can infer as much from George Kennedy's (1991) choice of a subtitle to his version of Aristotle's rhetoric: *A Theory of Civic Discourse*. No one would claim Aristotle was a sophist. It was in these terms, *physis, nomos, arête*—the uses of language to create and to maintain a political order that would rise above our natures—that Athenian culture saw its superiority to those who could only speak as by nature, not by gift of reason. The barbarian was barbarian by nature of discourse, of rhetoric, of politics, not by what we have come to see as "race."

The closest the Romans come to a notion of race is the *gens*: a community bound by a common ancestry. But here again, the distinction is not based on physiognomy or by some base nature. The distinction remains rhetorical and political—*civitas* as gifted-in-speech. Cicero (1918) might write to Atticus that he "not obtain [his] slaves from Britain because they are so stupid and so utterly incapable of being taught that they are not

fit to form a part of the household of Athens" (4.15), but in so saying, there is no overtly racialized distinction; it is a political one: unlearned, not given to the rational in that Aristotelian sense. Barbarians couldn't enter into the rhetoric of rising above nature by the creation of the city or even by the cutting of hair. They displayed a poor politic. Unkempt and unlearned though they might have been, they weren't colored.

NOMOS V. ECCLESIA

I tell the students that we are still Rome, that we still deal in Roman time. That we have conflated the Emperor and the Praetor even as we did away with the King, that we still deal in Senators and a Republic that was intentionally modeled after Cicero but which became the Empire. But like the empire of Rome, it gives way to religion: *The Left Behind* novels about the rapture and an overtly Christian (in that American, non-Catholic sense) president coins an educational program "No Child Left Behind." I'm not denigrating religion and religious beliefs. That's not mine to do. I'm attempting to demonstrate historical parallels and San Juan's (2002) assertion that the theology of the times is nationalism. I'm not sure I accept that, but it's good for classroom talk.

☩

The canon of rhetoric and of empire sees the time of Cicero as the time of change, from a city-state dominated by a *res-publica* to a greater attention to imperial accumulation. The greater the geographic expansion, the greater the suggestion that there might not be a common beginning to all, so that all might not be able to attend to speech-dominated politics. And with the change in the political system and its political economy comes a change in ideology. Vergil becomes the poet of the Republic, but he's cast in greater and greater Christian terms, the Good of Rome vs. the Evil of the Other. Eventually, the shift becomes paradigmatic: from politics/philosophy/rhetoric to religion. There are those who accept the faith (Judeo and Christian both as "the faith" at this point), and there are those who do not. Those who do not accept the faith are called *ethnics* by Paul (Hannaford 1996, 88). The complete rejection of the political comes from the Jewish general Flavius Josephus (around the first century CE). Augustine (1987), however, tries not to discard his learning of rhetoric and its political, civic implications, providing for the priority in faith, the recognition of an institution of the Church, and the possibility for politics, a kind of

philosophical/theological agreement between Church and State that he lays out in *The City of God*.

Then things start to change, as Islam rises, and Jews travel Europe, particularly Spain and southern France. In 711, Tarik ibn Ziyad travels from Morocco into Spain, the great rock taking his name—Jabal Tariq (Tariq's Mountain), corrupted into Gibralter. A hierarchy of religions—and thereby their followers—takes hold. Superiority belongs to the Christians, followed by the Jews, followed by Muslims. Although the intellectual world embraces the scholars of the three faiths as they study mathematics, logic, and the works of Aristotle, the rising power of the Papacy begins the denigration of a people for reasons that are no longer as clear as the use of language to create and maintain a politic.

People begin to be described as beyond the rational, as not human. According to Heinrich Graetz (2005), the beginning of the end for Jews and Muslims in Europe is tied to Pope Innocent III—particularly two events (one of which takes place on 9/11—September of the year 1211). Prior to 1209 and 1211, Innocent had given some dispensation to Jews, ordering that they not be subject to arbitrary punishment. But he becomes upset that kings of Spain (Pedro of Aragon and Alfonso of Castile, in particular) are a little too kind to the Jews. Having had Jews among them for nearly a thousand years and recognizing the intellectual and economic contributions of the Jews, these kings provided no special treatment to the Jews; they were Aragonians and Castilians, Spaniards. That lack of special treatment came to be seen by Innocent as very special treatment, however. Not to recognize their lack of Christian faith is for Innocent a heresy. Accordingly he issues an order that no one is to mix with the Jew—in every sense of "mix"— under threat of excommunication. In 1208, he declares that "the Jews, like the fratricide Cain, are doomed to wander about the earth as fugitives and vagabonds, and their faces must be covered in insult" (Graetz 2005, 516). Herein begins the Othering with a Biblical precedent. Jews become associated with Cain. Later, others will be associated with Ham.

According to Graetz (2005) this order from Innocent led to two events that would change how Jews are regarded. The first takes place in July 1209. News had come to Innocent that there was a community in southern France (Albingenses) that was accepting readings of the Bible influenced by Jewish exegesis rather than Papal interpretations. Such heresy gives rise to slaughter, with the Pope ordering his military to kill all the people of Béziers, all, leaving it to God to do the rewarding and condemning of the souls that would be freed from their bodies.

Then in September 1211, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur invades southern Spain from his base in Algiers. King Alfonso seeks the assistance of Innocent, who sends the leader of the massacre at Béziers, the cleric Arnold, to help, along with the largest military force gathered in Western history to that time. The Castilian and Papal forces are nevertheless defeated. But during that battle at Salvatierra, Arnold is offended by the kind of special treatment he witnesses Jews continuing to receive in Castile. He thereby takes it upon himself to slaughter Jews as part of his attack on the Moors, not unlike the lateral war that took place in response to the contemporary attacks of 9/11.

Over the next two hundred years, Jews and Arabs continue to live in Spain, with the poorer elements living in Arab *aljamas* or Jewish *burghettos.* After mob attacks, many Jews and Muslims convert to Catholic Christianity (there was no other kind yet). The monarchies are okay with this, since they see the intellectual and economic gains to be had by the converts, but there is suspicion by many clerics and "intellectuals," who believe that the converts are only pretending, that they are still following their prior religious teachings and conducting their prior religious rituals in secret. Eventually, Jews are forced to convert; children are taken from their parents to be baptized; parents convert to regain their children. But suspicions remain, so that by the beginning of the fifteenth century in Spain, the neo-Christians of Jewish ancestry are more hated than the unconverted Jews or Muslims.

And there remained the bad blood from the widely held belief (though not by the Papacy) that the Jews were responsible for the Black Death, that Jews had been poisoning the water throughout Europe (rather like the anthrax scare of 9/11), a belief that traveled as far north as Switzerland. Jews were captured, tortured (water boarding first explained as a method born at the trials of the Black Death and explained as a method of extracting confessions during the Inquisition), with many confessing to creating the Black Death (even as Jews died alongside Christians) and pointing to co-conspirators.

Even in times of peace among Christians and Jews throughout Europe, from the thirteenth century till their expulsion at the end of the fifteenth century, Jews were either mandated to wear certain clothes—the Muslims requiring the Jews to wear distinctly different turbans from those worn by Muslims or to wear yellow robes, not white; the Christians mandating that Jews wear a badge in the shape of a star. By 1492, Queen Isabela and King Fernando of Castile and Aragón demand

the expulsion of all Jews and Muslims from their lands, effectively expelling Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. Political discourse had been supplanted by religious discourse, debate by the mandates of a Pope, a King, a Queen, and a tyrannical tribunal, the Inquisition. *Nomos* was no longer the rule. *Physis* had not yet become the physiognomy in the racialized sense, but the decision had been made that those who were made to wear badges of disgrace were disgraced not just by belief but by blood—the sons and daughters of Cain.

FROM FAITH TO THE FANTASTICAL AND PRESCIENCE

The hermeticists sought to duplicate the liquid referred to in the Bible that Moses had received by striking a rock—manna—the secret food that allowed the Ancients of the Bible to live many hundreds of years, like Abraham and Moses. Hermeticism believed all things sprung from a *prima materia*, a Philosopher's Stone. It was also believed that one can begin with lead, turn it into gold, turn gold into potable gold, and that in turn would lead to the Elixer of the Sages—that food that would make for long life or else for the purer form of being which is spirit. The closest they came was booze—still called distilled spirits to this day. I tell students they must have thought they had changed into something invincible—at least for a couple of hours, after which they needed to invent aspirin.

<div align="center">✧</div>

Ivan Hannaford (1996) argues that in the time between the marking and expulsion of Jews and the creation of the term *race* in a relatively modern understanding, interest in Hermeticism and the Cabala of the European late middle ages and early Renaissance began the new divisions of humanity into types. Hermeticism provided that though all matter derives from a common matter that evolves into higher forms—a kind of early version of evolution and a source for the neoplatonic chain of being—the elements (earth, wind, fire, and water) and demons can corrupt certain forms. The Cabalists take the teachings of Hermeticism and add elements of ancient numerology to the system, an esoteric mix of magic, the zodiac, and alchemy to arrive at new readings of the Talmud and of the Bible that explain differences in psychology and physiognomy in humankind through differences in eyes, nostrils, and skin color—or even to explain the man-beast mixes described by travelers and by depictions and descriptions of the not quite human: dog-headed Jews and wolf-headed Muslims, for example. Through these mixes, Hannaford explains, through these precursors to science as we

understand it (alchemy leading to physics and chemistry), there arises the right sons (and possibly daughters, but never directly said) of God and the Others, the outliers, the sons of Cain (Canaans with dog heads, etymologically the source for the word *canine*) and the sons of Ham.

   In like manner, David Brion Davis (1997) refers to Jennifer Morgan's "'Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500–1770" to describe how black women during the Renaissance, when removed from the African continent by being in the Cape Verde Islands, say, were thought objects of beauty to the European (with "object" a clear rhetorical choice here), but when on the African continent, the black woman was rendered a beast, with breasts hanging so low as to be confused with an additional pair of legs, the male European traveler describing her as naked, promiscuous, given to sleeping with apes, even giving childbirth without experiencing pain. The bestialization of "lower orders" (which included women of color, "sodomites," and Jews) becomes a rhetorical trope—from Aristotle's assertion that "the ox was the poor man's slave" to the Christian depiction of Jews as "horned beasts, swine, and vermin" (Davis 1997, 12). Shakespeare describes the Moor Othello as black (with Laurence Fishburne taking the lead role in the 1995 film rendering), though Othello is a Turk, not a contemporary "black," the *moor* by Shakespeare's time suggesting a person of mixed racial heritage: the Spaniard mixed with Arab and North African Berber, the reason why Hegel will later construct a history that will place Spain with Africa rather than Western Europe. As I'll reference below, this is a legacy that continues, as I think of even a well-meaning William Labov (1972) not making the distinctions others like Ana Celia Zentella (1988) will between the Puerto Rican's English vernacular and Black English Vernacular in the ghettoes of Manhattan, of Harlem and Spanish Harlem. And perhaps the greatest representation of this mix of the Hermetic, the Cabalistic, the traveler, the beast-in-the-other, is Caliban, the Caribbean man-beast born of a devil and a human whose name is an anagram of the Spanish *caníbal*, cannibal.

THE NEW WORLD, THE NEW SCIENCE, AND THE RISE OF RACE

I used to like using Ronald Takaki's (1993) *A Different Mirror* in first-year comp classes to demonstrate the arbitrariness of language and the equally arbitrary matter of "race." Takaki points out that what made the American Indians noble savages was the bigotry of the race called Irish, who were, by implication, ignoble savages. These noble savages

were black people. But then came the African slaves when the American Indian slaves died, committed suicide, or ran, or rebelled. The Africans were much darker, so they became black, the Indians became red, and eventually the Irish (who really are red, often), became white.

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World exploration gives rise to the word *race*, no longer confined to establishing ancestral lines of nobility, now conflated with *ethnic*, originally the term to describe the non-Christian. The "philosophical," theosophical, theological, and scientifical (not quite scientific) become clearly conflated with the economic—the need for imperial expansion and profit—with the full fruit of racism. W.E.B. DuBois (1962), for example, in *Black Reconstruction in America*, is at pains to describe the political economy that necessitated the idea of the inferiority of black folk. He argues that the American Southerner was pushed into slavery by the economics of Northern and European industry, so that the Southern slave master "was therefore not deliberately cruel to his slaves, but had had to raise cotton enough to satisfy his pretensions and self-indulgence, even if it brutalized and commercialized his slave labor" (37). Though there is a clear irony to this, DuBois is presenting an economic explanation for slavery. In this same passage, DuBois goes on to say that

> slavery was the economic lag of the 16th century carried over into the 19th century and bringing by contrast and by friction moral lapses and political difficulties. It has been estimated that the Southern states had in 1860 three billion dollars invested in slaves, which meant that slaves and land represented the mass of their capital. Being generally convinced that Negroes could only labor as slaves, it was easy for them to become further persuaded that slaves were better off than white workers and that the South had a better labor system than the North, with extraordinary possibilities in industrial and social development. (37)

DuBois relates an economy that gives rise to a politic which is represented rhetorically, as matters of persuasion. DuBois later details the discussions that take place in the press and within the legislature to rectify the problem of the poor white workers, making it necessary, he argues, for the African American to be reduced to subhuman status. From 1897, when DuBois spoke on "The Concept of Race," to his 1962 revision of an older essay on Africa, colonialism, and racism, DuBois remained attached to the idea that racism finds its roots in capitalism and imperialism.

By the eighteenth century, a new paradigm comes to the fore. The paradigm of rhetoric as *physis, arête, nomos* and the civic that had given way to the paradigm of *ecclesia*, is replaced by the rational. Kant, by the end of the eighteenth century, has a new explanation for the inferiors who are subjugated. In answering the question "What is Enlightenment?" he explains that

> Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) is the exit of humanity by itself from a state of culpable immaturity (*verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*). . . . Laziness and cowardliness are the causes which bind the great part of humanity in this frivolous state of immaturity. (quoted in Dussel 1995, 20)

A few years later, Hegel will write that

> Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the *end of universal history*. Asia is the beginning. Africa is in general a closed land, and it maintains this fundamental character. It is characteristic of the blacks that their consciousness has not yet even arrived at the intuition of any objectivity. . . . He is a human being in the rough. This mode of being of the Africans explains the fact that it is extraordinarily easy to make them fanatics. The Reign of the Spirit is among them so poor and the Spirit in itself so intense . . . that a representation that is inculcated in them suffices them not to respect anything and to destroy everything. (quoted in Dussel 1995, 22)

And as for Spain, which had harbored Jews for a millennium and Arabs of North Africa for nearly eight hundred years, it is the place where

> one meets the lands of Morocco, Fas (not Fez), Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli. One can say that this part does not properly belong to Africa, but more to Spain, with which it forms a common basin. De Pradt says for this reason that when one is in Spain one is already in Africa. This part of the world . . . forms a niche which is limited to sharing the destiny of the great ones, a destiny which is decided in other parts. It is not called upon to acquire its own proper figure. (quoted in Dussel, 21–24)

A new philosophical base describes ethnocentricity in the contemporary sense, marked not only by Kant and Hegel but also by their predecessors in Bacon, Newton, Hobbes, and Locke. But it is science that finally puts forth races in a more contemporary sense. A number of arguments about ancestral lines of different peoples had been taking shape from the sixteenth century, while within the sciences Aristotle's taxonomical ways had been absorbed by those who would provide descriptions, first of flora, then of fauna, perhaps best demonstrated

by the works of John Ray, who classified plants, fish, birds, serpents, and mammals in a number of works toward the end of the seventeenth century. By the late eighteenth century, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1969), the father of physical anthropology, "fixes" prior schemes to arrive at the first set of racial classifications. By his third edition of *The Natural Varieties of Mankind*, he had arrived at five races based on his studies of skulls more than skin color. The five races are

- Caucasian
- American (as in American Indian)
- Mongolian (Asiatic in an earlier edition of Varieties)
- Malay
- Ethiopian

Of these, the most beautiful are the Caucasians, people described as of light brown skin with black wavy or curly hair. American Indians form a transition from Mongolian to Caucasian. And the Malay form a transition from Caucasian to Ethiopian. The rest is a slippery slope: Darwin to Edmund Spenser to the British looking to be master races to the German creation of the Aryan as a Northern tribe that had invaded the lands of the South, where we know of the Aryans as Iranian and Indian, to the reinvigorated hatred of the Jews, along with Gypsies, to the attempted genocide of World War II. In the U.S. there is the Chinese Exclusion Act, Jim Crow, the forced expulsion of Mexican and Mexican Americans during the 1930s, and the continued colonization of American Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Northern Marianas, Palau, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico—to this day.

THE NEW RACISM

By the end of World War II, the presumption of white supremacy could no longer be tolerated. The biological determinism born of the Age of Enlightenment and necessary for the continued functioning of imperialist capitalism no longer resounded as a given. Something else has to come to take its place. While "race" is given less and less credence, the process of racialization continues, the rhetorical creation of racial identities (though Michael Omi and Howard Winant [1994] say it's the discursive creation, but that confines us to the Foucauldian notion of discourse). The rhetorical tropes that define this new form of racism—racialization—are seen in the terms "ethnicity" and "civilization."

Ethnicity was first the term to describe non-Christian Jews and Arabs in Europe. But the term eventually elided into the single term *race-and-ethnicity*, suggesting a race that is not necessarily visible as a race yet subject to the same treatments as those of a recognized race. Latinos and Latinas, who comprise all races and mixes of races as commonly understood, form a prime example of a race-and-ethnicity. The term *ethnicity* began reappearing in the 1920s in a move to justify continued colonial holdings among the U.S. and Western Europe. By the end of World War II, few colonies remained among the Europeans, so that it became necessary to hearken back to the inherent inferiority of racism without reference to race or to colonial status. Within the U.S., the term received its most complete treatment in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, first published in 1963, with a second edition in 1970. In their book, Glazer and Moynihan describe ethnic groups as those who do not necessarily assimilate as a matter choice rather than bigotry. According to Glazer and Moynihan,

> Ethnic groups, . . . even after distinctive language, customs, and culture are lost . . . are continually recreated by new experiences in America. The mere existence of a name itself is perhaps sufficient to form group character in new situations, for the name associates an individual, who actually can be anything, with a certain past, country, or race. (quoted in Omi and Winant 1994, 18)

Rather than full assimilation, ethnicities form *interest groups*. Glazer and Moynihan continue:

> But as a matter of fact, someone who is Irish or Jewish or Italian generally has other traits than the mere existence of the name that associates him [sic] with other people attached to the group. A man is connected to his group by ties of family and friendship. But he is also connected by ties of *interests*. The ethnic groups in New York are also *interest groups*. (18)

The problems that ethnic groups then face become the sedimentations of conflicting group interests. In 1975, Glazer and Moynihan write that "ethnic groups bring different norms to bear on common circumstances with consequent different levels of success—hence *group* differences in status," so any group that fails does so by virtue of flaws in the group's "norms," as in the stereotypical contention that the dropout rate among Chicanos and Latinos is so high because Latino culture does not prize education like other groups do (Omi and Winant 1994, 21).

Since 2001, the term *civilization* has found a resurgence, a way of addressing neocolonial, geopolitical, and economic conflicts arising from the September 2001 aircraft-as-bomb attack on the twin towers of the New York City World Trade Center. In his article "The Clash of Civilizations?", Samuel P. Huntington (1993) offers the

> hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (22)

In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington (1998) then provides a taxonomy of contemporary world "civilizations," titled in such a way that the precursors of modern racism and modern racism itself are now intermeshed. The civilizations are:

- Western
- Latin American
- African
- Islamic
- Sinic
- Hindu
- Orthodox
- Buddhist
- Japanese (26)

The natural order of things is rendered as neither *ecclesia* nor race nor *nomos*. *Civitas* is rendered not as speech but as "civilizations" and the cultures those civilizations contain. The natural order of things, then, becomes the "need" to resist contamination by those other cultures.

A section of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* begins by reducing U.S. immigration as coming from two civilizations, the Sinic and the Latin American, more specifically Asians and Mexicans, and even more specifically Filipinos and Mexicans. Huntington then writes:

> While Europeans see the immigration threat as Muslim or Arab, Americans see it as both Latin American and Asian but primarily as Mexican. . . . The central issue will remain the degree to which Hispanics are assimilated into American society as previous immigrant groups have been. . . . Mexicans walk across a border or wade across a river. This plus the increasing ease of transportation and communication enables them to maintain close contacts and identity with their communities. Second, Mexican immigrants are concentrated in the southwestern United States and form part of continuous Mexican society stretching from Yucatan to Colorado. Third, some evidence suggests that resistance to assimilation is stronger among Mexican migrants than it was with other immigrant groups. . . . Fourth, the area settled by Mexican migrants was annexed by the United States after it defeated Mexico in the nineteenth century. . . . In due course, the results of American military expansion in the nineteenth century could be threatened and possibly reversed by Mexican demographic expansion in the twenty-first century. (1998, 205–206)

Huntington expands this view in a 2004 book titled *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity.* Racism, he argues, is no longer an American problem:

> One of the greatest achievements, perhaps the greatest achievement, of America is the extent to which it has eliminated the racial and ethnic components that historically were central to its identity and has become a multiethnic, multicultural society in which individuals are to be judged on their merits. (2004b, xvii)

The problem, writes Huntington, is that when civilizations clash, national identities are jeopardized, at risk of being taken over by a people whose values contain a "lack of ambition," taken over by a people for whom the "acceptance of poverty as a virtue [is] necessary for entry into Heaven." The only way that Mexicans will not ruin America's national identity is for them to embrace the Anglo-Protestant ethos, its American dream, able to "share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (2004a, 36). As of 1999, twenty-five states—half the country—have now established English-only laws, as if laws can accelerate cognitive processes, and anti-immigrant hysteria.

Yet the 2008 election of a black American lends truth to Huntington's assertions. Barak Obama, mixed Kenyan black and American white, a man of the working class who ascended through Harvard, is elected by a clear majority of Americans. Yet the headline for the July 13, 2009, *New York Times* notes the racial disparity in unemployment, with New York

City black citizens losing jobs at four times the rate of whites (McGeehan and Warren). Tim Wise reports on July 15, 2009, that a Philadelphia swim club expelled sixty children of color from its pool. When pressed, the president of the swim club, John Duesler, wrote that the admittance of the sixty mainly black urban children would "change the complexion and atmosphere" of the club. Mr. Duesler was a supporter of President Obama who had helped to coordinate a blood drive to celebrate Obama's presidential inauguration.

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) uses framing analysis to describe the ways in which college students and others continue to betray racist conceptions through their talk. His method arises from Erving Goffman's framing, essentially looking at rhetorical tropes displayed through narrative. Although Bonilla-Silva tweaks his frames from publication to publication, they amount to four:

- abstract liberalism: every man for himself, and may the best man win; fair competition without regard (or mention) of race or ethnicity; lack of qualified candidates of color without regard to the causes for those lack of qualifications.

- naturalization: it's only natural that *they* would hang out with *their* own kind; it's only natural that students of color would not attend a rural university; it's just the way things are.

- cultural racism/biologization of racism: they're culturally predisposed to athletics; they're culturally predisposed to partying rather than hard work (written about Puerto Ricans in a book titled *Latinos*); they're culturally predisposed to having a lot of babies.

- minimization: of course there is still racism, but it isn't as bad as it once was.

In a 2007 version of a class on The Rhetoric of Racism, I introduce students to Bonilla-Silva. Students don't care for his tone, for his lack of "objectivity." I never call the students on their own uses of these tropes. I always assure them that the class isn't about them; it's about us all, about the language we are presented with and use. I ask them to read newspapers, extend beyond CNN and the Discovery Channel, to keep their ears open. This lists things students discovered during that one semester:

- Celebrity Racism: Mel Gibson, Michael Richards, Don Imus, Dog the Bounty Hunter;

- Jena 6: nooses around the country, including Columbia University;

- Charleston, West Virginia: the rape and torture of a young black woman by six white people;

- The Border Fence: antibrown immigration hysteria;

- The Border Fence: College Republicans on our campus erect a fence; two faculty engage the students; the faculty show up on YouTube and Fox News;

- Dr. James Watson: Nobel Prize Winner, codiscoverer of DNA, espousing the inherent biological inferiority of black people;

- Supreme Court decisions on school integration in which justices make convoluted explanations against recognizing ongoing racial inequality in education;

- Resistance Records and RaHoWa (i.e., Racial Holy War);

- Prussian Blue: thirteen-year-old girls performing neo-Nazi music and receiving national broadcast attention;

- The Knights Party: the new face of the Ku Klux Klan (literally);

- Lewiston, Idaho, outside the Nez Percé Reservation, forty-five miles from our campus: a thirteen-year-old American Indian girl is beaten for asking four or five young men, "What about Native pride?";

- Islamo Fascism Week on our campus.

Students not only record these events, but they record how the events are presented—or not presented—by the news media, the ways in which reporters or the police or local politicians are quick to dismiss each event as an aberration. The great caution of the "post-racial era" touted by the election of Barak Obama, the iconic representation of a now color-blind society, is that it threatens to silence the racism that still exists, even if its form has changed yet again.

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2

THE "STANDARD ENGLISH" FAIRY TALE

A Rhetorical Analysis of Racist Pedagogies and Commonplace Assumptions about Language Diversity

Laura Greenfield

In a recent first-year seminar on language diversity in contemporary America, I began the term by having students read the first chapter in Rosina Lippi-Green's (1997) *English with an Accent,* in which the author presents five "linguistic facts of life" for novice linguists to consider. I chose this text precisely to help the students in the course begin our discussions with a common set of premises—a grounding in assumptions about the nature of language upon which almost all linguists, regardless of their politics or subspecialties, agree. I broke the students into small groups and asked each group to tackle one of the "linguistic facts of life" presented by Lippi-Green, report back to the class in their own words the linguistic truism, and illustrate that point with a relevant observation they could glean from their own experiences. These truisms included

> All spoken language changes over time.
> All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms.
> Grammaticality and communicative *effectiveness* are distinct and independent issues.
> Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.
> Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level. (10)

As we moved from group to group, some students struggling more than others, some making not-so-quiet whispers to one another such as "So she's saying we don't know anything if we disagree with these points?" (well, yes), some needing some clarification from me in order to decipher the text, it became quickly apparent that this process would not simply be a matter of reading Lippi-Green's report on the present state

of linguistic knowledge and moving forward in agreement in order to interrogate more complex issues. In fact, as Lippi-Green herself notes, "The least disputed issues around language structure and function, the ones linguists argue about least, are those which are most often challenged by nonlinguists, and with the greatest vehemence and emotion" (9). A relatively open-minded and linguistically diverse bunch themselves, many of the students were willing to participate in what was for them a bit of a suspension of disbelief and move forward tentatively as though these statements were indeed true. Importantly, one student towards the end of the activity raised her hand and asked something to the effect of, "If all linguists are in agreement about these phenomena, why is it that most people in general don't know about them or disagree with them?" It was an excellent question, and while it took me a second to collect my thoughts and fumble through an answer for her, my own more focused reflection on such a question after class helped me clarify an argument I have been striving to develop throughout much of my academic career. Why *do* many people hold opinions in such stark contrast to linguistic evidence?

I argue that the "new racism" described in this volume by Victor Villanueva (26)—a "racism that still exists, even if its form has changed"— is deeply entrenched in our discourses about languages. As I will show in this chapter, the unresolved racism in the U.S. education system has given way to a particular rhetoric about language diversity and education that has drastically skewed our understandings of linguistic phenomena. While linguists agree upon a basic set of premises about the nature of language, the general public and even the most well-meaning educators hold beliefs in stark contrast to this knowledge. Our assumptions about language are guided more often by a rhetoric that feeds on our unconscious racism than they are by our intellectual understanding of linguistic fact. (The unconscious emotional impulses driving racist beliefs may explain why many people, when confronted with the seemingly mundane observations of linguists, react with extreme skepticism, disbelief, and even anger.)

Racism, as Villanueva's historical account in this collection shows, is—though material in its effects—a function of rhetoric. Working from this assumption, I intend to dig beneath the rhetoric contemporary writing teachers and writing center tutors use to rationalize inherently racist pedagogies surrounding language diversity. To demonstrate the racism in many common assumptions about language difference, I will work

through the "linguistic facts of life" outlined by Lippi-Green (1997) and analyze how racism is the catalyst for our skepticism and rejection of these facts. At stake, ultimately, are the ethics of our teaching and tutoring. For if most educators allow their unchecked racism to guide their beliefs about language, it stands to reason that the teaching and tutoring practices long advocated in the fields of composition and rhetoric and writing center studies that are premised on these attitudes are necessarily racist, too. Included in this indictment are those contemporary pedagogies—*especially* those contemporary pedagogies—celebrated by those of us who fancy ourselves "progressive" in the world of teaching and tutoring writing.

Of all the assumptions upon which linguists agree, the notion that "all spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms" (Lippi-Green 1997, 10) is easily at the root of the most significant disagreements among nonlinguists. Specifically, many people believe that certain languages are superior to others. This belief is perhaps the most fundamental false premise upon which racist arguments are built. Because they observe that all spoken language changes over time and is able to adapt to the needs of its speakers, linguists reject the idea that languages can be arranged in any sort of hierarchy of intelligence. Nevertheless, the general public regularly insists upon the inherent superiority of specific languages and varieties, failing to understand that "correctness" is a socially prescribed modifier, and systematically bases policies and practices on those mistaken judgments.

Most people in the United States generally believe that "Standard English" is the most proper, sophisticated, and clear way to speak English. We all may recognize the prevalence of that kind of assumption as it is expressed in our informal conversations with family and friends and, likely, as it creeps into our own thoughts now and again as a result of our social conditioning. We may, for example, have witnessed a person being ridiculed for what a listener describes as her "broken" English, or have privately joked with friends by putting on an accent in a performance meant to belittle someone out of earshot. Less overtly negative, most of us have had—or have been—teachers or parents who have insisted upon the need to speak what has been termed "proper" English in certain contexts, with the rationale that in order to be taken seriously and be successful in life a person must know how to speak "correctly." Imagined as the original English, the pure English, the epitome of sophisticated language use, or—practically speaking—the

most natural choice of a common denominator for widespread communication across diverse communities, "Standard English," ultimately, is invoked as that ideal, superior language. The assumption that "Standard English" is superior to other English varieties is also prevalent among language educators in the United States, spanning pre–K to graduate levels. In a conversation about dialect diversity several years ago, for example, a fellow university composition instructor asked why people would refer to "Standard English" as one of many dialects of English— "Isn't it just correct English?" she wanted to know. Similarly, on a writing center listserv, several widely influential writing center directors posted the following statements: "What do we mean when we say all language variants are equally valuable? Just exactly how is that so? If we say that, are we convincing? Are we right? How do we know?" and "Maybe one day someone will show the world that Street English or Cajun or Gullah is also up to the task [of communicating as well as 'Standard English']."

These kinds of statements, which summarily overlook and stand in clear contradiction to decades of linguistic research, exemplify a common tendency to assign, in ignorance, dismissive labels such as "Street English" to rule-based language systems spoken most recognizably by people of color. Here is where my first argument about race comes in: the language varieties deemed inferior in the United States (so much so that they are often dismissed not simply as inferior varieties but not as varieties at all—just as conglomerations of slang, street talk, or poor English) tend to be the languages whose origins can be traced to periods in American history when communities of racially oppressed people used these languages to enact agency. It is no coincidence that the languages spoken by racially oppressed people are considered to be inferior in every respect to the languages spoken predominantly by those who wield systemic power: namely, middle- and upper-class white people.

Geneva Smitherman's prolific work, for example, demonstrates in painstaking detail how Ebonics, contrary to popular opinion, is not the uneducated slang of young black rappers, but a sophisticated and rule-based language group with origins in the transatlantic slave trade. Ebonics comprises multiple ways of speaking that have, for centuries, been a means of survival, solidarity, and resistance for enslaved and the descendants of enslaved Africans spanning at least three continents. By clearly laying out the rules of its grammatical, lexical, phonological, and rhetorical structures, Smitherman (2001) shows that Ebonics is "emphatically not 'broken' English, nor 'sloppy' speech" (19) nor a

result of "linguistic deficiencies" or ignorance (Taylor 1998, 36), but instead comprises rule-governed and logical language systems. John Rickford and Russell Rickford (2000), likewise, demonstrate in a comprehensive analysis of how Ebonics is used in a vast range of spheres—by "novelists, playwrights, poets, preachers, pray-ers, comedians, actors, screenwriters, singers, toasters, rappers, and ordinary folk"—that it is not only, in the dismissive terms of the aforementioned listserv poster, "up to the task" of communicating meaningfully among speakers, but that it is able to do so with a significant sense of historical, cultural, and personal importance. Rickford and Rickford affirm that the use of this "spoken soul" resonates with its speakers as "a symbol of identity" and by "touching some timbre within and capturing a vital core of experience that [has] to be addressed *just so*" (222). As Lisa Delpit (2002) eloquently describes, "Our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself—as the sweet sounds of love accompany our first milk" (xvii).

Another language, Hawaiian Creole English (also known locally as "Pidgin English"), similarly has its origins in the history of American racial strife; scholars of this language have traced its roots to the descendents of Asian, Polynesian, and European sugarcane plantation workers in Hawaii who created a pidgin language system to facilitate their collective survival in an oppressive period of white colonization. Commonly dismissed as "broken English," Hawaiian Creole English, as demonstrated by Kent Sakoda and John Siegel (2003) in their grammar handbook, is in fact highly governed by logical rules. Scholar and author Lee Tonouchi (2004) has demonstrated effectively in his writings that despite prejudice against the language and its speakers, it is nevertheless capable of communicating meaningfully in diverse contexts; Tonouchi has published (with great critical acclaim) both creative fiction and academic scholarship in Hawaiian Creole English, not the least of which are his master's thesis and an intellectually rigorous article in *College English*. Tellingly, in recent years, the publication of *Da Jesus Book* (2000), a translation of the New Testament into Hawaiian Creole English, has been met with widespread appreciation among Hawaiian Creole English-speaking Christians and others alike; as reader comments on online retail sites such as *Amazon.com* indicate, purchasers of the text praise it for its accuracy, usefulness in Bible-study groups, ability to afford readers a greater emotional connection than do other translations, and inspiration for families.

Examples of other American languages that have been simultaneously created and marginalized by their racial histories (such as Chicano English), can be found in existing scholarship, so I will not attempt to account for them all here. Rather, I will draw the following conclusion: given the definitive nature by which linguists agree that all spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms; and given the decades of research in sociolinguistics that show how languages operate with significant personal, psychological, social, cultural, historical, symbolic, and even visceral value among their speakers; and given the striking inability of most people to accept such a truism when considering those languages that have historically afforded agency to people of color, it becomes clear that racism—not unbiased unfamiliarity with linguistics—is the driving force behind their rejection of linguistic evidence.

The belief that "Standard English" is an inherently superior language has been used to justify pedagogies that insist upon the teaching of only "Standard English" in writing classrooms and writing centers (and indeed across the curriculum). Such pedagogies, when built upon this faulty assumption, implicitly privilege a racist view of history rather than an intellectually sound understanding of linguistic phenomena.

Many of my students do not identify as racist but nevertheless find much of the histories and detailed descriptions of the grammar of languages such Ebonics or Hawaiian Creole English that we discuss in class to be new—perhaps enlightening—information. Many are surprised by this newfound understanding and often feel frustrated that they have been cheated by having had this information withheld from them all their lives by mainstream society, by their teachers. Why didn't someone tell them sooner? they want to know. While it is easy to see the education system as responsible (and certainly, as educators, a great deal of this responsibility does belong to us), I also wonder why people require a detailed history and explanation of certain languages and not others in order to believe in good faith that they are legitimate. Many of my students have never studied French, or German, or Latin, yet despite knowing nothing of the etymologies or structures of those languages, they have never questioned their legitimacy. Yet their default assumption about Ebonics, for example, is that it is street slang—a degradation of proper English; and this position is often hard to unsettle, even in the face of what should be incontrovertible evidence.

Many of us, in contrast, might be quite confident, and in fact perhaps feel a little morally superior to those kinds of students, in our ability to

dismiss the notion that "Standard English" is somehow better than other language varieties. By virtue of your interest in reading this book, I am going to afford the reader the benefit of the doubt that this kind of relationship between racism and language comes as no great revelation; scholars have made this claim repeatedly in the literature prior to my doing so. I will proceed with the belief that readers share the knowledge that certain language varieties (specifically, in the context of this book, varieties that people of color have used historically to wield power in the face of oppression) are linguistically equal to "Standard English." What I plan to unpack now, instead, is how despite a recognition of the legitimacy of different varieties of speech, our other beliefs about language—specifically, our assumptions about what "Standard English" even is—in fact fly in the face of other linguistic truisms. Importantly, I will show how racism drives and thrives on contemporary pedagogies developed even by those of us who believe different varieties to be equal. Many educators who reject the idea of the superiority of "Standard English" instead celebrate what they *interpret* to be the antiracist alternative: respect students' home languages while teaching "Standard English" in the classroom or writing center, not as a superior language but as a ticket for survival and success in American society. The remainder of this chapter, in contrast, explains why such a pedagogy, despite the best of intentions, is not only linguistically flawed, but inherently racist.

My claim draws on this assumption: Living languages cannot be standardized. The only standard languages—languages with finite boundaries and comprehensively accountable features—are dead languages. Any linguist wishing to dispute this would have a hard time producing empirical evidence to the contrary. My claim, therefore, is this: There is no such thing as "Standard English." Nevertheless, white American society has a deep investment in perpetuating the myth that "Standard English" is real; the idea of a standard language as an equal-opportunity tool for advancement works as a perfect foil for the institutionalized racism actually to blame for contemporary racial inequities. As a rhetorical tool, the evocation of a "Standard English" and all of its corollary linguistic impossibilities gives the false impression that the language practices of individual people of color, rather than the racist practices of American institutions, are responsible for these inequities. I will explain just how this is so.

To be sure, as Lippi-Green (1997) points out, "Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally

fundamentally different creatures" (10). While it is tempting to imagine speaking and writing simply to be two vehicles for communicating in the same language (writing is often considered the same thing as speech transcribed), linguists provide extensive evidence to the contrary. Spoken language is an innate, social, context-bound, and ephemeral activity that draws on paralinguistic features and is capable of resolving confusion; written language is a learned, socially removed, decontextualized, and permanent activity that relies exclusively on words and symbols (20). I mention this "linguistic fact of life" for two reasons. First, the premise that living languages cannot be standardized must be qualified by the acknowledgment that written languages and spoken languages enjoy different relationships with standardization. Written language, in its quest to communicate across space and time, is perhaps more invested in the goal of standardization than is spoken language, which generally serves a comparably more contextualized, temporal function. Nevertheless, even written language, which by nature provides a fixed document of itself, cannot avoid variation and change: the creation of a new text, even that which seeks (with a certain degree of futility) to employ a common grammar or draw from a common lexicon, by virtue of being a new text (and a new idea) invests that grammar and those words with new meaning; likewise, each time an old document is read and interpreted in a new context, any stable meaning of the text's language is dissolved. Second, while I argue that standardization is impossible for living languages both written and spoken, the differences between these two forms of communication tend to be overlooked by the contemporary educators I critique in this essay. Importantly, the false conflation of these two forms in fact helps perpetuate racist assumptions. I will demonstrate this more explicitly at the end of the essay, but I invite you to take note along the way of how often the scholars and teachers I criticize draw on examples of spoken language to make their own arguments about written language without accounting for the inherent incongruence between the two.

Perhaps the next most important premise, for the sake of the discussion that follows, upon which all linguists agree is that "variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level" (Lippi-Green 1997, 10). This means that at any given moment across space, spoken language use will vary in terms of lexicon, phonology, and morphology—or, in more recognizable terms, things like vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical structure. This may seem apparent when considering that people in my household may be speaking Arabic on the phone with our family

members in North Africa, while students in São Paulo may be conversing in Portuguese with their teacher, while a businesswoman in Seoul may be greeting her clients in Korean; this kind of language variation is easily observable and uncontroverted by the general public—people speak different languages. The observation becomes a bit more nuanced but nevertheless relatively easily grasped by nonlinguists when we take into account that variation is also apparent within a given spoken language group when considered across regions. For example, the Spanish spoken in Spain will differ from the variety spoken in Mexico which will differ from the variety spoken in Cuba—in terms of the use of certain vocabulary words (*chaqueta*, a perfectly acceptable term meaning "jacket" in Spain, has an entirely different and offensive connotation to some folks in Mexico, for example); the pronunciation of certain sounds (the consonant *c* is spoken in Spain with a slight lisp akin to the English *th* whereas elsewhere it might sound like a hard *s*, for example); and grammatical structure (the phrase *to give back* in Spain, formed with the verb infinitive *devolver*, may be heard constructed more similarly to English as *dar pa' atras* in the United States or northern Mexico, for example). Even more locally, the Spanish spoken in the United States differs throughout Miami, Southern California, New Mexico, Texas, Chicago, New York, and elsewhere. The variation, however, does not stop here. Even within a community of people that speaks one of these more regional varieties, variation intrinsically occurs, often according to age group, social class, gender, political orientation, and other factors, influenced both by proximity to others and as a means of identification. Even within the smallest subgroup, individuals necessarily use spoken language differently. A small circle of friends who all identify, for example, with speaking Nuyorican English (a language variety that draws heavily on Puerto Rican Spanish influences and the Englishes of New York City), do not speak quite the same as one another. These speakers' usage will be affected by the subtle differences in influence from the way their parents speak, the way their teachers speak, the way their classmates speak, the way their friends speak, the languages spoken in the various communities they move among, the languages they hear on television, their own physiology, and their particular aesthetic and political preferences. Some of these differences may be subtle and some might be quite pronounced. In short, no two people in this world speak in exactly the same way.

A necessary corollary to these observations is that the idea of a language itself must be an *abstraction*. While we might think we understand

language to be something concrete, what we have just observed tells us that within that label there is so much diversity it would be impossible to create a finite list of what constitutes it; this is so not simply because such a list would be too extensive and take too many volumes to cover, but because the boundaries among different languages and speakers could never themselves be precisely discerned. Linguists also observe that all spoken language, barring the genocide of the speakers and regardless of efforts to the contrary, changes over time. Given these truths, the terms *language*, *dialect*, *variety*, and other such words intended to organize speech into coherent groupings are in fact themselves arbitrary markings. While numerous scholars have noted that what counts as a "language" and what counts as a "dialect" tend to be a matter of politics rather than linguistics, and that the term *variety* might be used to avoid getting caught in the middle, such observations fail to account for the larger linguistic picture. Each of these words seeks to do the impossible: give the impression of finite groups across space and time. In this way, the term *language diversity* is in itself a redundancy, for language is by nature diverse.

Our tendency in contemporary scholarship to use the term *language diversity* when talking about the place of languages other than "Standard English" in the classroom is problematic, and not just semantically so; rather, it sets the stage for inherently racist pedagogies. Here is why: If we recognize that spoken language is intrinsically variable at all levels and that the idea of a language is necessarily an abstraction, then "Standard English," the language we purport to teach in school, the language many purport to be superior to other ways of speaking, the language progressive educators insist is necessary to ensure the survival and success of students of color, is also an abstraction. How does racism prevent us from seeing this and how does believing that "Standard English" exists as any kind of measurable entity benefit a racist system? If "Standard English" is imagined to be a finite language system when it is not (as no living language is finite), then people in power can always use it as a socially acceptable measure for making decisions about affording access to people of color, obscuring the racist motivations behind their practices. This is not to say, importantly, that we are imagining that certain ways of speaking are privileged, or that growing up in school we didn't have teachers who insisted upon specific ways of using English that we were told were correct; indeed, there are ways of speaking that enjoy greater privilege and less stigma than others. Instead, what

is important to recognize is that "Standard English" is not a quantifiable dialect with a finite set of rules and features; in contrast, I argue, "Standard English" is a qualifier ascribed to *many* ways of speaking (and by extension, though differently, writing) by privileged white people or, perhaps more accurately, any variety of English that has not been associated historically with resistance by communities of color.

We might, then, more accurately replace the term *Standard English* with the term *standardized Englishes* to make visible the fact that humans actively select which Englishes will be privileged and to emphasize that *many Englishes secretly enjoy this designation.* (I should also note that the idea of "Englishes" itself still suggests a certain sort of coherence that is linguistically impossible to demonstrate.) It is also important to consider that just because the term *standardized Englishes* constitutes a broader realm of language use than the term *Standard English* connotes, does not mean that people of color do not or cannot claim ownership of and/or identify with any of these "standardized Englishes" as a home language or as a target language. Likewise, it does not mean that white people do not or cannot speak the same languages as people of color. What it does mean is that excluding languages that people of color historically have used as tools of resistance and automatically including languages spoken by privileged white people in the realm of what counts as "Standard English" necessarily creates a system of inequality in which many people of color are expected to be bidialectal or bilingual as a condition for being taken seriously as communicators, whereas privileged white people—regardless of their actual speech—*always already* speak a language of power. Despite the actual languages spoken by any one individual, the system as a whole is able to maintain itself along racist lines so long as the criteria for what counts as standard are always (invisibly) determined by the race of its speakers.

The evidence of the claim that "Standard English" is an abstraction deliberately and deceptively used to refer to a variety of privileged white speech patterns can be observed in a number of significant phenomena. When we wrack our brains for examples of features we imagine to be rules of a "Standard English" (or when we look at grammar guides that purport to describe proper "Standard English"), we can observe a great deal of variation within what is considered acceptable so long as that variation describes usage that has become common within dominant white communities. Spelling is one example. The alternative spelling of the word *color* as *colour*, for instance, is widely accepted as "Standard

English" (because, I argue, its British origins, in the American imagination, position it as a sophisticated substitute); the alternative spelling of the word *talking* as *talkin*, in contrast, is not considered "Standard" due to its approximation to some black speech. Pronunciation is another example. It is considered "Standard English" to pronounce sounds out of order from their written form so long as such pronunciation can be found in white speech—the *r* and *t* in the word *comfortable* are regularly swapped without notice as *comfterble*; in contrast, African Americans who exchange the *s* and *k* in the word *ask* to result in *aks* are the subject of constant ridicule. Redundancy in markings is another example. It is considered "Standard English" to offer multiple markers of *plurality*: "She has *five* daughter*s*" indicates plurality twice. In contrast, a singular marking of plurality, despite clarity in meaning, is not allowed when the usage can be found in the languages of some people of color, as in the phrase "She has five daughter," an allowable translation found in some varieties of Ebonics. Nevertheless, this prohibition of redundancy is wavered when it benefits a white speaker: it is considered correct "Standard English" to *avoid* redundancy when it comes to *negation*. For example, the phrase "You ca*n't* tell me anything" is considered "Standard English" whereas the comparable "You ca*n't* tell me *nothing*," which is sometimes used by Ebonics speakers, is not. While one might argue that there is nothing amiss about the above observations—that considered independently the rules of plurality and the rules of negation are consistent in and of themselves—the following example reveals that even these rules continue to be modified internally for the inclusion of white speakers and the exclusion of others. Some redundancy—"*No,* you ca*n't* do that"—will be tolerated among white speakers, whereas the single marking in "You *no* can do that" in Hawaiian Creole English is also rejected despite its conformity to the supposed rule of singular negation.

A different way to look at the phenomenon that "Standard English" in fact comprises a variety of white speech patterns is in the observation that "Standard English" is less easily defined by what it *is* (as it is impossible to identify finite rules when the rules are in fact variable) than by what it is *not*. In particular, the features frequently cited to describe "Standard English" generally are those that differentiate usage from usage common among languages that have been spoken historically by people of color in the face of oppression. For example, we learn ad nauseum that in "Standard English" you don't say *ain't* (a term with ambiguous etymology, though believed to have come from Britain and

which took root in the United States within African American popula-
tions—though arguably not a feature of Ebonics "proper"—and in the
poor areas of the rural south) and you don't conjugate the infinitive *to be*
as *be* (which exists in some varieties of Ebonics as an habitual marking).
To look at one such example more closely, when many English teachers
are asked to identify important features of correct "Standard English"
grammar, they often stress the importance of "subject-verb agreement."
Cynthia Linville (2004), in her chapter in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing
Center Tutors*, identifies "subject-verb agreement" as the most common
error type that is "often frequent or serious in ESL college composi-
tions" (86). Citing "subject-verb agreement" (referring to the use of *she
goes* instead of *she go*, for instance) as a feature of "Standard English"
reveals a number of racial biases. First, this kind of verb conjugation is
one of the features that superficially differs most noticeably with usage
in some Ebonics and Hawaiian Creole English (exemplifying my obser-
vation that people define "Standard English" by what it is not). Second,
arguments for superior clarity or consistency in "Standard English"
become moot when we see that the preferred "Standard English" usage
is in fact *irregular* in comparison to the more uniform usage in the other
aforementioned languages ("I go/you go/she *goes*/they go/we go" ver-
sus "I go/you go/she go/they go/we go"). Third, the very characteriza-
tion of subjects and verbs being in "agreement" in "Standard English"
allows no room for other usages to be understood as legitimate trans-
lations; instead, the means by which the languages spoken historically
by many people of color indicate subject-verb *correspondence* is implicitly
denigrated as "disagreement" rather than simply as different markers of
correspondence. Such a characterization is equally ironic when we see
that, given conjugations for first and second singular and plural person
forms, the "Standard English" conjugation of the third person singular
would be more accurately described as "disagreement" than would its
more consistent counterpart spoken in the above-cited languages.

One might also observe the peculiar phenomenon that "Standard
English" handbooks fail to account for rhetorical conventions that may
be "correctly" employed through the grammar of the language. Because
Ebonics historically has used sophisticated rhetorical tools to communi-
cate messages that non-Ebonics speakers (such as white slave masters)
would not understand (hence its subversive capabilities and its rejec-
tion by those in power), many contemporary non-Ebonics speakers do
not notice when the rhetoric is being used. Accordingly, this ignorance

means that believers in a quantifiable "Standard English" fail to account for their own multiple rhetorics in their own conversations or handbooks. Without having knowledge of the rhetoric of people of color against which to identify a standard rhetoric, such handbooks have no single rule that can stand on its own to name. This all goes to the point that "Standard English" is really nothing more than whatever is *not* designated as nonstandard.

As compositionist Phyllis Ryder (2007) aptly observes, what are generally held up in contrast to "paradigms of American speech" are linguistic features "that bear the markers of non-white identity" (11). This is not to say that standardized Englishes have not been influenced by the languages of people of color in the United States; indeed, the speech patterns of most (if not all) white American communities have developed in response to diverse influences of many speakers. For instance, certain expressions translated literally from the Chinese during the height of immigration in the nineteenth century are so widely used today that their origins are largely unrecognized (the greeting for an old friend, *long time no see*, for example). What is significant about this phenomenon, nevertheless, is that privileged white people have had the power to adopt those influences and claim ownership of them as part of their language (in the phrase *long time no see*, for instance, *no* is used by white speakers to form a negation, but such consistent usage by Hawaiian Creole English speakers in Hawaii is still not recognized as standard).

Another reason that believing in a "Standard English" perpetuates a racist system can be seen when we recognize that when we talk about what constitutes a privileged way of speaking (whether we imagine that the language is indeed superior or that the language is just one among many equally as good), we obscure the fact that we are not really talking about language at all but about which communities we imagine to be superior. For when the languages of white people collectively are called "Standard English" and when "Standard English" is imagined as a tool necessary for participation in mainstream society, people of color are put in the oppressive position not of having to speak or learn to speak a particular language (for no single language exists), but of ridding themselves of all linguistic features that may identify them with communities of color.

The institutionalization of such racism is far reaching. In the classroom, it can be seen in the inequity of teachers' grading practices

between white students and students of color when teachers do not recognize their own racialized assumptions about what constitutes "Standard English." If a white student submits a poorly written essay that draws upon her spoken language, its reception will tend to be better than a comparable piece of writing that reveals features of a language spoken by people of color. The first is merely assumed to be poor editing, the work of a potentially smart person who simply needs to develop her writing skills; the second is assumed to be evidence of the incompetence ascribed to a race of people and is received with far greater hostility. The study findings presented by Nancy Effinger Wilson later in this collection provide evidence of this inequity in response to perceived student "errors;" the surveys she administered to English instructors and writing center tutors revealed that sentences featuring "African American Vernacular English" were identified as the "most bothersome" as compared with sentences containing common ESL errors and nonstandard European American English. As Wilson rightly comments, if teachers and tutors are concerned exclusively with error (and not race), then their scores in response to the writing samples in the surveys should have been uniform.

In the academy, an increasing number of scholars reference the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (1974) Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution as a foundation for building a number of what we interpret to be ethical teaching practices. While this resolution forcefully argues for the legitimacy and equality of diverse language varieties—the aspect of the resolution most readily referenced—the rejection of "the myth of a standard American dialect" included at the beginning is almost summarily overlooked by its contemporary readers and proponents. Importantly, while many of us would be quick to say that "Standard English" is no more superior than any other variety of English, in such a statement we nevertheless inadvertently reveal our subscription to what I argue is the most insidious and false assumption upon which all others rest: "Standard English" exists. This false premise is the sustenance of a racist educational system and functions in inextricable complicity with other racist assumptions about language, as I will discuss below.

Another linguistic truism that nonlinguists regularly reject at the service of racism is that "grammaticality and communicative *effectiveness* are distinct and independent issues" (Lippi-Green 1997, 10). To clarify, the term *grammaticality* is used by linguists to refer to any utterance that

carries meaning by a speaker of a language, independent of the social judgments about the propriety of the choice. For example, to say "I ain't happy" would be considered "grammatical" because it is a construction that exists among English speakers, even if great social stigma can be found against that particular word. In other words, "I ain't happy" is intrinsically capable of clearly expressing an idea to English speakers even if some people would prefer that "I am not happy" be used in its stead (a choice, many could argue, that in fact loses a sense of emotion and intensity conveyed through the former). In contrast, the ability to have "communicative *effectiveness*" depends upon the judgments of the listeners. For example, if a listener has a preconceived notion about the educational background, social status, or intelligence of the kind of person who would choose to say "I ain't happy," then upon hearing this statement the listener may tune out, be dismissive, or feel her preconceptions have been affirmed; the intention on the part of the speaker to engage meaningfully with this listener may be unsuccessful.

For example, in a debate on a writing center listserv about the place of variant dialects in the classroom, a prominent writing center scholar wrote:

> There are many faculty around a campus who lament the use of non-standard English by their students, knowing that it will cost them jobs, in addition to lost time and money due to miscommunication. (Remember that PEW report about a survey of Fortune 500 companies where top execs were asked what aspect of the college education of their employees was most lacking? Almost all the respondents listed poor communication at the top of their list because it caused massive time and monetary loss, as people e-mailed back and forth trying to figure out what the other person meant in his/her e-mail, memo, report, etc....and then the original writer had to write back to ask the questioner what he/she was confused about?) Miscommunication is serious, important, and employers realize that it's a major concern out there.

While miscommunication, as this writing center scholar argues here, can certainly lead to serious consequences, the assumption the scholar takes for granted is that "poor communication" in general and strong communication in a nonstandardized variety of English are one and the same. In this instance, the purportedly unclear usage cited by the listserv poster (who himself or herself, albeit writing in an informal forum, would be vulnerable to the red pen of many a critical editor) was a perfectly comprehensible statement made by a student drawing on features of Ebonics. When the threat of "miscommunication" is used

as a scapegoat for enforcing racist attitudes about a speaker and her perfectly comprehensible differences in speech, racism is perpetuated.

The fact that one's ability to communicate clearly and to be received successfully are not necessarily directly correlated sheds important light on how the pedagogical practices of even the most well-intentioned educators are fundamentally problematic. This is so because the goal to teach students of color "Standard English" as a tool for success in mainstream society falsely assumes several things: 1) People believe falsely that the home languages of people of color, despite their linguistic "grammaticality," are unable to communicate clearly in widespread contexts and are therefore (at least partially) responsible for their reduced opportunities in white-dominated society; in contrast, this assumption prohibits consideration of the ways in which the racist judgments of listeners about who people of color are as people influence those listeners' willingness to listen. In other words, this assumption ignores the role of the audience in the success of the communicative exchange. 2) People believe falsely that by changing the way people of color speak (diminishing the racially identified markings in their language), others' racist preconceptions will disappear and the communicative act will be successful.

Belief in those two misstatements reveals a fundamental lack of understanding about how racism is institutionalized in American society. Arguing that "literate culture is the most democratic culture in our land: it cuts across generations and social groups and classes," E.D. Hirsch (2006) voices a widespread belief in a myth that posits that "Standard English" is a racially neutral language available for all to use with the same potential for communicative success:

> Literate culture has become the common currency for social and economic exchange in our democracy, and the only available ticket to full citizenship. *Getting one's membership card is not tied to class or race.* Membership is *automatic* if one learns the background information and the linguistic conventions that are needed to read, write, and speak effectively. (21–22; emphasis added)

Nevertheless, as I will show below, the success afforded by the adoption of linguistic conventions sanctioned by the powerful is not at all automatic, but quite contingent upon those very markers.

While I have already argued that privileged white people speak the languages that comprise the abstract "Standard English" language, it is less easily proven that adopting one of these standardized Englishes spoken by those in power will lead a person otherwise subjected to

the oppression by that group into membership. Just as the "American Dream" myth purports that anyone with good brains, determination, and hard work will be met with equal opportunity for financial, social, and political success, so too does the "Standard English" myth insist that speaking this imagined dialect of prestige is the ticket to upward mobility. If those on the margins of society, people of color in the context of this discussion, are not moving up in the economic ranks, it is—so the myth goes—because they are incompetent, lazy, and/or cannot speak correctly. If only they would speak "proper" English, the world bemoans, they could improve their station in life. It is their language—their hillbilly, black, accented *ya'lls* and *ain'ts*—preventing them from getting mainstream jobs. Language prejudice is not a figment of the imagination. People across the world form strong opinions in response to the negative assumptions they make about different languages, and those attitudes undoubtedly have material consequences for the opportunities made available to speakers. Nevertheless, a central argument of my chapter is that *it is not the language which causes listeners to make assumptions about the speaker, but the attitudes held by the listeners towards the speaker that cause them to extend that attitude towards the speaker's language.* Accordingly, changing the language would address merely the symptom of the racial prejudice—not the institutionalized cause. In other words, a stigmatized person will rarely lose her stigmatization *completely* by adopting—or speaking as a home language—a language of prestige because her body still carries with it the racialized markers people have used to relegate her to the margins to begin with. She may gain a minimal amount of access in certain ways by distancing herself from what white people historically associate with people of color, but doing so does not erase others' white privilege nor bring about institutional change to the larger system that held her up to judgment in the first place. Black people are not discriminated against because some speak a variety of Ebonics—rather, I argue, Ebonics is stigmatized because it is spoken primarily by black people. It is its association with a particular people and history that has compelled people to stigmatize it. Our attitudes towards language, it appears, are often steeped in our assumptions about the bodies of the speakers. We assume an essential connection—language as inherently tied to the body. In other words, language varieties—like people—are subject to racialization.

It is this unspoken, perhaps unconscious, belief that some languages belong most naturally to certain bodies that make some people assign

a language to a face and a face to a language. While one myth might lead us to believe that any person who speaks or learns a standardized English can better avert the discriminatory practices of a society hyper-conscious of race, it is sometimes the case that the unexpected sound of a standardized English coming from the mouth of a "non-naturally" standardized English-speaking person creates in some people such unease and confusion that they nevertheless dismiss the person back to the margins—an anomaly, a freak, something they do not know how to name; certainly, not a real American.

David Mura (1991), for example, in his memoir *Turning Japanese*, illustrates an encounter that appears frequently in narratives by Asian American writers. This encounter demonstrates the feeling of disconnection that some people experience when an unexpected language comes out of a marked body; it also shows the subsequent resistance towards accepting the combination of the language and the body as something natural. On Mura's first day teaching a class of fourth graders, the following dialogue occurs:

> "Where do you come from?" one of the students asked.
> I knew what the student meant, but answered, "Minneapolis."
> "No, where were you born?"
> "I was born at Great Lakes Naval Training Center."
> "But where did you learn English?" Later, I got this same question from some of the teachers.
> I told them I learned English in the same way they had, at home, in school, on the streets of my hometown, Chicago. (76)

Mura, through this dialogue, emphasizes the extent to which mainstream American society assumes that the English language (and therefore, American identity) is something essential to phenotypically white citizens; whereas, on the contrary, someone with an Asian face is not only necessarily a foreigner, but someone for whom English is something acquired—something secondary, something unnatural.

Traise Yamamoto (1999), in *Masking Selves, Making Subjects*, asserts that "the body [is] the bearer and manifestation of difference" (77) and that "women, people of color, the poor, the queer are subject to an enforced embodiment wherein the particularity of their hyper-visible bodies defines their status as the obverse of American ideality, or more accurately as the obverse on which the idea of American national identity depends" (73). While many argue that the English language is a uniting commodity, that speaking it provides a common

denominator among diverse citizens, this is clearly not always the case; rather, as Mura's (1991) experience shows, it is the speaking of English that creates *additional* marginalization, because no longer are the speakers merely Othered ("Asian"—not "American"), but now they are Othered and without a name. It is this unrecognizable pairing of appearance and voice that creates opportunities for judgment—not acceptance—by some observers whose power over definitions is threatened by what Hayden White (1982) calls the "sublime;" they are unable to make coherent and identify that which is out of their control.

It is this desire for physical and linguistic coherence that allows people to take liberties in making assumptions when confronted with faces and voices that do not conform to their expectations—even when those voices employ Hirsch's supposed "common currency" of a standardized English. Booker T. Washington (1901), in *Up From Slavery*, observes an instance when white Americans' attitudes towards black Americans make the latter's proficient use of a standardized English *problematic*. Washington tells of a time during the late nineteenth century:

> I happened to find myself in a town in which so much excitement and indignation were being expressed that it seemed likely for a time that there would be a lynching. The occasion of the trouble was that a dark-skinned man had stopped at the local hotel. Investigation, however, developed the fact that this individual was a citizen of Morocco, and that while traveling in this country he spoke the English language. As soon as it was learned that he was not an American Negro, all the signs of indignation disappeared. The man who was the innocent cause of the excitement, though, found it prudent after that not to speak English. (50)

What this moment illustrates is the deep entrenchment of racism towards black people in the United States, so much so that anyone subject to being racially marked as Other is likewise at risk of being subjected to prejudice regardless of—or in this case more readily because of—their language use. Essentialist assumptions about black *Americans* (different, because of our national history, than assumptions about black *Africans*) led these white Americans—when hearing the sound of English—to conclude that this man was the kind of black with which they were familiar and who was deserving of their disdain. The foreigner's use of English did not provide him "membership" in American society; instead, the impression that he was an American due to his use of English subjected him to exclusion and racism because he was mistakenly associated with an already marked group within the United States.

More problematically, in American classrooms, teachers' assumptions about the innate intelligence and capabilities of African American students lead to highly contentious interactions where power struggles over the use of standardized Englishes reveal that the distribution of membership cards is indeed dependent on race. Because Ebonics is viewed by many as broken English (an assumption which stems, undoubtedly, from a belief that its speakers are inferior), a bilingual African American speaker who can switch between a variety of Ebonics and a standardized English variety is viewed with skepticism; such a speaker, after all, is generally not viewed as *bilingual* but as a *contradiction*—how can someone ignorant (a black U.S. Ebonics speaker) also be intelligent and competent (through her standardized English speech)? Such an irreconcilable confusion on the part of the listener reduces the speaker's presumed access to the mainstream and instead positions her as a paradox worthy of suspicion. In an essay by Shuaib Meacham (2002), for example, an African American teacher discusses her own experiences as a student in a teacher-education program. Linda, a fluent speaker of "African American English"—despite proficiency in a written standardized English—describes having her academic work challenged by her white teachers in ways that other white students do not. Meacham argues, drawing on the work of John Baugh, that these teachers believe that "speakers of African American English are less capable of expressing ideas in an academic manner" (194). When Linda contradicts those assumptions by submitting a sophisticated written assignment in a standardized English, the teacher's first impulse is to assume that the work is plagiarized. The teacher asks: "Did you write these passages? It doesn't look like your writing. Please give references" (194). Meacham observes that

> regardless of the reason for the comments, it is clear that the writer holds inaccurate conceptions regarding the academic performance possibilities of speakers of African American English. Linda later observed that the [teacher] could have expected her writing to contain African American English and when it was not evident, assumed that the Standard English writing had to have been plagiarized. . . . Not only was her intelligence called into question, but her personal and academic integrity as well. (195)

This woman's experience shows that despite simplistic arguments that "Standard English" provides opportunities for success, that success was not granted her free of charge; the teacher's assumption about Linda's intelligence and capabilities based on her racialized body affected

the teacher's willingness to accept her use of a standardized English. Instead, the standardized English writing was called into question as being legitimately hers, and Linda was forced to suffer the insult and added labor of having to prove the authenticity of her work. This is an insult her white classmates had the privilege—because of their lack of racial stigmatization, not their particular dialects—not to endure. In pointing out this example, I do not seek to invalidate the success that ultimately may have been aided by Linda's proficiency in a standardized English privileged by her academic context. Instead, I hope to show that her physical body affected the *reception* of her language use, even when that language use was identical to that of her white classmates. In other words, despite writing in a language variety that her white teacher had deemed proper, her communicative success was disrupted by that same teacher's racist assumptions.

Indeed, while many continue to argue that "Standard English" is a "neutral" tool that provides access and opportunity to all who use it, evidence continues to suggest that people's prejudices towards certain speakers carry more weight than the speakers' facility with language itself. Keith Gilyard (1991), in his autobiographical study of language, *Voices of the Self*, cites a study by Frederick Williams as one that "fuels the argument that racial prejudice overrides concerns of linguistic output."

> Separate videotapes were made of three children: black, white, and Mexican-American. Enough of the children was visible so that racial characteristics were apparent, but the children had been filmed at such an angle that a viewer could not see the movement of their mouths as they spoke. The same voiceover was then dubbed onto all the tapes. Nonetheless, when student teachers were asked to rate the children's speech for standardness and fluency, the white child's speech was rated superior. It seems foolish to dispute the belief of Burling (1973) that "when we are contemptuous of a people, we tend to be contemptuous of their language" (p. 20), even if what they are speaking is really our own. (73)

For these children, the uniform expression of the "democratic" linguistic currency did not afford them equal access; their physical bodies, ultimately, were the deciding factor in their public (and educational) reception.

Similarly, Ryuko Kubota and Lori Ward (2000) cite a study by Donald Rubin that demonstrates how "native speakers' racial and ethnic stereotypes can negatively affect how well they comprehend the utterances of others," regardless of how well the speaker uses language. This shows,

perhaps most concretely, the veracity of the linguistic truism that grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are indeed separate matters. They explain that in the study

> a group of undergraduate students was presented with a picture of a Caucasian female instructor and listened to a lecture recorded by a native speaker of English from the Midwest, while another group listened to the same audio recording, while looking at a picture of an Asian female instructor dressed exactly the same. The results showed that the group that was presented with the picture of an Asian instructor perceived more accent and performed more poorly on a listening comprehension test compared to the other group. These results imply that it is not only nonnative speakers of English, but also native speakers, who are responsible for problems in cross-cultural communication. (81)

Just as with the study cited by Gilyard (1991), these conclusions demonstrate how deeply assumptions about the physical body can trump the supposed value of language facility; this instructor was perceived as having an accent because of her physical features, despite speaking with the same voice as that of the Caucasian woman.

Despite all linguistic evidence to the contrary (particularly our understanding that no single "Standard English" exists and that speaking a standardized English well does not automatically afford communicative effectiveness, particularly for people of color), the following assumption remains as the driving force behind most educators' practices: "Standard English" is a ticket available to all people for upward mobility and success in mainstream educational and occupational settings. Indeed, given a number of false premises, many of the most progressive and influential scholars and teachers in the realm of writing studies—those who value the diversity of languages among their students and those who seek to fight against institutional oppression—necessarily develop what they mistakenly perceive to be ethical and pedagogically effective practices. In particular, the most liberally progressive scholarship up to the present day continues to reiterate, without much variation or development, the same set of assumptions and claims: (1) nonstandardized English varieties are legitimate, rule-based language systems, (2) all students must learn "Standard English" because it is the language of wider communication in the United States and is crucial for academic and professional success, and (3) teachers must validate and respect students' home languages in order to effectively teach these students "Standard English."

Indeed, Elaine Richardson (2003) reports that a survey of members of both the CCCC and the NCTE found that 96.1 percent of all members believe that students "need to master standard English for upward mobility" (45). Smitherman (2001), the most influential contemporary scholar on Ebonics, argues that "yes, black youth need to learn LWC" (38) and that while "the language policy for the black community must be one of multilingualism," such a policy must "reinforce the need for the Language of Wider Communication" (39) as it is the "language of literacy, commerce, politics, and education, and it is a necessary addition to most people's linguistic repertoire" (38). Prominent linguists Rickford and Rickford (2000) conclude their book, which otherwise celebrates the legitimacy of U.S. Ebonics, with the suggestion that "it is only when we have claimed both Spoken Soul and Standard English as our own, empowering our youth to appreciate and articulate each in their respective forums, that we will have mastered the art of merging our double selves into a better and truer self" (229). Delpit (1995), a scholar on the education of African American children, argues that these children must be taught "Standard English": "I prefer to be honest with my students. I tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must play" (39–40). Influential composition scholar Peter Elbow (2002) likewise agrees: "The short-range goal is clear: help students in our classrooms today whose comfortable dialect is not 'Standard' American English (SAE) to meet the demands of most teachers and employers. We can't wait for a new culture of literacy" (129). Following their examples, other lesser-known scholars repeat well-meaning platitudes like these: "We are obligated to promote standardized English in public and professional settings where it is required" (Bruch and Marback 2002, 663–64); "We have an obligation as teachers to open up LWC to all our students, help them become fluent in it and be able to use it with comfortable facility" (Jonsberg 2001, 53); and finally, "It is our duty as English teachers to promulgate the correct use of standard English" (Shafer 2001, 41). While all of these educators, I believe, care deeply about the success of their students of color, it is the pervasiveness of a racist system that obscures the linguistic realities that make their pedagogical arguments necessarily problematic. Donaldo Macedo (1994) perhaps says it best: "If education in 'English Only' can guarantee linguistic minorities a better future . . . why do the majority

of black Americans, whose ancestors have been speaking English over 200 years, find themselves still relegated to the ghettos?" (39). A few contemporary scholars also have begun to criticize this kind of pedagogy. Vershawn Ashanti Young's work, for example, interrogates the racism behind commonplace assumptions about pedagogies for "code-switching." In his chapter that follows in this collection, he builds an argument in support of an alternative language practice.

To be sure I am not misunderstood: I do not want to argue that the reason "Standard English" does not exist is because, as Elbow's (2002) recent writings about the difference between written and spoken language suggests, nobody speaks the same way they write. As discussed earlier, the profound differences between written and spoken language are widely agreed upon by linguists, but such an observation should not allow us to conclude that written language is entirely free from abstraction or that standardized written Englishes approximate the speech patterns of all Americans to an equal degree. Put differently, scholars such as Elbow, whether intentionally or not, exploit the above truism that in effect obscures recognition of the racism that student writers of color may experience. Assertions such as Elbow's (while nevertheless helpful, I would argue, for students to understand why their experiences as writers may differ from their experiences as speakers) problematically suggests that all students experience the process of learning to write in American classrooms with the same degree of ease, eliding recognition of (historically racialized) home languages as significant factors. In contrast, as I have shown, race can play an integral role not only in the overprivileging of some people's monolingualism or the burden of a compulsory multilingualism, but also in the way a student and her language—regardless if it is standardized or not—are received.

As Lippi-Green (1997) argues, with the rejection of linguistic fact comes the "implication . . . that discrimination is purely a matter of language, and that it is *first and primarily* the right accent which stands between marginalized social groups and a bright new world free of racism and prejudicial treatment" (50; italics in original). What I hope to have shown, in contrast, is that such assumptions both have origins in our racism and, when acted upon, allow institutionalized racism to thrive. By suggesting that "Standard English" exists as a language variety, rather than acknowledging that "Standard English" is, by definition, the conglomeration of all privileged white speech, we set up a hypothetical ideal for all people which, for people of color, can never in reality be

attained. Worse yet, granting, for the sake of example, that "Standard English" does exist as a particular language variety, the suggestion that a person of color could speak it and thus overcome the institutional oppression that exists independent of her language perpetuates a commonplace understanding of racism as individual acts of prejudice and makes invisible the institutionalized racism that remains.

An objection to what might be perceived as the trajectory of my argument at this point is likely the same objection that Delpit has wielded at liberal educators in her numerous writings about educating black children. Delpit critiques liberal educators (who fear oppressing their students by teaching them "Standard English") for withholding from African American students the very tools she believes are necessary for them to survive the system. To the contrary, I reject the very premise of both that pedagogy and its critique—the premise that there is a quantifiable and ascertainable "Standard English" language. Rather, I believe teachers and tutors must be cautious about what it means to insist upon what language resources any student does or does not need. Given my arguments in this chapter, I am calling for a drastic revision to contemporary approaches to teaching language. Ultimately, until our institutionalized racism is eradicated, practices that advocate the teaching of any privileged language will be—by definition—contributing to a system of inequity. Instead, our writing classrooms and writing centers can be deliberately and openly concerned with participating in, even leading, efforts to create greater social justice beyond our walls. In addition to giving all students as many language tools as possible, teachers and tutors should ultimately be concerned with helping them develop a critical consciousness of the effects of their choices at an individual and institutional level, and—most importantly—cultivating in them a sense of agency in combating, linguistically and otherwise, the injustices they encounter along the way. To do so, discussions of the sort included in this text can become a part of the curriculum, so that students' choices about language use are based on their own critical thinking, not on the instructors' personal biases. Such a pedagogy is not a distraction from the real work of teaching and tutoring writing, but an investment in teaching and tutoring through a lens that both ethically and practically accounts for the social and linguistic truths of our time.

In 1969, the New University Conference convened at the CCCC and drafted a resolution that called for a move away from the privileged teaching of "Standard English," offering in its place a project of social change:

CCCC and NCTE meetings and CCCC and NCTE Executive Committees should work actively to make non-standard dialects acceptable in all schools from kindergarten on and create an active articulation between the elementary schools, secondary schools, junior colleges and universities to deal with this problem. Linguists and English teachers should concentrate *not on trying to teach everyone to speak and write upper-middle-class white dialect but rather on changing the attitude of society that discriminates against other dialects.* Their efforts should be devoted to teaching the truths that all dialects are effective and valuable and that no dialect is any more indicative than any other of intelligence and even language ability on the part of the speaker. (quoted in Faigley 1992, 60; emphasis added)

The Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution that was devised as a result conspicuously failed to account for this goal of social change; in doing so, the resolution obscures the reality of systemic injustices and falsely implies that it is the individual speaker and the individual teacher who are exclusively responsible for the student's future communicative success. This chapter is a call to revisit the goals of the New University Conference and begin collectively to devise strategies for creating pedagogies that advance those aims. We can no longer be satisfied with deferring to the kind of rhetoric of "naturalization" that Villanueva cites from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, saying that our students need "Standard English" because "it's just the way things are."

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3

SHOULD WRITERS USE THEY OWN ENGLISH?

Vershawn Ashanti Young

> *What would a composition course based on the method I urge look like?*
> *. . . . First, you must clear your mind [of the following]: "We affirm*
> *the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the*
> *dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own*
> *identity and style."*
>
> Stanley Fish, "What Colleges Should Teach, Part 3"

Cultural critic Stanley Fish (2009d) come talkin bout—in his three-piece *New York Times* "What Should Colleges Teach?" suit—there only one way to speak and write to get ahead in the world, that writin teachers should "clear [they] mind of the orthodoxies that have taken hold in the composition world." He say don't no student have a right to they own language if that language make them "vulnerable to prejudice"; that "it may be true that the standard language is a device for protecting the status quo, but that very truth is a reason for teaching it to students."

Lord, lord, lord! Where do I begin, cuz this man sho tryin to take the nation back to a time when we were less tolerant of linguistic and racial differences. Yeah, I said racial difference, tho my man Stan try to dismiss race when he speak on language differences. But the two be sho nuff intertwined. Remember when a black person could get hanged from the nearest tree just cuz they be black? And they fingers and heads (double entendre intended) get chopped off sometime? Stanley Fish (2009a) say he be appalled at this kind of violent racism, and get even madder at the subtle prejudice exhibited nowadays by those who claim that race is dead, that racism don't happen no mo. But it do happen—as Fish know—when folks don't get no jobs or get fired from jobs and worse cuz they talk and write Asian or black or with an Appalachian accent or sound like whatever ain't the status quo. And Fish himself acquiesce to this linguistic prejudice when he come sayin that people make theyselves targets for racism if and when they don't write and speak like he do.

But don't nobody's language, dialect, or style make them "vulnerable to prejudice." As Laura Greenfield point out in her chapter on racism and writing pedagogy in this collection, it's ATTITUDES. It be the way folks with some power perceive other people's language. Like the way some view, say, Black English when used in school or at work. Black English don't make it own-self oppressed. It be negative views about other people usin they own language, like what Fish express in his *NYT* blog, that make it so.

This explain why so many bloggers on Fish's *NYT* comment page was tryin to school him on why teachin one correct way lend a hand to choppin off folks' tongues. But, let me be fair to my man Stan. He prolly unaware that he be supportin language discrimination, cuz he appeal to its acceptable form—standard language ideology, also called "dominant language ideology" (Lippi-Green 1997). Standard language ideology is the belief that there is one set of dominant language rules that stem from a single dominant discourse (like standard English) that all writers and speakers of English must conform to in order to communicate effectively. Dominant language ideology say peeps can say whateva the heck they want, howeva they want to—BUT AT HOME!

Don't get me wrong, Fish ain't all wrong. One of his points almost on da money—the one when he say teachers of writin courses need to spend a lot of time dealin straight with writin, not only with topics of war, gender, race, and peace. As a person who train and supervise writin teachers, I have observed too many syllabi that cover the rhetoric of the feminist movement, which is cool, but don't spend no time on effective sentence construction, the development of prose style, the conventions of argumentation, and the conventions of public discourse. Fish rightly ask teachers to pay mo attention to these matters. But he don't like no Black English and Native American rhetoric mixing with standard English. And this is a huge problem considerin that the concept of "standard English" is widely contested. Linguist John McWhorter (2001), for one, challenge the notion of a monolithic standard English in the very subtitle of his book *Word on the Street: Debunking the Myth of "Pure" Standard English*. McWhorter agree with what Laura Greenfield say in her chapter, that "the terms *language, dialect, and variety,* and other such words intended to organize speech into coherent groupings are in fact themselves arbitrary markings" (42).

To me, what make these "markings," i.e., "standard" and "dialect," problematic, even though I use the designations myself, is that what we call standard English is part of a common language system that include

Black English and any other so-called variety of English. I'm sho not trying to say here that Black English don't have some rhetorical and grammatical features that differ from what is termed standard English. What I'm sayin is that the difference between the two ain't as big as some like to imagine. McWhorter's own book title show this, since it has what some would codify as black speech "word on the street" with what some would codify as standard speech (the myth of pure standard English).

This why I got a big problem with the followin advice that Fish (2009d) give to teachers:

> If students infected with the facile egalitarianism of soft multiculturalism declare, "I have a right to my own language," reply, "Yes, you do, and I am not here to take that language from you; I'm here to teach you another one." (Who could object to learning a second language?) And then get on with it.

Fish got it wrong here. When we're talkin bout so-called varieties of English or dialect in relation to standard English, we're not dealin with two different languages; we're dealing with a common language. So in fact he *can't* teach "another one." When we/he teach English, we teachin it with all its beautiful dialects that comprise it. And Fish should know better, seeing how often he himself has used the full range of English, even emphasizing its dialects to good effect (Fish 2002).

In addition, besides encouraging teachers to be snide and patronizing, Fish flat out confusin' (I would say he lyin, but Momma say be nice). You can't start off sayin', "Disabuse yo self of the notion that students have a right to they dialect" and then say to tell students, "Y'all do have a right." That be hypocritical. And ain't it disingenuous of Fish to ask, "Who could object to learning a second language?" when his whole argument is to convince writin teachers to require students, the "multiculturals," to do the impossible, to leave they dialect behind and learn another one, the one he promote? If he meant everybody should be thrilled to learn another dialect, then wouldn't everybody be learnin everybody's dialect? Wouldn't we all become multidialectal and pluralingual? And when it comes to speakin and writing English, ain't we all usin a common language anyway, even if somebody over there speak it with this accent, and someone over here use it in that dialect? And that's my exact argument, that we all usin a common language. And to the extent that folks use of that language differ, then we all should learn everybody's dialect, at least as many as we can, and be open to the mix of them in oral and written communication (Young 2007).

Of course, the argument to teach and learn the dialects of English and to understand how to exploit them in effective communication don't come originally from me. I borrow the idea from the 1974 Resolution on the Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTTOL), specifically where it say, "Resolved, that NCTE [National Council of Teachers of English] promote classroom practices to expose students to the variety of dialects that comprise our multiregional, multiethnic, and multicultural society, so that they too will understand the nature of American English" (Conference 1974). This resolution point up for me an important fact—that don't nobody all the time, nor do they in the same way, subscribe to or follow standard modes of expression. Everybody mix the dialect they learn at home with whateva other dialect or language they learn afterwards. That's how we understand accents; that's how we can hear that some people are from a Polish, Spanish, or French language background when they speak English. It's how we can tell somebody is from the South, from Appalachia, from Chicago, or any other regional background. We hear that background in they speech, and it's often expressed in they writin' too. It's natural (Coleman 1997).

But some would say, "You can't mix no dialects at work; how would peeps who ain't from yo hood understand you?" They say, "You just gotta use standard English." Yet, even folks with good jobs in the corporate world don't follow no standard English. Check this out: reporter Sam Dillon write about a survey conducted by the National Commission on Writing in 2004. He say "that a third of employees in the nation's blue-chip companies wrote poorly and that businesses were spending as much as $3.1 billion annually on remedial training."

Now, some peeps gone say this illustrate how Fish be right, why we need to be teachin mo standard grammar and stuff. If you look at it from Fish view, yeah it mean that. But if you look at it from my view, it most certainly don't mean that. Instead, it mean that the one set of rules that people be applyin to everybody's dialects leads to stereotypes that writers need "remedial training" or that speakers of dialects are dumb. Speakin and writin prescriptively, as Fish want, force people into patterns of language that ain't natural or easy to understand.

This unnatural language use is what my girl, linguist Elaine Richardson (2004), call "stereotype threat." This term applies when someone is forced in the face of racial perceptions to keep the most expressive parts of her language out of formal communication, whether writing or speakin, like when say, a black person is asked to keep her dialect out

of a school paper. Richardson says this causes "stereotype threat" and her language become neither expressive standard or expressive Black English but a stilted middle-brow discourse. A whole lot of folk could be writin and speakin real, real smart if Fish and others stop using one prescriptive, foot-long ruler to measure the language of peeps who use a yardstick when they communicate.

Instead of prescribing how folks should write or speak, I say we teach language descriptively. This mean we should, for instance, teach how language functions within and from various cultural perspectives. And we should teach what it take to understand, listen, and write in multiple dialects simultaneously. We should teach how to let dialects comingle, sho nuff blend together, like blending the dialect Fish speak and the black vernacular that, say, a lot—certainly not all—black people speak.

See, people be mo pluralingual than we wanna recognize, as I will illustrate later. What I want to argue right now is that we need to enlarge our perspective about what good writin is and how good writin can look at work, at home, and at school. The narrow, prescriptive lens be messin writers and readers all the way up, cuz we all been taught to respect the dominant way to write, even if we don't, can't, or won't ever write that one way ourselves. That be hegemony. Internalized oppression. Linguistic self-hate. But we should be mo flexible, mo acceptin of language diversity, language expansion, and creative language usage from ourselves and from others both in formal and informal settings. To better explain, take, for example, that time when Fish put former Harvard President Lawrence Summers on blast in 2002. What had happened was, Summers called Professor Cornell West to his office and went straight off on the brotha for writin books everybody could read, for writin clear, accessible scholarship. Summers apologized after the media got involved, sayin, "I regret any faculty member leaving a conversation feeling they are not respected." Fish (2002) say, "In a short, 13-word sentence, the chief academic officer of the highest ranked university in the entire country, and therefore in the entire world, has committed three grammatical crimes, failure to mark the possessive case, failure to specify the temporal and the causal relationships between the conversations he has and the effects he regrets, and failure to observe noun-pronoun agreement."

But get this: Fish's correction of Summers is suspect, according to a grammar evaluation by linguist Kyoko Inoue (2002). Inoue say, "What the writer/speaker says (or means) often controls the form of the

sentence." She say Summers's intent make his sentence clear and under-standable, not rules from the grammar police-man.

But Fish gone ignore Inoue again, as he did back then in 2002, when Fish used Summers's example to try to force writin teachers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I was a graduate student, to teach more standard English grammar. Inoue gave Fish her analysis, but it didn't change his mandate. Fish believe the examples of Summers and the corporate workers show reasons why we should teach mo standard grammar. He reasons that if corporations and high-ranked universities got folks who can't write right, we gotta do a better job of teachin the rules. And since most of those workers are white, he gone also say he not supportin prejudice. He don't like it when whites don't speak right, just the same as he don't like it when Latinos not speakin right. Race ain't got nothin to do with it, he gone add. It be only about speakin and writin standard English. He say his words apply to everybody, not just to those who be wantin "a right to they own language."

But here what Fish don't get: standard language ideology insist that minority people will never become an Ivy League English department chair or president of Harvard University if they don't perfect they mas-tery of standard English. At the same time the ideology instruct that white men will gain such positions, even with a questionable handle of standard grammar and rhetoric (Didn't George W. get to be president for eight years, while all kinds of folks characterized his grammar as bad and his rhetorical style as poor? And hasn't former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin made up words like *refudiate* for repudiate and *lamestream media* to poke fun at mainstream media? Just askin.) Fish respond that this the way our country is so let's accept it. I say: "No way, brutha!"

Also, Fish use his experience teachin grad students as evidence for his claim. He say his grad students couldn't write a decent sentence. Well, they wrote good enuf in they essays to get into grad school, didn't they? And most grad schools admit students by committee, which mean some of his colleagues thought the grad students could write right. But it sound like Fish sayin he the only one who could judge what good writin is—not his colleagues. What is Fish really on, what is he really tryin to prove?

I, for one, sho ain't convinced by Fish. I don't believe the writin prob-lems of graduate students is due to lack of standard English; they prob-lems likely come from learnin new theories and new ways of thinkin and tryin to express that clearly, which take some time. New ideas don't always come out clear and understandable the first few times they expressed.

And, further, grad students also be tryin too hard to sound smart, to write like the folk they be readin, instead of usin they own voices.

In my own experience teachin grad students, they also tend to try too hard to sound academic, often using unnecessary convoluted language, using a big word where a lil one would do. Give them students some credit, Fish! What you should tell them is there be more than one academic way to write right. Didn't yo friend Professor Gerald Graff (2003) already school us on that in his book *Clueless in Academe*? He say he tell his students to be bilingual. He say, say it in the technical way, the college-speak way, but also say it the way you say it to yo momma—in the same paper. Now that's some advice!

But Fish must don't like this advice. He say we should have students to translate the way they talk into standard English on a chalk board. He say, leave the way they say it to momma on the board and put the standard way on paper. This is wrongly called code switching. And many teachers be doin' this with they students. And it don't work. Why? Cuz most teachers of code switching don't know what they be talkin bout. Code switching, from a linguistic perspective, is not translatin one dialect into another one. It's blendin two or mo dialects, languages, or rhetorical forms into one sentence, one utterance, one paper. And not all the time is this blendin intentional, sometime it unintentional. And that's the point. The two dialects sometime naturally, sometime intentionally, coexist! This dialects coexisting in one is code switching from a linguistic perspective: two languages and speech act (Auer 1988).

But since so many teachers be jackin up code switching with they "speak this way at school and a different way at home," we need a new term. I call it CODE MESHING! Code meshing is the new code switching; it's multidialectalism and pluralingualism in one speech act, in one paper.

Let me drop some code meshing knowledge on y'all. Code meshing what we all do wheneva we communicate—writin, speakin, whateva. Code meshing blend dialects, international languages, local idioms, chat-room lingo, and the rhetorical styles of various ethnic and cultural groups in both formal and informal speech acts. This mode of communication be just as frequently used by politicians and professors as it be by journalists and advertisers. It be used by writers of color to compose full-length books; and it's sometimes added intentionally to standard English to make the point that there ain't just one way, sho nuff more than one way, to communicate formally.

Code meshing also be used to add flavor and style, like journalist Tomas Palermo (2007) do in the excerpt below from his interview with Jamal Cooks, professor of education. In his online article "Rappin' about Literacy Activism," Palermo write:

> Teachers frequently encounter him on panels with titles like "The Expanding Canon: Teaching Multicultural Literature In High School." But the dude is also hella down to earth. He was in some pretty successful "true-school" era hip-hop recording groups. . . . Meet the man who made it his passion to change the public education game, one class at a time.

With vernacular insertions such as "but the dude is also hella down to earth" (not to mention beginning a sentence with the conjunction "but") and adding the colloquial "game" to "public education," the article, otherwise composed in monodialect standard English, shift into a code meshed text.

Here some mo examples:

1. Iowa Republican Senator Chuck Grassley sent two tweets to President Obama in June 2009. His messages blend together common txtng abbrvs., standard English grammar, and a African American rhetorical technique:

    > First Tweet: "Pres Obama you got nerve while u sightseeing in Paris to tell us 'time to deliver' on health care. We still on skedul/even workin WKEND."
    >
    > Second Tweet: "Pres Obama while u sightseeing in Paris u said 'time to delivr on healthcare' When you are a 'hammer' u think everything is NAIL I'm no NAIL." (Werner 2009)

2. Professor Kermit Campbell (2005) uses multiple dialects to compose *Gettin' Our Groove On*, a study of college writing instruction. In it he say:

    > Middle class aspirations and an academic career have rubbed off on me, fo sho, but all hell or Texas gotta freeze over befo you see me copping out on a genuine respect and love for my native tongue. . . . That's from the heart, you know. But I don't expect a lot of folks to feel me. (3)

3. Chris Ann Cleland, a real estate agent from Virginia, express disappointment about President Obama's economic plan in an interview with the *Washington Post*:

    > "Nothing's changed for the common guy," she said. "I feel like I've been punked." (Rich 2009)

4. Referencing Cleland's remark, the title of *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich's (2009) Op-Ed article asks, "Is Obama Punking Us?" Rich writes in the last paragraph of his article:

> The larger fear is that Obama might be just another corporatist, punking voters much as the Republicans do when they claim to be all for the common guy.

The contraction "nothing's," the colloquial phrase "common guy," and the vernacular expression "punked," are neither unusual nor sensational. Yet, when these examples get compared to the advice teachers give about code switching, you get a glaring contradiction.

Students be told that vernacular language should be reserved for the playground with friends or at a picnic with neighbors, and that standard English be used by professionals at work, in academic writing, and when communicating with important officials. However, the colloquial language of two white, middle-aged professionals (Cleland and Rich), which appears in two of our nation's most highly regarded newspapers, prove this ain't so, at least not no mo and prolly never was. The BIG divide between vernacular and standard, formal and informal, be eroding, if it ain't already faded. And for many, it's a good thing. I know it sho be for me.

The Internet, among other mass media, as well as the language habits of America's ever-growing diverse ethnic populations, be affecting how everybody talk and write now, too. A term like *punked*, which come from black culture to describe someone getting tricked, teased, or humiliated, used to be taboo in formal communication as was black people wearin braided hair at work in the 1980s. The professional world has become more tolerant of black hair styles. And that same world not only toleratin but incorporatin, and appropriatin, black language styles—as they do black hairstyles.

Actor Ashton Kutcher popularized the term *punked* with his hit TV show of the same title. That's probably how the word seeped into the parlance of suburban professionals ("I feel punked"; "Obama . . . punking voters"), although it still retains it colloquial essence.

Fish may reply, "But these examples be from TV and journalism; those expressions won't fly in academic or scholarly writing." But did you read Campbell's book, Fish? What about Geneva Smitherman's (1997) *Talkin and Testifyin*? Is you readin this essay? Campbell (2005) blends the grammars and rhetorical styles of both Black English and

so-called standard English, along with the discourse of Rap and Hip Hop. He also blend in oral speech patterns (with the phonological representation of words like *fo sho* and *befo*). And his book is published by an academic press and marketed to teachers of English. Campbell just one of so many books by academics—professors of language and writin studies, no less—who code mesh.

Still, Fish may say, "Yeah, but look, they paid their dues. Those professors knew the standard rules of writin before they broke them." To this kind of objection, Victor Villanueva (2006), a Puerto Rican scholar of American studies, as well as of language and literacy, point to "writers of color who have been using the blended form . . . from the get-go" (351). Villanueva makes this observation in a review of Candace Spigelman's book *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse.* In it he take exception with Spigelman's notion that academics pay they dues by writin in formal traditional academic prose that excludes narrative first, and only when they done that, they turn to using stories in writin they research. But Villanueva point out that many academics of color find they first academic voice in narrative modes that come from the particular rhetorics of they cultural heritages. In other words, many writers from minority backgrounds don't play academic games (do it this way first, then you can use story). As Villanueva put it, including himself among those who use the narrative voice first, "The blended form is our dues" (351). They don't have to learn the rules to write right first; the blended form or code meshing is writin right.

This brings us back to Senator Grassley's tweets. It's obvious he learned some cool techno shorthand (e.g., "WKEND" and "delivr"). He also use both the long spelling of "you" and the abbrv. "u" in the same line. "We still on skedul" is a complete sentence; the backslash ("/") that follow it function like a semicolon to connect the emphatic fragment to the previous thought. And the caps in "WKEND" and "NAIL" pump up the words with emphasis, which alleviate the need for formal exclamation marks.

Grassley's message be a form of loud-talking—a Black English device where a speaker indirectly insult an authority figure. The authority figure is meant to overhear the conversation (thus loud-talking) so that the insult can be defended as unintentional. Grassley sent the message over his Twitter social network but he address Obama. He wanna point out what seem like a contradiction: If healthcare reform is so important to Obama, why is he sightseeing in Paris?

Grassley didn't send no standard English as a tweet. Twitter allow messages with 140 characters. The standard English question—If healthcare reform is so important to Obama, why is he sightseeing in Paris?—is eighty characters. Why didn't Grassley use this question or compose one like it? Cuz all kinds of folks know, understand, and like code meshing. So Grassley code meshed.

Code meshing be everywhere. It be used by all types of people. It allow writers and speakers to bridge multiple codes and modes of expression that Fish say disparate and unmixable. The metaphorical language tool box be expandin, baby.

Plus code meshing benefit everybody.

In the 1970s linguist William Labov noted that black students were ostracized because they spoke and wrote black dialect. Yet he noted that black speakers were more attuned to argumentation. Labov say that "in many ways [black] working-class speakers are more effective narrators, reasoners, and debaters than many middle-class [white] speakers, who temporize, qualify, and lose their argument in a mass of irrelevant detail" (Graff 2003, 37).

So when we teach the rhetorical devices of blacks we can add to the writing proficiency of whites and everybody else. Now, that's something, ain't it? Code meshing use the way people already speak and write and help them be more rhetorically effective. It do include teaching some punctuation rules, attention to meaning and word choice, and various kinds of sentence structures and some standard English. This mean too that good writin gone look and sound a bit different than some may now expect.

And another real, real, good result is we gone help reduce prejudice. Yes, ma'am. Now that's a goal to reach for.

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TWO

Toward an Antiracist Praxis for Writing Centers

4

RETHEORIZING WRITING CENTER WORK TO TRANSFORM A SYSTEM OF ADVANTAGE BASED ON RACE

Nancy M. Grimm

Fifteen years ago, the writing center I direct was staffed by knowledgeable, articulate, respectful, helpful, and friendly white people. Every February, we participated in NCTE's African American Read-In. That was the only day of the year when people of color were a significant presence in the writing center. We decided to sponsor new varieties of read-ins, namely a Native American Read-In, which attracted maybe five Native Americans and a lot more white Americans who had embraced new spiritual ideas loosely connected to native traditions, and a Latino Read-In, which attracted students in Spanish language classes who were required to attend. Why, we wondered, were there so few days in the year when even a few people of color entered the writing center? What could we do to make our space more welcoming so that we could extend our helpful services to a broader clientele? What did we need to know about them in order to communicate the value of our services?

Our willingness to ask those questions (misguided as they were), our efforts to find answers in recovered histories and new theoretical terrains, and the arrival of a good-humored and honest Latina graduate student, who was assigned to the writing center as part of her assistantship, led us toward some hard lessons. Chief among the lessons we learned, thanks to that graduate student, was the need to look more closely at ourselves instead of others, particularly to examine the extent to which *our* writing center was based on assumptions about language, literacy, and learning that privileged white mainstream students. Some of those assumptions included the following: that students of color needed our help; that they would find our services useful; that the university and thus the writing center were race-neutral and benign spaces; and that the literacy education offered by the university and the writing center contributed to leveling the playing field, allowing them to

become like us, thus (ahem) "better" and "equal." These assumptions about who needs what, about the unproblematic nature of academic discourse, about superiority, were not consciously and deliberately held by the individuals who worked in the writing center, but they certainly structured our practices just as they structured the education offered by the university.

Today the writing center I direct is conceptually and physically a different space; in recent years, the number of underrepresented people on the staff has ranged between thirty and forty percent, even on a campus with a predominantly white student body (more than ninety-five percent). The numbers of all students of all racial identities who use the center has grown exponentially; by the second week of every semester, the schedule is full and tutors are always busy working with walk-ins. Recently, in recognition of the ways diversity operates as a core value in this writing center, a major corporation donated a large sum for the renovation of the center, allowing it to double in size and gain far greater visibility on campus. In this chapter, I focus on some of the conceptual work that created a context for these changes to happen. In particular, I examine what is seemingly one of the least controversial statements a person can make about writing centers—that a writing center provides "individualized instruction" in academic writing. I argue that an ideology of individualism not only shapes writing center discourse but also *races* writing center practice, making it inhospitable to students who are not white. In doing so, writing centers are sites where what Victor Villanueva (2006) calls "the new racism," a covert form that "embeds racism within a set of other categories—language, religion, culture, civilizations" (16), plays itself out, making the writing center far less the helpful place we imagine it to be and far more just another part of the reproductive social structure designed to maintain white privilege. I examine the ways an ideology of individualism shapes the discourse and practice of writing centers, and I conclude the chapter by offering a different way to conceptualize the learning that happens in writing centers, a way that places less emphasis on individuals and more emphasis on making changes to the social structure, particularly the social structure of the writing center itself.

My rhetorical strategies in the previous paragraph set me up as an authority, which is one of the worst moves a person committed to undoing institutional racism can make. So let me back up again to my first paragraph to call attention to the fact that I am telling the back story of a major transformation in one writing center, a transformation made

possible by an examination of basic assumptions as well as a fortuitous set of circumstances. In this chapter, I focus primarily on one shift in understanding, the shift in how we conceptualized the learning that happens in the writing center. Additional changes in our understanding of language and literacy were also necessary, yet the shift in how we theorize the learning that happens in the writing center continues to create changes in the writing center and even the institution. My view of these changes and my perspective on what caused them are necessarily partial and open to debate. Readers can decide for themselves.

Equally problematic is the assumption that the audience for this chapter is white. A glance around a national and regional writing center conference may reinforce that assumption, yet that perception overlooks hybrid racial identities, it overlooks those whose differences are less visible but who know well how structural privilege works, and it overlooks the small but significant presence of people of color. The efforts of white academics to come to terms with racism in the academy call for a great deal of patience from these readers, particularly when we write as though they were not already present in our audience. In doing so, we enact the very ism we attempt to address. I ask for their continued patience with my attempts here, and I welcome their guidance.

A significant part of my argument in this chapter rests on the notion that writing centers are important resources for those who are newcomers to a discourse or a culture. Because I am focusing on the ways writing center practices may be complicit with racism, it may seem that I am suggesting that students of color are always newcomers to academic discourse. That is not true. However, it is sometimes true, just as it is also true that many white students are newcomers to academic discourse. My point is that when writers *are* newcomers to a discourse or a culture, a writing center should be a place where they can expect to find someone who knows how to make discourse and cultural expectations explicit. Too often writing centers are staffed by members of what Jacqueline Jones Royster (2003) calls the "well-insulated community that we call the 'mainstream'" (616), and that needs to change because the insulation makes it difficult for them to identify the expectations and assumptions they have always taken for granted.

THE CASE FOR RETHEORIZING WRITING CENTER WORK

In my earlier work, I have argued that the one-student-at-a-time nature of writing center practice provides opportunities to understand how

privileging mechanisms work and to use these understandings to revise composition pedagogy. Unfortunately there are theoretical and practical blocks to that revision potential. Villanueva (2006) cautions writing center professionals that when "we get caught up in the individual . . . we avoid the large" (3). Villanueva specifically challenges the field of writing center studies to examine covert forms of racism. In doing so, he observes, "The ultimate reduction . . . is individualism. If everything is reduced to individual will, work, and responsibility, there's no need to consider group exclusion" (6). I take Villanueva to mean that if we look only at individuals to understand why literacy education does not accomplish its inclusive democratic goals, we come to facile and judgmental conclusions, such as "some students just don't work hard enough," or "some students just aren't motivated enough," or "some students simply fail to take responsibility to use the resources made available to them."

Writing centers could complain that Villanueva (2006) is shifting the burden of a long-standing social ill to the shoulders of those with the least institutional power (ourselves and our tutors). We could continue business as usual, waiting for the day when the institution changes. But changes what? Recruitment strategies? Admissions policies? Curriculum? Hiring initiatives? What sort of changes would address the foundational assumptions that structure what we do? And how would that trickle down to writing centers? On the other hand, writing center scholars can rethink the *why* of writing center work, in other words, the ways writing center work is theorized. In particular, we can examine the extent to which our theoretical discourse focuses on individuals rather than on the rapidly changing social contexts that create communication challenges, and then we find alternative ways to theorize.

Some may think that making a case for retheorizing writing centers is an ineffectual way to address a serious social problem like racism. I disagree. Theories, especially tacit inherited theories, guide our decisions, support our assumptions, and inform our judgments. These tacit theories tell us what's "normal" or what's "right"; thus they have real consequences for people who are subject to our decisions, assumptions, and judgments. If we want to avoid complicity with racism and other forms of exclusion, then those tacit theories about language, literacy, and learning need to be made explicit and open to revision. James Gee (1996) makes this same argument. In fact, he argues "it is a moral obligation to render one's tacit theories overt when they have potential to hurt people" (x).

"Hurt people?" Most would claim that writing centers are about "helping" people. In fact, many tutorials start with this question: "How can I help you today?" This propensity to describe writing center work as "helping" neutralizes the hierarchy and power of our positions within a system of advantage/disadvantage based on race. Within this system, those of us who are white and/or middle class (no matter how well-intentioned and helpful) automatically carry privilege. As Peggy McIntosh (2004) and other race theorists observe, whites are so accustomed to this privilege that even with expressed commitment to social justice, it takes a lifetime to unlearn it. If we narrate our work only in terms of what good we do ("helping"), we cannot develop a practice that challenges a racial system of privilege because we will not have the theoretical context or capacity to imagine doing harm.

Without an examination of tacit theories and an articulation of explicit theories, writing center practice does have potential to hurt (or continue hurting) people, particularly if these theories support tutoring principles that sanction withholding information from students who may need it or if these theories suggest one-size-fits-all approaches. Because our primary articulated theories support individualized instruction, our focus on the individual hinders our ability to address racism that operates structurally. Race and educational theorist Beverly Tatum (1992) defines racism as "a system of advantage based on race" (323). Writing centers operate within those systems, thus in spite of the good intentions of individual writing center workers, we operate with structures of privilege (i.e., historically racist institutions) and often the principles and practices we most take for granted support these structures of privilege, thereby placing responsibility for change on the shoulders of the individuals who use writing centers, individuals who are often in the least powerful social position. With our focus deflected in this way, writing centers can evade the responsibility to examine and challenge privileging mechanisms, including the discourse that shapes business as usual within writing centers.

Some readers may be concerned that I am devaluing the hard work individuals have done to master academic discourse, particularly the work of those of nondominant racial identities. I do not intend to diminish that work but rather to advocate for transformations in the structure so the work of individuals can be more purposeful, more focused, and more satisfying rather than a frustrating process of trying to identify tacit expectations and negotiate institutional hoops, all the

while encountering reminders that this place wasn't designed with you in mind.

Other readers may be wondering if I'm simply engaging in what Philip Gardner and William Ramsey (2005) call "contrarian" rhetoric. In a *Writing Center Journal* article, Gardner and Ramsey argue that writing center theorizing has reveled too much in counter-hegemonic, antagonistic struggle and oppositional values rather than providing "effective language for sitting down with deans, vice-presidents, or boards of trustees" and describing our work in ways that understandably convey our contribution to the institutional mission (26). What we need instead, they say, is "a theoretical perspective that more productively centers us in the university even as we offer space for difference" (26). While I do not agree with all the specifics of Gardner and Ramsey's analysis, I am offering what they ask for: an explanation of "what [we] do and why [we] do it" (37). The ideas I advocate in this essay are ones that inform the way I direct a writing center at what many would call a conservative public university. The theoretical formulations I advocate in this essay exploit the radical potential of writing center work and suggest ways to address systemic privileging mechanisms. These changes are not anti-institutional but rather supportive of diversity and learning and critical of mechanisms that interfere with diversity and learning. Today, regardless of a university's reputation as conservative or progressive, learning to learn and communicate in diverse global environments is a primary educational concern. Global environments are linguistically, culturally, and *racially* complex. Thus a writing center's willingness to revise practices that privilege white students can be represented as timely interventions in the status quo rather than simply counter-hegemonic discourse.

It is encouraging that writing center scholars have already engaged in efforts to challenge racism as well as other isms (sexism, heterosexism, classism, monolingualism, ethnocentrism, and so forth). Recently, for example, Frankie Condon (2007, 20) responded to Villanueva's challenge with a comprehensive set of suggestions "to take up locally" in order to begin the work of antiracism, suggestions that include examining mission statements, resources, staffing, definitions of good writing, and more. As important as these suggestions (and others like them) are, my claim is that they will be insufficient to the task of challenging white racial privilege if writing center work stays rooted in theories of learning that take the individual as the starting point. Most familiar models of learning are psychological models, thus most of them

focus on the individual (and his or her will, work ethic, learning style, background knowledge, developmental stage, and so forth) rather than the social context that shapes expectations and operates on longstanding assumptions. Even the pedagogical models we label social construction, such as Kenneth Bruffee's early theorization of peer tutoring, still give primacy to the individual. In Bruffee's theorization of peer tutoring, peers are employed to foster individual learning. Individual performance still remains the primary site for evaluation and/or remediation. This focus on the individual is not particularly surprising given the familiar American valorization of individual rights, individual achievements, and individual independence. A truly social model of learning should alter our understanding of why we do the work we do; it should change the language we use to describe our work; it should shift the focus of what we aim to change away from individual students and toward the social structure.

THE IDEOLOGY OF INDIVIDUALISM IN WRITING CENTER DISCOURSE

To illustrate how the ideology of individualism operates in writing center theorizing, particularly in tacit ways, I will examine some ubiquitous writing center mottos that "carry" our theories. These include the following:

1. A good tutor makes the student do all the work.

2. The ultimate aim of a tutorial is an independent writer.

3. Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing.

My choice of these particular three is arbitrary; all writing center mottos are linked to one another because that is how ideology works. These mottos may have originally appeared in an early piece of writing center scholarship, such as Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" (1984) or Jeff Brooks's "Minimalist Tutoring" (1991), yet as a field we invoke them without attribution in workshops and presentations and in tutor education materials and publicity materials. They have become our common sense, and they illustrate our familiar, unexamined, and sedimented tacit theories about "individual will, work, and responsibility" (Villanueva 2006, 6); they carry the ideology of writing center work.

I use the term *ideology* as a way to call attention to a system of intertwined ideas, beliefs, and values designed to maintain the status quo. As

Antonio Gramsci (1971) explains, a particular ideology works by manu-facturing consent, particularly unconscious consent. Ideologies become naturalized through discourses that suggest the obvious ways that "nor-mal" people are supposed to think, write, act, speak, and believe. In the field of literacy education, both in classrooms and in writing centers, these ideological discourses perform what Brian Street (1995) calls "a sleight of hand" whereby the literacy practices of the dominant (and also white) group are taught as the preferred practices, yet at the same time they are not called white practices but are instead represented as neutral. According to Street, the dominant literacy is represented in unambiguous terms in order to privilege dominant interpretations and maintain hegemony, thus this model "embed[s] pupils deeply in the ideology and social control of the teacher's social class and deliberately prevent[s] them from arriving at a detached and critical appraisal of their real situation" (79). Street proposes an alternative model of liter-acy. His ideological model of literacy does not deny the power and privi-lege of the dominant literacy but explicitly calls attention to the values and belief systems attached to it. It is this ideological model of literacy that undergirds the argument I am making here as well as the practices of the writing center I direct.

The need to examine the ideology embedded in familiar writing center mottos is underscored by an understanding of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994) racial formation theory. According to Omi and Winant, racial projects link structure and representation. In other words, the way we *represent* what we do in writing centers, particularly at the level of "common sense," is a way of linking with the larger *social structure*. Omi and Winant explain the workings of racial formation proj-ects with reference to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. They write, "It is through its production and its adherence to this 'common sense,' this ideology (in the broadest sense of the term), that a society gives its con-sent to the way in which it is ruled" (67).

In his *Writing Center Journal* essay, Villanueva (2006) illustrates how common tropes function to disguise the ideology of racism; in this sec-tion, I illustrate how common writing center mottos function to disguise systems of privilege, thus failing to challenge the links between the ide-ologies of individualism and racism. Although I focus here on racial privileging, these mottos can serve other forms of privileging, including class, gender, and sexual orientation. These mottos signal characteristic positions and also function as formulaic protections. As mottos, they

support an ideology of individualism complicit with racism, particularly when they function as common sense. Thus it doesn't matter whether strongly prejudiced or generous-hearted people work in writing centers, the unchallenged or common-sense mottos that guide writing center practice allow structural forms of racism to continue.

Motto 1: A Good Tutor Makes the Student Do All the Work

All mottos serve strategic purposes, and this one serves several. Historically, it has reassured faculty that writing centers do not do students' work *for* them, an assurance made necessary by the dominant ideology in higher education—that students should learn "on their own." Learning "on one's own" is linked with the quintessential American bootstraps mythology, one that Villanueva (1993) critiques by reminding us that for some "the bootstraps break before the boots are on, that too many have no boots" (xiv). This motto also serves to remind tutors that their job is not to write students' papers for them, a puzzling reminder given the extensive screening and education process most peer tutors undergo, not to mention the scheduling realities of students' lives, where finding time to write one's own papers is challenging enough without also writing someone else's paper. I think this motto also serves (in disguise) to regularly remind peer tutors of their position in the academy, a not-quite-to-be-trusted position, a position that requires frequent reminders of what to do/not do. At the level of discourse, then, this motto protects the ideology of individualism that operates in higher education.

At the level of practice, this motto is accompanied by strict rules about who can hold a pen and who can't. In many writing centers, tutors are prohibited from writing on students' papers and encouraged to focus only on HOCs (higher order concerns). The LOCs (lower order concerns), which are often markers of identity, race, and class, are thus overlooked, creating a situation where individuals whose writing exhibits these markers are not able to make decisions about whether they want to comply with the dominant discourse. This motto about "making the student do all the work" often includes "no proofreading" policies, and it further disguises what as a profession we know "all the work" of writing to be, certainly far more than putting pen to paper. This work of writing includes focusing, forming, interpreting, revising, strategizing, predicting, not to mention understanding the cultural context in which one writes and all its attendant values, beliefs, assumptions, methods,

genres, citation practices, and more, none of which are learned "on one's own" but always in the company of others. If tutors continue to be advised to "make the student do all the work," then dominant discourses will remain impenetrable to students who are true outsiders, and structures of privilege will remain unchallenged.

This regular reminder (often internalized) to "make the student do all the work" does harm because it discourages tutors from offering useful information, even ideas, to a writer who is working to bridge the literacy he or she brings from home with the literacy expected in the academy. This motto presumes that all writers, regardless of neighborhood or country of origin, already have in their heads what they need, and the tutor's role is simply to phrase a series of questions that will lead the writer to discover the area of his or her brain where that information is located or to realize he or she has experience relevant to the writing problem at hand. This motto supports a form of Socratic questioning that is not in itself wrong but is certainly not productive when working with writers whose cultural, racial, or linguistic backgrounds are not congruent with the backgrounds they are imagined to have as college students. More often than not, this imagined background is "raced." The student may be from a non-European country, such as a country in Africa or Asia, or the student may be a domestic minority raised and schooled in areas where different ways of using language, making arguments, and forming relationships are practiced. For such students, the dominant forms of language and academic ways of making arguments are not already lodged in their heads, waiting for the gentle coaxing of a mainstream, probably white and well-intentioned tutor. Much more direct explanations on the part of the tutor are called for. Indirect approaches in these situations can be perceived as insulting, frustrating, and patronizing. For example, one tutoring practice embedded in the "make the student do all the work" philosophy is asking the students to read their papers aloud, thinking that they will "hear" and self-correct errors in idioms, syntax, and usage. Nothing could be further from the truth for students whose work in English carries markers of nondominant dialects, classes, languages, and cultures, and it is unlikely that they will return for more of this kind of "help." The practices this slogan condones are not race neutral but race specific. They ensure that white students will receive the assistance they need to improve their performance and that nonwhite students will encounter condescending assumptions and ineffectual practices.

If, on the other hand, writing centers were focused on challenging systems of privilege, then we would acknowledge that the bigger the gap between the real background and the imagined background of a particular student, the more "work" a *tutor* needs to do both to understand the perspective the student brings to the writing task and to clearly articulate the tacit values, beliefs, assumptions, methods, genres, and citation practices of the task at hand. To discourage such important work supports the system of privilege and the ideology of individualism, a system and an ideology that in many cases privilege white middle-class tutors and disenfranchise and frustrate writers of color who are trying to negotiate an unfamiliar system in which the rules are hidden. In spite of these challenges, many students of color have figured out "on their own" how to negotiate this system, yet unfortunately they are not often the students recruited to be peer tutors. They should be.

Motto 2: The Ultimate Goal of a Tutorial Is an Independent Writer

The motto "make the student do all the work" privileges the students who need only gentle reminders to understand the tasks at hand. Gee (1996) calls such students "false beginners" in contrast to students to whom academic discourse is most strange, the "true beginners." True beginners, students who are not already privileged, who need to use all the available resources to figure out what's expected of them, are sometimes labeled "dependent." This concern about dependency has given rise to another writing center slogan, "the ultimate goal of a tutorial is an independent writer." Given the celebration of independence in the United States (and I value mine as strongly as anyone), it is not surprising that concerns about "dependent students" are regularly taken up in writing center scholarship and conversations. What is disturbing is that the values that have emerged from writing center practice, values that include collaboration, listening, and dialogue, values that require partnerships and negotiated relationships rather than independence, find no positive expression in alternative mottos. Interdependence, for example, might be a positive counterpoint to independence rather than the negative connotation of dependence. If the ultimate goal were to foster interdependence, we would more likely be concerned about independent writers who avoid writing centers rather than about students who regularly seek the dialogue that writing centers provide.

This overvaluing of independence also interferes with a positive articulation of what writing tutors do. If writing center tutors are supposed

to "make the student do all the work," then what work do tutors do? Sadly, attempts to define what writing center tutors do frequently end in murky waters and unproductive binaries. For example, a chapter in *The Practical Tutor* (1987) provides a nuanced discussion of how tutors can frame responses and questions for drafts in which writers have made unsubstantiated or poorly reasoned claims. Yet the section concludes with, "We recommend questioning over evaluating, because questioning encourages writers to think dialogically and, ultimately, *independently*" (Meyer and Smith, 37; emphasis added). Interaction with an interlocutor certainly encourages dialogic thinking, and it is important for tutors to develop effective dialogic strategies, but how does dialogic thinking lead to independent thinking? Why is independent thinking rather than dialogic thinking the "ultimate" end goal of a tutorial? The murkiness of claims like this is rarely questioned because independent thinking is congruent with the bootstraps mythology, which insists on holding individuals accountable rather than holding a social entity accountable or valuing dialogic thinking.

My point is not to criticize Meyer and Smith's work but rather to illustrate how the ideology of individualism creates unquestioned assumptions in writing center work, assumptions that affect our practices and even prevent the recruitment of peer tutors who could challenge those practices. Most universities, indeed most social groups, would benefit from more dialogic rather than independent thinking, yet because the independence of the individual is sacrosanct, independent thinking is assumed to be the ultimate value. This ideology of individualism also produces unproductive binaries in writing center work, such as the unquestioned and perennial distinctions made between editing and tutoring. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie and Lerner 2004, 45), for example, provides a fine discussion of what it means to be a responsible tutor, reminding tutors that their work "will require an ethical code, a conscious system of behavior that is reasoned, thoughtful, and responsible" (45), yet that useful discussion is followed by a summary chart that makes clear distinctions between editing and tutoring, a chart that tacitly reinforces the "make the student do all the work" slogan and that disguises the important dialogic work that good *editors* do, highly important work that has contributed to our own scholarly publications.

Does this unquestioned allegiance to the value of independent thinking really do any harm to students, provided tutors are skillful at

establishing rapport and have a repertoire of questioning techniques they can use to guide the writers they work with? I doubt if it harms the students who are already privileged, but it does harm those who are not because there is no engagement with the possibility that a tutee might be enough of a novice in the academy that she does not recognize the tutor's "bait." Even more problematic is that a student's nonresponse could be interpreted as lack of interest or lack of motivation or even lack of work ethic or morality. Thus this allegiance reinforces a system of privilege, allowing racism to continue operating structurally and framing our interpretations of individuals.

Writers who understand the value of writing center dialogue and who use writing centers regularly are not positively represented in writing center discourse. Positive representations of such writers who are working their way into a dominant discourse would create a more welcoming context and suggest different tutoring strategies. Depicting regular writing center users as hard workers rather than people who "need help" would also create a more hospitable environment for students of color who may avoid writing centers because of what Claude Steele (1997) calls "stereotype threat," the concern that they will reinforce negative stereotypes of their race by making use of resources designed for people who "need help."

Motto 3: Our Aim Is to Make Better Writers, Not Better Writing

If the aim of writing centers were to challenge the privileging mechanisms in literacy education, then a writing center might advertise itself as a place that makes a "better institution." Instead we have yet another slogan that supports the ideology of individualism: "our aim is to make better writers, not better writing." Like the other mottos, this one serves more than one purpose. One important purpose is its function as a hold-harmless clause to protect writing centers against the red-faced professor who strides in exclaiming, "I can't believe this paper 'went through' the writing center!" Yet not surprisingly, it deflects attention from the writing center *and* the professor's misguided expectations and instead places it squarely on the *individual* student writer who uses a writing center. It also promotes a peculiar form of individualized instruction, one that proposes to change the identity of the writer, making him or her "better."

While this slogan functions to protect against expectations that learning to write within a given discourse can happen overnight, it still keeps

the focus on the individual rather than on the problematic systemic expectation, one that Paul Kei Matsuda (2006) identifies as endemic in composition—the notion that all college students speak a "privileged variety of English." This assumption about students leaves untroubled the notion that "'writing well' is the ability to produce English that is unmarked in the eyes of teachers who are custodians of privileged varieties of English" (640). Matsuda argues that teachers attribute language differences to an individual's inadequate preparation rather than examine their assumptions about the sociolinguistic reality of higher education. To protect their assumptions, teachers "send" students to the writing center. Elizabeth Boquet (1999) observes that even within the field of composition studies, "Writing centers remain one of the most powerful mechanisms whereby institutions can mark the bodies of students as foreign, alien to themselves" (465).

One way to challenge this notion of "better writers" is to redefine what makes a good writer in a twenty-first century context where multilingual writers outnumber monolingual writers and where mother-tongue speakers of English account for only a quarter of total users of English (Strevens 1992, 28). Writers who have developed proficiency in more than one dialect and more than one language and more than one culture are better equipped to communicate across linguistic and cultural differences. Suresh Canagarajah (2006) offers a positive articulation of those who have learned to write, read, and speak in multiple languages and dialects, an articulation that resonates with the qualities I have come to admire in good tutors. Canagarajah explains that those who communicate in more than one language environment learn to read social contexts to identify expectations, and they develop attitudinal resources, such as "patience, tolerance, and humility" that contribute to their ability to communicate across differences in culture, language, social circumstances and/or disciplinary expectations. Moreover, Canagarajah calls attention to the cooperative values and interpersonal strategies that multilingual speakers employ. He emphasizes that "speakers don't have to be experts in another variety of English in order to speak to other communities. They simply need the metalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and attitudinal preparedness to negotiate differences even as they use their own dialects" (593). At the writing center I direct, these metalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and attitudinal qualities are what we look for as we make hiring decisions, and not surprisingly, this has contributed to a far more diverse staff than we used to have when our primary

criteria were strong performance in English classes and recommendations from professors.

TOWARD A SOCIAL THEORY OF LEARNING

How, then, can the learning environment of a writing center be theorized to work against the ideology of individualism that holds harmless the institutional structures that privilege white monolingual middle-class users of English? How would a shift in learning theory also shift the focus, goal, and scope of writing center work in ways that address the structural work of racism? To offer an alternative to theories of learning that make the individual the analytic focus, I turn to a theory of learning developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), a theory that makes the community of practice rather than the individual its analytic focus. This social (as opposed to individual or psychological) theory of learning examines the extent to which communities of practice are (or are not) *learning* communities, that is, the extent to which communities offer learners opportunities to become active participants in the real work of the community and thus construct identities of participation in relation to that community.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) do not write with the intent of challenging racism, nor are their theoretical formulations regularly used in schools. Rather, social-learning research generally explores how people learn in nonschool-like social settings, how they interact with communities of practice, how they make meaning, and how they develop identities in relation to those interactions and meaning-making activities. Interestingly, many major corporations employ Wenger's theories to change workplace dynamics and support partnerships across cultural and linguistic differences. Motivated by the need to remain financially competitive, corporations use Wenger's formulations to design social structures so people can build relationships with one another, learn from one another, and share information over a sustained period of time, long enough to build a shared repertoire of experiences, stories, tools, and problem-solving strategies. Corporations now call themselves learning organizations because they recognize that knowledge is dynamic, social, interactive, tacit, as well as explicit, experiential, embodied, and participative. Educational institutions, on the other hand, still address teaching more than learning. They imagine learning as an individual process, as one that "has a beginning and an end," one that "is best separated from the rest of our activities," and one that "is the result of teaching" (3).

In contrast to the individual models of learning used in schools, a social theory of learning recognizes that "the tacit aspects of knowledge are often the most valuable" and that "sharing tacit knowledge requires interaction and informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching, and apprenticeship" (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002, 9). Within this social model of learning, writing centers can be understood as the social structures designed to facilitate deeper learning and fuller participation in the academic community rather than as places for students who "need help." Making the tacit explicit, promoting conversation and dialogue, sharing stories, coaching revision and editing, even losing track of whose idea is whose—all of this can be understood as the essential practices of writing center work.

Wenger (2006) has observed that to change the learning theory upon which schools are based would call for "a much deeper transformation," one that will "inevitably take longer." Nevertheless, because writing centers operate on the boundaries of traditional curricular and pedagogical structures of schooling, they provide an excellent starting place for this transformation. Because Wenger places his emphasis on what the community is or is not doing to support learning, his theory offers a powerful alternative to individualistic models of learning that contribute to making literacy education the site of social regulation and reproduction. When writing centers are open to rethinking their encounters with diversity in linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they have the potential to be deeply transformative sites, particularly if they are theorized in ways that locate communication "problems" in the nature of diverse, rapidly changing, and competing discourse and cultural systems rather than in individual writers. Wenger's theory offers the concepts to do that. Wenger (1998, 281) also aligns his learning theory with Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, or "the idea that structure is both input to and output of human actions, that actions have both intended and unintended consequences, and that actors know a great deal but not everything about the structural ramifications of their actions." Thus Wenger's social theory of learning addresses social structure rather than problematically attributing all learning successes and problems to "individual will, work, and responsibility" (Villanueva 2006, 6).

In the remainder of this chapter, I will illustrate the potential of Wenger's concepts for changing the ways race operates in writing center work. I find strong connections between Wenger's work and the vision of literacy education offered by the New London Group (2000), so I

will comment on those connections. I will also comment on the ways Wenger's work has influenced the practice of the writing center I direct. Race may seem to occasionally drop from focus in this next section, but that is because the changes we have made have created cognitive and social benefits for all of us who work in the writing center and who use the writing center. The New London Group reminds educators that we cannot remake the world, but that "we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures; a vision that is lived in schools" (19). Wenger's work has contributed to the restructuring of the writing center I direct in many ways, but primarily because he offers an alternative to cozy conceptions of communities, restricted notions of practice, and limiting understandings of identity. These alternatives have allowed us to change from the inside out, to articulate in different ways the *why* of what we do and to reshape the *what* to connect with the *why*.

IS THIS WRITING CENTER A LEARNING COMMUNITY?

The goal of Wenger's analytic framework is to examine the extent to which a particular community of practice does or does not encourage learning. For Wenger, a community of practice is not necessarily a *learning* community, and Wenger's understanding of community is not essentially benign. According to Wenger and his collaborators Richard McDermott and William Snyder (2002), the term *community* can "create a toxic coziness that closes people to exploration and external input" (144). A closed community becomes defensive and creates structures that lead to stratification, disconnectedness, dogmatism, narcissism, marginality, factionalism, and imperialism (140–50). They argue that the key to maintaining vital learning communities is keeping membership open, recruiting new members, and paying attention to the creativity that occurs at the boundaries, particularly to the nexus where communities overlap and members reconcile their memberships in multiple communities. If writing centers understand their work in this way, not as inducting individual students into a discourse community, but as places where the academic community actively recruits new members, welcomes the creativity of those with multimemberships, and studies the reconciliation work that occurs on the boundaries of communities, then their scope of practice and their function within the university changes in significant ways.

Within the center I direct, this rich understanding of learning community has encouraged us to define literacy much more broadly, to incorporate

a multiliteracies approach, one that incorporates all the ways that literacy (writing, reading, speaking, listening) is used to learn and to make meaning and one that recognizes multiple varieties of English and multiple literacies rather than a singular standard English. The New London Group (2000) argues that the role of literacy education in a global context is not to teach a standard or canonical English, but rather to teach students

> how to negotiate regional, ethnic, or class-based dialects; variations in register that occur according to social context; hybrid cross-cultural discourses; the code switching often to be found with a text among different languages, dialects, or registers; different visual and iconic meanings and variations in the gestural relationships among people, language, and material objects. (14)

This redefinition of literacy greatly expands the scope of writing center work, and it challenges us to think differently about who is qualified to do this teaching. In the writing center I direct, time is allocated not only for writers with drafts but also more broadly to include learners who face knowledge management challenges in large lecture courses and international students negotiating both linguistic and cultural challenges as they enter an American educational system. The dissertation research that happens in this writing center is often focused on the challenges of negotiating multimembership and the work of shuttling back and forth between communities. This research is based on two important revised assumptions: (1) that the academic community is interested in learning what invisible impediments create barriers for learners who are negotiating membership in a new community with different cultural values, and (2) that the academic community is open to revising diversity initiatives and teaching practices that are based on problematic assumptions about students. Thus the focus in this writing center is on articulating and changing structural assumptions rather than changing the identities of individual writers. The students who previously, in a different theoretical context, were perceived as lacking or needing help now help us understand what assumptions the profession needs to change. In turn, we tell faculty whose students make regular use of the writing center that we consider it a sign of good teaching that their students use the writing center because they have created stimulating, motivating, and flexible learning environments in which students want to be successful. This changes the impoverished relation of the writing center to faculty and makes the writing center a resource for faculty who want to identify assumptions that hinder learning and create courses that welcome linguistic and cultural diversity.

As I indicated earlier, and as the New London Group's vision of literacy education supports, the best guides for a learning community with a multiliteracies approach are those who have experience reading context and negotiating cultural, racial, and linguistic differences; thus, the writing center I direct recruits as writing coaches those individuals who have lived experience of this engagement. In using the word *recruit*, I don't mean any particular recruitment strategy or quota but rather the reputation of the center as a place where diversity is a core value, where all of us expect to learn and change as we interact with differences in perspectives and experiences.

Wenger's emphasis on keeping a community open, recruiting new members, and paying attention to the creativity that occurs at the boundaries is much different from Bruffee's model of peer tutoring (2008), which was intended to inculcate students into a particular kind of conversation (singular) "from which a particular kind of thinking originates" (209). For Bruffee, the goal of peer tutoring was to encourage students to think more like "us" (the academic community, a place not known for its racial diversity). Bruffee was interested in the "social justification of belief" rather than the negotiation of differing beliefs. His definition of community was "a group of people who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions" (211). Thus peer tutoring was employed to induct students into a group of like-minded people. There was no discussion of what to do when paradigms, values, and assumptions conflicted. Creating knowledge involved "canceling each other's biases and presuppositions" (214) to achieve "normal discourse." Bruffee recommended that peer tutoring be thought of as "resocialization" (216) and that peer tutor educators "should contrive to ensure that that conversation is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to write" (210). This conception of peer tutoring and literacy education is radically different from Wenger's model of learning and social models of literacy. Its emphasis was to change students rather than change communities of practice. It located problems in students rather than in competing contexts and different ways of making meaning.

A RICHER NOTION OF PRACTICE

Wenger (1998) also offers a richer understanding of practice that enlarges restricted understandings of writing center practice endorsed

by the unfortunate mottos. For Wenger, practice is the essential meaning-making activity of a domain. The concept of practice includes

> [the] historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. [Practice also includes] the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit. . . . Importantly practice also includes all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views.

Practice, in Wenger's account, does not fall on one side of traditional dichotomies that "divide acting from knowing, manual from mental, concrete from abstract" (47). Even the production of theory is a practice. Thus, Wenger's conceptions expand the scope of writing center practice far beyond the limits the mottos impose. Rather than focus on "individuals who need our help," the writing center is focused on extending membership, which requires analyzing and articulating implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, and so forth. This blurs the distinction between HOCs and LOCs, between editing and proofreading and tutoring. To function well, the practice must include plentiful opportunities for the engagement of all members rather than heavy reliance on reified rules, policies, and procedures.

In the writing center I direct, this understanding of practice means fully incorporating undergraduate writing coaches into the decision making about coach education, about ways we represent and promote the center, about effective approaches to problematic situations. Thus students of all racial identities are involved in negotiating and establishing and revising practice. Although coach education still focuses on approaches to deep revision, it also includes the "grammar breaks" run as commercial breaks in which experienced coaches teach mini lessons on the use of semicolons or the differences in documentation styles, a change which no longer supports a distinction between HOCs and LOCs but instead provides coaches with all levels of information to share with students when they need it.

In the design of the practice and in the look of the place, the writing center is clearly not an institutional program designed and run by white people, and this changes what students think they can expect from us in powerful ways. Their potential readers are clearly not all from the upper Midwest, thus students' assumptions may be open to challenge.

An African American writing coach from Detroit or a graduate student writing coach from China reads their writing in sensitive, intelligent, and responsible ways, yet clearly doesn't represent a familiar audience. This writing center practice is clearly not a replication of what they have come to expect in the institutions they are familiar with. It unsettles assumptions, changes relationships, and encourages a richer context for meaning making, all of which provide a more inclusive approach to literacy education, an approach that prepares students to communicate within a global context.

Although Wenger doesn't make the point himself, David Barton and Mary Hamilton (2005) have called attention to the link between Wenger's understanding of learning as engagement in practice and understandings of literacy as a social practice. Learning literacy requires access to the social elements of the discourse practice—its relationships, its institutional histories, its cultural values. All college students are entering new discourse communities, some more familiar than others depending on the students' primary discourses and cultures of origin. Thus a writing center is an essential site for learning the explicit and implicit understandings, histories, conventions, values, and meaning systems of the new discourses. We do not need mottos that restrict this learning. Instead, we need to focus on articulating tacit understandings, sharing perceptions, comparing assumptions. This expands the scope of writing center practice far beyond what a minimalist model recommends.

PROMOTING IDENTITIES OF PARTICIPATION

A third concept that Wenger's (1998) theory offers writing centers is a way of understanding identity in relation to learning that moves away from static categories related to race, culture, class, and sexual orientation, categories that often leave us stuck in essentialism. According to Wenger, learning always involves a change in identity in relation to a particular practice. Identity "includes our ability and our inability to shape the meanings that define a practice" (145). Wenger explains that learners develop identities of belonging to communities of practice to the extent that they can participate in that community's authentic practices, imagine a trajectory for themselves within that community, and align their efforts with the work of the community (173–88). Many social groups maintain practices that inhibit or discourage newcomers from participating in a practice, from imagining a trajectory for

themselves within that practice, and from aligning their work with the work of the community. They do this by creating rigid boundaries, standardized reifications, and narrow procedures. Wenger makes it clear that an identity of nonparticipation is "as much a source of identity as participation" (164). Wenger's explanation of *relations of participation* is a fruitful one for understanding the ways communities ostensibly committed to diversity still maintain practices that offer identities of nonparticipation or identities of marginality to newcomers. As individuals and communities, these relations of participation affect fundamental aspects of our lives, including

> 1) how we locate ourselves in a social landscape; 2) what we care about and what we neglect; 3) what we attempt to know and understand and what we choose to ignore; 4) with whom we seek connections and whom we avoid; 5) how we engage and direct our energies; and 6) how we attempt to steer our trajectories. (167–68)

Importantly, to Wenger, these are not simply personal choices we make as individuals but rather processes of structural formation within the community. Thus writing centers can be understood as places where these identities of participation or nonparticipation are being negotiated, and the policies and practices of a particular writing center can either encourage or discourage the process of developing an identity of belonging to an academic community.

If a community of practice wants to encourage learning, it must focus on ways to increase opportunities for participation, and in doing so, it must change itself. Wenger and his colleague Jean Lave (Lave and Wenger 1991) make this clear in their concept of legitimate peripheral participation. Lave and Wenger explain that in order for learning to happen, the essential practices of a particular domain must be opened up to newcomers and must offer these newcomers opportunities to participate in that practice. Rather than viewing newcomers as novices who need to be educated before they can participate, Wenger and Lave developed the concept of legitimate peripheral participation to analyze the extent to which the practice of a community is structured in ways that newcomers can learn from peripheral participant roles. They discovered that the least successful learning contexts were ones in which the work of experienced members was separated from the work of newcomers. The emphasis on the importance of developing an identity of participation has two important interdependent meanings:

(1) individuals need to be able to both engage in and contribute to the practices of the community, and (2) the community itself needs to welcome newcomers and revise its exclusionary practices in order to ensure new generations of members. Thus, a particular community must concern itself not only with creating access but also with transforming itself so learners can develop meaningful identities of participation.

At the university, our essential practices are teaching, research, administration, and service. These are the social activities we report on every year, the ones that determine our worth as faculty and staff. Undergraduates are rarely allowed to participate in these authentic practices of the institution. In composition classes, the writing assignments, including those situated in rich contexts created by teachers are, at best, facsimiles of the authentic work of the institution. Mary Lea (2005) writes, "It could be argued that most university teaching and learning practices are not about inclusion but tend to position undergraduate students as permanent novices, never attaining full membership of an academic community of practice" (193). Students who write for even the most creative assignments write for evaluation rather than to do the authentic work of the university. Lea notes how this concept of access to participation in practice "provides a lens to examine how meanings are contested within a community, to explore the ways in which certain ways of making meaning are privileged to the exclusion of others within the academy, and how some members of a community might, therefore, always find themselves excluded and at the margins" (188).

One place where undergraduates are able to participate in an authentic practice of the community is in a writing center where they contribute to the teaching mission of the institution. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation identifies a primary reason for the depth of learning that undergraduate writing tutors experience. The lasting impact of this participation is demonstrated by the Peer Tutor Alumni Project conducted by Brad Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail (2010). The growth in confidence and intellectual engagement we witness in undergraduate tutors every year is due to this participation in practice far more so, I would argue, than the sense that they are "helping" others. In fact, I would argue that they are not so much helping their less experienced peers as they are extending the domain of practice to their peers. Because peer tutors are involved in the authentic practice of the university, they are also opening that practice to their fellow students, particularly if we avoid restricting what they share,

encourage semester-long appointments so meaningful learning relationships can develop, and provide them with plenty of opportunities to share problems of practice with one another and shape the educational program of the writing center. Writing centers structured in this way offer good examples of a genuine community of practice.

More critical questions to ask, however, involve the extent to which students of color are represented on the writing center staff, the extent to which they shape the practice of the center, and the extent to which they are offered identities of participation. If their participation is controlled and regulated and proscribed by policies and procedures established long before they were hired, they function to represent a token commitment to diversity rather than as potential catalysts of change in institutional structure.

In the writing center I direct, a tutor still works with one student at a time, but there are no attempts to control or manage the powerful learning potential inherent in tutorial interaction with rules about who can or who can't hold the pencil or how many appointments a student is allowed to have. We still have occasional encounters with emotionally fragile students and red-faced professors, but we do not allow those unusual encounters to dictate principles of practice. We identify our role in the institution as that of identifying and articulating the tacit understandings that inform literacy teaching in order to challenge privileging mechanisms that interfere with learning and communicating in global contexts. We encourage rather than limit long-term working relationships with students, particularly with those students most affected by tacit privileging mechanisms. We encourage those same students to apply to be writing coaches. We expect the writing center to be a site of scholarship, and we are supported institutionally in ways that create opportunities for productive scholarship, particularly by having a tenured director, a staff to manage daily operations, and graduate as well as undergraduate coaches.

The extent to which a writing center influences the profession of teaching writing, the teaching practices on a local campus, and even the understandings of literacy that students take to the world of work can be far greater than we currently imagine it to be if writing centers move toward integrating Wenger's theory of learning. The concepts Wenger's work offers challenge us to begin by examining our own practices first, particularly the extent to which they adhere to a minimalist model of tutoring, underwrite identities of nonparticipation, and constrain our ability to study how discourses function at the peripheries to create or

disallow access. Writing centers provide space for the social interactions integral to all learning, yet our understandings of what we do in this space and why we do it are key to whether we imagine our work as examining practices of exclusion and challenging the covert operations of the new racism.

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5

BOLD
The Everyday Writing Center and the Production of New Knowledge in Antiracist Theory and Practice

Anne Ellen Geller, Frankie Condon, and Meg Carroll[1]

"We'll need to prioritize hiring consultants of color for fall," Anne says to Davia. All four new consultants who are about to begin work in the writing center are white.

"Do you really think about that?" she asks with her Jamaican lilt.

"Yes, I do," Anne says. "Don't you think it's important that we think about it?"

"I guess," she replies. She shrugs. "I don't know. My country is one color."

Davia tells Anne she goes home after this conversation, calls a friend in Austin, Texas, and asks him if he thinks she's the "affirmative action chick" who was hired into the writing center by a white director. She says she wonders, for the first time, if she was qualified for the job.

<div align="center">✥</div>

Alison wonders aloud to Frankie about a consultation she has just had with an African American student writer. She notes how rare it is for African American student writers to come to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) writing center at all and wonders why. Her consultation did not go well, she is sure. "What might I have done differently," she wonders aloud. Should she have been more explicit in naming her own view that academic English is white English? Marli, the writer with whom Alison worked, left unsatisfied, asserting that her writing is hopeless; she hates writing and she guesses she'll just have to start over. "I

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was too uncomfortable myself to say aloud what I was thinking," Alison concludes, "but I think Marli was thinking the same things I was." Alison talks her way through what she sees as the racial dynamics inherent in the assignment and its expectations for a particular form of English: NOT Black English, but white English. Alison says she felt shame as a teacher of writing and as a writing center consultant. And she feels shame still. She is sure she failed Marli; and she thinks she failed herself as well.

<div align="center">✥</div>

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Meg brings into her first-year writing class the widely circulated picture of an African American wading through the floodwaters towing a large plastic bag. The caption: "A young man walks through chest-deep water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans." The photo underneath is of a white couple in similar circumstances. The caption: "Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store." Some of her students acknowledge that racism might be an issue, but many more assert that it isn't. One changes the subject to talk about the morality of taking food in emergencies. Another insists that race probably isn't an issue, and in rather convoluted logic, writes, "Look at the source of the article. There might not be an unfriendly bias on one side, but a too friendly bias on the other. Also, it could just be a journalist looking to use different words in an article instead of repeating the same word." Another student focuses on the words instead of on race and says, "'Finding' seems a strange word to use, and I do not feel that word should be used, but maybe 'taking' should be used instead." The discomfort in the classroom of white faces is palpable.

<div align="center">✥</div>

The title of this chapter is taken from Victor Villanueva's (2006) call to writing center scholars to be bold in seeing race as an intrinsic force and racism as a condition intrinsic to teaching and learning practices associated with the acquisition of academic literacies, as well as to the institutions we make our professional homes. We were moved by that call and have both struggled and experienced great joy individually and collectively in our attempts to be responsive to it. We've been intrigued by the ways talking with tutors and reading what our tutors write about race and racism have helped us dig into the kinds of stories we've told above.

We have been thinking together about what it takes for white writing center directors to be bold enough to break the silence, to be able to respond to stories of racism within writing centers without rage, to be able to make reasoned decisions around moments charged with race, and to think carefully and reflectively about what actions would lead white writing center directors to be allies to writers and colleagues of all races. We have also thought a great deal about how to nurture a writing center where issues of race can be talked about openly. And we've noticed that one of the most significant obstacles to our own deep engagement with this work and the engagement of white tutors, in particular, with whom we work seems to be shame: the dread we feel of experiencing shame, of being shamed, and the shame we carry with us throughout our days, but suppress because we're not sure how to process or transform it. We know well the feeling of wanting to take back something we've said in conversations with one another or with tutors; we have felt shame because of something we've said or done. But we also know that rejecting the collective pressure to stay quiet around issues of race is the most significant responsibility of whites engaged in antiracism work. To choose such work is also, necessarily, to choose a discomfort that leads to reevaluation of the self as well as the social in and through which the self emerges.

In this chapter, we hope to narrate the ways our work with tutors has shaped our understanding of the institutional, administrative, and pedagogical implications of taking up race and working at antiracism in and through the writing center. We want to rethink the nature, the importance, and the value of white shame to this work. We want to offer models for engaging with tutors talking and writing about race and racism, even and especially through conditions of shame. And, finally, we want to explore what our tutors' engagement with these matters suggests to us in terms of new directions for research and the production of new knowledge about writing centers, race, and racism.

Stories are, we think, critical to the formation, framing, and reframing of writing center communities. Stories are also central to the conceptual and practical work of antiracism. As critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2000) note in their introduction to *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge,*

> Critical Race Theory's challenge to racial oppression and the status quo
> sometimes takes the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the

myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down. Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence. (xvii)

Stories, as Delgado and Stefancic point out, are one of the means by which critical race theorists and, we would note, antiracist activists, engage resistantly and transformatively in (re)constructing the social in service of racial justice. Part of the glue that holds the three of us together is telling and listening to one another's stories. Stories are a central means by which each of us finds words for complex, dynamic, troubling, and occasionally funny moments in our work as writing center scholars and directors. And stories continue to help as we seek to recognize, trouble, and transform what whiteness means in each of our lives. Stories work for us because, in both the telling and in the analysis that attends both constructing and listening, stories, thoughtfully told, enable us to connect lived experience of whiteness to the social, political, and historical conditions that (re)produce and enable that experience.

By engaging willingly and deliberatively in the de-centering of whiteness, we expose the depth and degree of our vulnerability to one another and our necessary interdependence on one another. The three of us have often needed one another, and other writing center colleagues, to help us think through issues of race, so that we may continue learning and reevaluating ourselves and our actions. We believe in the power of conceiving of writing centers as "communities of practice" where diverse groups of engaged participants negotiate meaning in a variety of ways by bringing together the diversity of their life experiences (Wenger 1998). These communities offer an opportunity to incorporate teachers' and students' actual lives into the learning milieu. But nurturing this kind of living classroom is not simple; it requires that all of us engage in the ongoing examination of our own racial construction, as well as the ways we construct others. In the case of white teachers and students, unless, as Maureen Reddy (2002) points out, "white authority is . . . constantly foregrounded and interrogated in the classroom, it sneaks back into silent, invisible prominence" (61). Reddy is referencing the power of her own authority as a white antiracist teacher, but she's also talking about how easy it is for students and for us to lapse into unconscious racism when white privilege is unexamined. It is in the living classroom of the writing center—one committed

to looking at the everyday manifestations of race and privilege—that we, directors and tutors, might begin to dialogue with, write back to, and write into critical race theory and whiteness studies from a writing center perspective.

We look not only to story and community, but also to theory to understand our experiences in and outside the writing center. Theory works by situating experience or phenomena within a historical context, within and against the known. And we have begun together to explore the ways our experiences and the experiences and writing of the tutors with whom we work can also contribute to the building of a body of race theory from within the writing center. The purpose of theory, we think, is not only to describe the world and our moves within it, but to change the world and the ways we know and move within it.

In their essay, "Creating Theory: Moving Tutors to the Center," Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch (2003) cite Peter Vandenburg to note that when we conceive of tutors as "listeners to writing center theory," they have "limited potential to engage in the discourse that governs their activities and few opportunities to construct themselves within it" (63–64). Dinitz and Kiedaisch agree with Vandenburg "that tutors must 'write their way out [of this] subjugated role.'" They urge their readers to "encourage . . . tutors to engage with writing center theory as a way to invite them to become part of the scholarly conversation about writing centers" (64). Dinitz and Kiedaisch write that "as the folks at the boundary of theory and practice, tutors are well-positioned to explore the connections between them and to tease out the subtleties, the complications, the assumptions, the omissions in our theory and our practice, and to see how one might shed light on the other" (75). Finally, Dinitz and Kiedaisch note that when tutors are encouraged and supported as writing center theorists, "interacting with theory [accomplishes] more than allowing them to become part of the conversation of writing center professionals" (74). The intellectual engagement and activity of theorizing, Dinitz and Kiedaisch suggest, enables tutors to create "their identities as tutors" (74).

This representation of the intimate relationship between theory and identity resonates well with our experiences encouraging and supporting our own tutors in deep engagement with the production of new theoretical knowledge around race. As tutors begin to think, write, and produce new knowledge in and through the boundary regions of theory and practice, not only do they begin to (re)create and transform their

own identities, but also the identity of the community of practice within and to which they speak and write. In no case does this seem more true to us than when tutors are theorizing race and race formation. As, for example, we've processed in our writing centers and with consultants the stories we told above, colleagues have been called to respond, to speak, to write back. In producing new knowledge, we are all called to account—and to urge, cajole, and support one another in that accounting—for the ways the stories others tell and the sense they make of them mirror our own stories, helping us to understand them and ourselves more fully.

✤

Writing centers are, we believe, fruitful places for both learning about how whiteness works in and through academic environments to maintain white hegemony and studying and practicing resistance to that hegemony. The most significant way white hegemony works in, over, and through all of us is by appearing to be nothing at all, by appearing to be politically and ideologically neutral, by appearing to be "natural," even commonsensical.[2] Within the context of this hegemony, some writing center stories (told in service of offering insights or truth claims unperturbed by the ambiguities and complexities of identity, generally, and race, in particular) can take on, we think, the quality of Roland Barthes's *studium.*

Barthes (1980) coins the term to describe the perspective or consciousness of the spectator in relation to the object being viewed when that object provokes little more than "polite interest." "The *studium,*" Barthes writes, "is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like/I don't like. The *studium* is of the order of *liking,* not *loving*; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds 'all right'" (27; italics in original). Stories, told in this way, are an exercise in containment and unfold with a kind of universal end or lesson in mind. They are to writing center readers what Hudson River School landscapes might be to one who has seen and been moved by Picasso's *Guernica.* For they lack, as Barthes would say, "that accident which pricks me (but also

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2.   For a more elaborated description of this phenomena as it pertains to writing centers, as well as a more detailed introduction to critical race theory as it pertains to writing center work, please see Frankie Condon's (2007) "Beyond the Known: Writing Centers and the Work of Anti-Racism."

bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). They lack the *punctum*, that which punctures or penetrates, wounds in some sense, the seemingly impenetrable membrane of the normal, the given, and the polite, the civil, the "rational." We don't intend to suggest here that we don't like the Hudson River painters or that we don't like writing center stories that affirm the manageability of the kinds of questions that might arise in the everyday life of a writing center. What we do mean is that the stories we learn the most from are the stories most difficult to narrate, precisely because they exceed the bounds of civility, of polite interest, because they prick both conscience and consciousness, because they make visible that which has been hidden from us or that which we have attempted to hide from ourselves and others.

Some of the stories we've told to each other involve attempting and failing, sometimes abysmally, to bring up or face the topic of race or racism in any number of contexts in our lives. We know how easy it is for white people to politely ignore the daily workings of racism, to pass over such moments in the service of "civility" or unawareness. But when we fail to acknowledge our implicated-ness as white people in situations where we are confronted with (or have even created) racial injustice, we reify the hegemonic systems that privilege whiteness. Sharing these stories with supportive allies is a first step; working from those stories, taking action, is the next. We think here of the difficulty in doing just that with our white colleagues. Les Back (2004) in "Ivory Towers? The Academy and Racism" describes the response that many of us have when we look at our own racism. That civility Barthes references is stripped away. Back writes:

> Even raising the issue of institutional racism tentatively produces responses like "how could you" or "how dare you make such accusations?" This reaction goes deeper than a response to being accused of something. What raises their [white faculty] blood pressure is that something is being taken away. It is the theft of all that is mannerly about liberalism, knowledge and educational progress. To accuse educators of racism is—in their minds—tantamount to taking their education away from them. And this is why it is so difficult to have a measured and open debate about racism in the academy. (4)

Few within the academy feel comfortable with the possibility that it might be (along with myriad other institutions and organizations) suffused with the logics of white supremacy and engaged in a series of racial projects that, in effect if not in intent, maintain the unstable equilibrium

of systemic racism.[3] To even suggest such a possibility is to implicate our-selves in the perpetuation of racism, to acknowledge our own guilt. But without implicating ourselves, it's difficult for any of us to begin reflect-ing on our roles in such a system. We've realized, through hard experi-ence if nothing else, that to even consider raising the matter of racism as a white person is inevitably to expose one's own limits, one's own opac-ity to one's self, and to recognize the ways and degrees to which racism is also in us and working through us. When, though, we have felt that *punctum* Barthes speaks of, that wound that breaks through our notion of the normal and the civil, we open the way for shame—our own and others'. It is at those moments, we argue, that we are inclined and act on the inclination to name, interrogate, or intervene in what we perceive to be racism at work.

At first blush, the production of shame seems so terribly antitheti-cal to the ways we have tended to conceive of the work of writing cen-ters. Others within academe, we tell ourselves, may feel no hesitation in shaming others, but not us: not writing center directors, tutors, scholars. Shame, we recognize, makes others and us, as Elspeth Probyn (2005) writes in her astonishing work, *Blush: Faces of Shame*, "feel small and undone" (2). Writing center work, we say, counters shame; our work as directors and tutors is to assist and support writers as they recognize and claim agency within the discourses of the academy and the workplace. And maybe our work is, in some sense, to assist writers in avoiding the possibility of being shamed when speaking and writing within those dis-courses—to avoid being caught out as it were. The three of us have cer-tainly thought of shame in this way, and, even in our own lives, sought to avoid it. But in our avoidance we have felt paralyzed precisely in those moments when we've most wanted to ask, "Hey, what was that thing that just happened . . . was that racism?"—those moments when we've most wanted, needed even, to MOVE, to ACT, to ENGAGE.

Elspeth Probyn's (2005) ideas about shame landed with us because of our shared, urgent sense that we needed individually and collectively to move past paralysis around moments that cause us shame, particu-larly around the antiracism work to which we are drawn and committed.

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3.   The term *unstable equilibrium* is used in critical race theory to refer to social systems marked by racial inequality and maintained in a dynamic, fluid rather than static, solid state, as it were (rather like maintaining a pot at a low boil). Readers may learn more about this term in Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994) book, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*.

Probyn reframes shame not as an exclusively destructive emotion or affect, but as a productive embodiment of our interest, our need for one another. Probyn notes that "we have to care about something or someone to feel ashamed when that care and connection—our interest—is not reciprocated" (13). She goes on to say that "shame illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others, and the knowledge that, as merely human, we will sometimes fail in our attempts to maintain those connections" (14). That is, for Probyn, shame is an integral aspect of human-ness. Shame is an inevitable by-product of our (human) need for one another, our desire to belong with and to one another, our interest in belonging. The term *interest*, Probyn suggests, signifies our need to know one another as well as our self-interest in being known to or recognizable as belonging to/ with one another.

But Probyn (2005) goes even further than the claim that our ability to feel shame is part of what makes us human. Shame, she suggests, can be and ought to be a central, productive force in our conception of what it might mean to be in ethical relation to one another for it "produces ways of being and ways of understanding what those should entail" (33). Probyn quotes Karen Sykes, who points out that Papua New Guineans "define their egalitarian spirit by accepting the gift of shame. The gift burdens the soul to act charitably towards others whose suffering might well become one's own" (33). The pairing of this particular conception of shame with the work of antiracism is intriguing to us in part because of the ways we believe resistance to taking up the work of antiracism in and through the writing center is so often caused by the notion that antiracism is always and inevitably confrontational and combative. Probyn's notion of shame suggests that whether we are conceiving of antiracism work in terms of how we interact with student writers or in terms of how we interrupt the normalized practices of our institutions, an ethics that is informed by shame would lead us to transformative and compassionate practice. She writes that "shame seems . . . to compel a future anteriority—in shame one feels viscerally the conditional sense of 'as if': a tense that highlights the implications of one's present actions. This is a good working definition of ethics: to be aware of what one's actions might set in motion" (34).

Probyn (2005) isn't suggesting that we seek out opportunities to feel shame, but that the shame we feel might have a more productive (healthy, even) effect than we have previously acknowledged. For

Probyn, shameful moments are potentially learning-ful moments; they are moments of opening, of possibility, at least as much as they are moments of foreclosure. If we ignore or deny or suppress those moments when we feel shame, Probyn suggests, we also ignore, deny, or suppress what might be learned in and through those moments.

For this reason, one of our goals, among others, is to work collaboratively and collectively with our tutors to create and sustain conditions in which we can learn in and through moments of shame. Another point is that we consider deeply how to tell our stories of learning in those moments. For, as Probyn (2005) notes,

> Too often accusations and denials of shame construct two subsets of history, that of the oppressor and the oppressed, in such a way that they cannot meet up. In other words, instead of focusing on the necessarily intertwined and intersubjective production of shame, an abstract use of the term . . . poses two solitudes, placed within the transhistorical and undifferentiated space of the shamed and the ashamed. If shame highlights what it means to be human, we need ways of using and relating to shame that make our history more humane: stories of individual and collective aspiration, fragility, and humiliation. (115)

The three of us have tried to nurture communities of practice where we and our tutors feel able to turn to these stories, to value them and interrogate them for what we might learn from them. Etienne Wenger (1998) reminds us that we all "keep negotiating our identities" (155) and accepting feelings of shame—our own, our tutors', and our colleagues'—feels integral to negotiating our identities. He also points out that in communities of practice, an "identity exists—not as an object in and of itself—but in the constant work of negotiating the self" in a social context, "in a lived experience of participation" (151). What our "narratives, categories, roles and positions come to mean as an experience of participation is something that must be worked out in practice" (151) and with one another.

With this in mind, we've tried to find ways to talk about, write about, and process our shame in the communities of practice that are our writing centers without feeling as if that work must be done privately, singularly, and secretly. Probyn (2005) has helped us explain why we value this open sharing of our stories of shame and invite them into our everyday interactions in the writing center and even into our more formalized staff education. "Shame illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others, and the knowledge that,

as merely human, we will sometimes fail in our attempts to maintain those connections" (14).

Striving to build connection and continually searching to find the possibilities that can grow from moments of shame is not easy—or comfortable. As Anne wrote about her conversations with Davia, she wondered, and Frankie and Meg asked her to wonder, why it was that she chose to bring up the issues around hiring a more diverse staff with Davia in particular. Anne hadn't thought about how Davia, as a person of color, might feel disoriented or be made uncomfortable when she, a white person, took notice of race and spoke so explicitly of race. But even with all these moments of doubt and shame, and because of the support of others in the communities of practice Anne shared—with Frankie and Meg and with her own writing consultants—she was able to ask Davia to read and respond to the conference talk that incorporated these narratives, and she was able to continue to have conversations with Davia in which the two of them reflected on these exchanges. In fact, years later, after reading over a draft of this chapter, Davia told Anne that conversations about race in the writing center helped her deal with the racism she was experiencing as a graduate student.

Alison, whose story we told at the beginning of this chapter, seems to have had the doppelganger experience, as it were, to Anne's. Her consultation with Marli led Alison to recognize and acknowledge her discomfort—her sense of shame—at naming systemic racism: at naming the degree to which discourses integrally linked to the maintenance and reproduction of white privilege are, themselves, unmarked and privileged within the academy. Like Anne, Alison reached out. Writing on the UNL Writing Center blog, she narrated her experience, her questioning of herself, her sense of failure. And, importantly, Alison began to situate her experience within the bodies of writing center and race formation theory. And she began, from this relational stance with regard to both her teachers and colleagues and to scholars in the field, to see her experience and the *noticings* (Alison's term) that emerge from it as productive of new collective, public knowledge. She still struggled with shame and with the complexity and ambiguity of what transpired during that consultation with Marli. But as she read her experience through the lenses of race formation theorists and writing center scholars like Harry Denny (2005), and as she began to produce and share new knowledge, she contributed to the possibility that student writers of color will be better served than they are now by writing centers in predominantly

white institutions and that white consultants may increasingly take up, as Alison has, their responsibility to educate themselves about race and racism rather than relying on student writers of color to do that work for them.

The three of us understand how uncomfortable both silence and talk about race can be, primarily because we are all so worried that what we say or don't say may be misunderstood, may be heard differently than we meant it, may be said in some way we hadn't intended to speak. But all of our moments of shame, our attempts at connection, may also be some of the most important moments of identity transformation we can experience in our communities of practice. We can feel bad, guilty even, that something we've said or done or not done or not said is "wrong" or will be taken "in the wrong way," but Probyn (2005) encourages us to see the important distinction between guilt and shame. Guilt is triggered in response to specific acts and can be smoothed away by an act of reparation. But shame is deeply related not only to how others think about us but also to how we think about ourselves. Shame, then, demands a "global [re]evaluation of the self" (45). Shame may be the *punctum* we talked about earlier, what Barthes (1980) describes as the "sting, speck, cut, little hole, . . . that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). We and our tutors need to be aware of these moments for they happen frequently in our personal lives as well as in the lives of our writing centers.

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It seems to us, though, that working with the possibility created by moments of shame in our writing centers would mean we would find ways to celebrate how difficult moments bring us into connection with one another and also bring us more deeply into reflecting on ourselves and our identities. But it is challenging for any one of us to embrace a moment of shame as we're in it, so we need to convince ourselves that any moment of shame is a moment that can be revisited, revised, rethought.

When we think that way, we find ourselves turning to the palinode as a strategy for thinking through conversations about race and racism that bring us shame. The palinode is a poem in which the poet retracts a statement made in a previous poem, and a palinode may also be a poem of revision (I wrote that I loved you, for example, but what I said didn't quite cover the enormity of what and how I feel . . . so let

me try again). Using the palinode we have the opportunity to acknowledge how we saw or experienced before and how we want to see and experience now. Here's another story from the Clark University Writing Center to explain.

At the 2006 CCCCs conference, Anne told a story about a first-year student who arrived at the Clark Writing Center with the draft of an essay for her expository writing class. The assignment asked her to explain when and how she became aware of race. Later on the day of this student's conference, Sandy, the white writing consultant who worked with her, arrived at Anne's open office door. "I had a difficult conference. Can we talk about it?" The student had begun to cry, Sandy said, and then she, too, began to cry. Perhaps, Sandy said, she cried because the student cried as she read her essay. Or, maybe the essay's narratives were so powerful she could not stifle her own response. Maybe it was the story of this student's family trying to buy a car in Texas. When they revealed they were African, the sales personnel said they weren't sure they could sell the car and gave many excuses for their changed demeanor. Maybe it was the student's poignant scene of white sixth-grade girls in the African Catholic school she attended who were not required to cut off all their hair. Black parents were told that short hair was regulation, but white parents who pled to keep their daughters' hair long were allowed not to cut it. Or, perhaps, Sandy told Anne, it was this student's description of her African father's experience as a college student at McGill University in Montreal. His roommate never slept while he was awake. When her father asked his roommate why this was, his roommate told him his Indian parents had warned him that Africans eat people and he should be careful.

As a graduate student who was already teaching in classrooms in addition to within the writing center, Sandy left her conference with this student thinking about how explicitly this young writer's text had required her to recognize and acknowledge her privilege as a white, Western academic. She was struck by the experiences of a student so affected by daily, systemic injustices. And before she talked with Anne, she found two fellow writing consultants in the kitchen and told them about the conference. Anne later heard a few versions of this conversation, and she was surprised by how different the versions were and what the writing consultants reported hearing one another saying when talking about race and racism.

As she wrote her CCCCs talk, Anne spoke with the student Sandy had worked with. The student said, "I don't know if Sandy told you, but when

I came to the writing center, I cried. I don't even know why I cried, but I remember I was so depressed. I had so much work. I think it was just all my emotions and all my work and everything building up." The student remembered what Sandy told her in that conference, "how some people misjudge, how some people see her [Sandy] and because she's big, they're like 'look at the man coming.' She told me something about lesbians. Basically she was telling me about how people judge you all the time." Sandy remembers creating space in the conference to empathize with the student's experience of prejudice by sharing ways her sexuality and accompanying gender performance could elicit hateful responses. She did not intend to tell the student that she believed that feelings drive homophobia or racism or to approximate (O'Brien 2001) in ways that would discount the student's experiences with systemic racism.

Was what Sandy offered enough? For the student, yes. The student told Anne she left her conference with Sandy feeling confident. She said, "I've never realized that something I could write could touch somebody else as much as it touched me." It was *just* an assignment, the student told Anne twice. But it wasn't just an assignment. It was a description of moments of racism that served as a *punctum* for Sandy—and then for the whole staff and the director. The set of stories left Anne thinking about what her entire staff would need to know to name systemic racism and talk about hate and racism, and a bit shameful that they might not have known enough at that point to talk deeply across racial difference with each other or the writers they tutored.

These uneasy conversations—between tutors and students, tutors and tutors, tutors and directors, directors and their colleagues—are ambiguous in many ways. We can't point to any one of them and say, "There! See? That's when I began to change." Yet both the internal conversations with self and the more public conversations in our communities of practice are what shape our identities, what begin to help us and our tutors actually see what before was invisible. As Charles Mills writes, "The fish do not see the water and whites do not see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move" (quoted in Purwar 2004, 49). We are fish in water, and we need Barthes's *punctum*—conferences such as the one this student and consultant had, exchanges like those the tutors had, however unsatisfying they may be, self-reflective moments like the ones Anne had through all her talks with her staff around the student's conference—to help us become aware of race and whiteness, to name moments shaped by racism, and to notice

the times when we have not been able to connect to one another. Anne's awareness led her to consider ways she could help her tutors name systemic racism; Frankie learned that some critical part of her work as an antiracist writing center director must involve supporting and sustaining consultants like Alison as they confront their own racialization and internalized racism and begin the work of theorizing the intersections and collisions of writing center work and implicit institutional racism; Meg's students underscored the need to deepen conversations about race in the classroom, despite the limitations of a semester's rhythm.

In one talk Davia and Anne had together that semester, Davia asked, "If we hire, as you suggest we should, for diversity of race and experiences, some of the staff will know about and live with racism, some of the staff will deflect those conversations, and some of the staff will just be discovering racism. How can we manage to have any conversations at all?" And this is a question the three of us find we must necessarily revisit again and again in our everyday interactions. We are often aware in these uncomfortable conversations that we could freeze and do nothing except remain shamed.

It is with shame that Meg remembers teaching a writing course and "correcting" an African American student's word choices in an attempt to make them more "standard." Later, the student, who was an excellent code switcher, said that for her final assignment, she wanted to write an essay for an audience of her neighborhood teens using language they would understand, her own home language. Meg was delighted. At the end of the semester, when the student wrote an excellent paper, she told Meg that it wasn't what she wanted, that she found it impossible to write for that teen audience because Meg's comments were always in her head. Meg felt undone as a teacher, as a person who cared. The course was over. The damage was done. That experience, though, has been an opportunity for a kind of continuing revision, for the palinode, if you will. She has retold this story to colleagues and tutors as they try together to work toward a reflective practice that probes the violence inflicted by unexamined white privilege. One of the operations of the palinode might be to enable a continuous refinement of our expressions of love for one another, for our comrades in antiracist struggles, and for those perpetually awakening states of consciousness that are treasonous to self and selfishness. This work, though, must be done both individually and with others. Anne's process of writing about her own experiences and her staff's experiences with racism and antiracism, and interviewing and

conferencing with her staff and the student writer as she did so (and again as we revised this chapter years later), was one version of the palinode. Alison's narrative—told and retold, theorized and retheorized—presents another version of palinode. We might recognize, with Alison, that palinodes cannot change the past, but are instead efforts to revise the ways and degrees to which the past conditions the future.

The palinode as a kind of life revision in service of antiracism, though, requires processing these experiences together. In *The Miner's Canary*, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres (2002) write of "power-with," "the psychological and social power gained through collective resistance and struggle and . . . an alternative set of narratives. It is relational and interactive" (140). Guinier and Torres review a series of campaigns, safe spaces, and collaborations that lead groups to "power-with" together, and they argue these "enclave[s] of resistance" (Mansbridge quoted in Guinier and Torres 2002, 147) are where "differences in perspective are examined out in the open to develop greater insight, stimulate constructive disagreement, and spark innovation" (147). In such "free, in-between spaces, . . . people . . . can experiment, reflect, self-correct, and share information. . . . Having discovered allies and learned important coping skills, participants can then leave these intermediate spaces better equipped to exert collective counter pressure to oppose the dominant norms" (148).

We have thought about how to establish these spaces in a writing center, and we turn again to Wenger (1998) for some guidance. He tells us that members of a community of practice need ways of talking, both individually and collectively, about their changing abilities, a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal and collective histories of becoming in the context of our communities (4–5). We do not mean to suggest here that these communities are uncomplicated or idealized. Quite the contrary, they are risk filled and complex. They are also essential to antiracism work.

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When we first discuss race with new white tutors, we often get similar responses to those Meg received in her first-year writing class, but because a writing center staff has the opportunity to be a diverse and continuing community of practice, and usually for longer than one semester, there is more time to interact and learn. We want to encourage embrasure of what students have to say, of their lived experiences

with racism, not a policing of their ideas constrained by a rigidly constructed syllabus. Expressions of racial oppression, fears, and prejudices mean there will be tensions. These tensions *are* risky, and any of us may respond in ways that leave us feeling shame (especially when we have time to rethink our first reaction), but it is within those tensions that real learning can happen.

As Wenger (1998) notes:

> Practice itself is not amenable to design. In other words, one can articulate patterns or define procedures, but neither the patterns nor the procedures produce the practice as it unfolds. One can design systems of accountability and policies for communities of practice to live by, but one cannot design the identities that will be constructed through these roles. One can design visions, but one cannot design the allegiance necessary to align energies behind those visions. (229)

Wenger's notion of identity formation is key here, because real learning implies emerging identity.

What follows are examples of two tutors' (both white) writing about race to illustrate some of the moves made over the course of two or three years. The writers were responding to African American, Latina, or Asian scholars, to readings on whiteness, or to experiences in their own lives. They had the luxury of "power-with," of processing what they were learning with a supportive group; they had the opportunity to articulate and consider their own shame, and we can see them working with palinodes on two levels—as they were experiencing the stories they describe and as they further reflected on them.

In 2002, Kathryn[4] was completing her first summer tutor workshop[5] and wrote her final paper about her parents' racism and its effect on her, a huge step forward that was facilitated by course readings, the sharing of written responses to those readings, and by long group discussions about race. She concluded her paper saying, "I am rapidly realizing how interesting I find other cultures and how much I like learning about them. . . . I hear my parents' racist comments, but I read [these] articles. . . . I know what's right."

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4. We have written previously about Kathryn and included examples of her writing in *The Everyday Writing Center* (Geller et al. 2007). Discussions of her work are also included in Meg Carroll's (2008) "Identities in Dialogue: Patterns in the Chaos."

5. Each summer, seasoned tutors and newcomers meet for ten weeks for a writing center theory and practice workshop. The veterans help plan the readings and activities for the course.

In 2003, she wrote in response to Beverly Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and talked again about her family. This time, she wasn't simply talking about how interesting it is to experience other cultures. Here, she recognized her own complicity as a white person, and with that recognition came the fear of being a "race traitor," the fear that change/transformation involves killing off of part of the self. She wrote:

> Tatum writes about the fear of isolation, which I can relate to. She says, "The fear of isolation that comes from [protesting a racist joke, for example] is a powerful silencer" (196). I have experienced situations like this often with my family. They will tell racist jokes or make racist comments, and I will say nothing. I totally fear isolation. I would probably be a traitor to them. Of course I disagree with them, but I just don't see any way to approach the situation so that it will go smoothly.

Perhaps this doesn't seem like much of a move. In fact, it seems as if fear and its subsequent silence have been the result of her shame. However, we see hope in Kathyrn's realization that it isn't enough to say one isn't racist or to surround oneself with "progressive" people, and she experiences shame at her own silence when confronted by racism. At that point, Kathryn seemed stuck in shame, but as the group shared their writing, and processed their experiences, the way was open for another future to be imagined.

That same year, Marcia, another second-year student, also wrote about speaking out. First, she referred back to an incident that frightened her; next she processed that event with the tutors who had been reading, writing, and talking about racism.

> I vividly remember the particular incident in my life that got me to want to really talk about racism—to understand it. I was entering the Providence Place Mall through a lobby way, when a group of young African-American kids tripped me. They began to chant "Whitey" and make obscene comments about me, until someone walked by and yelled at them (another young African-American kid who stood up for me). At first, I was angry and scared. However, it made me want to understand racism and to understand why these kids would randomly do this. That summer was my first tutor workshop and I had the opportunity to discuss this event.
>
>   I feel that often, white people do not understand racism as part of our culture, but rather as individualized. Unfortunately, as I have seen within my own family and working in the Writing Center as a tutor, racism is prevalent in many different ways throughout our society. Whatever prompted those

kids to trip me was either connected to their anger at racism or to some childish impulse—it was not directly connected to me. Yet it *was* connected to me in the end.

Finally, Marcia wrote about breaking the silence that marked her parents' relationship with her sister's boyfriend.

> I began to think about how my family reacted to my sister's boyfriend—a young man from Jamaica. I decided it was time to "break the silence" and let my parents know how I felt about their reaction to him. They claimed they were not racist, but felt my sister would have a difficult life in a biracial relationship. "Sorry," I said, "that *is* racist.". . . My parents since that moment have had a very different view on things—the silence has been broken.

Although we aren't sure about the long-term effect of that conversation with her parents, Marcia took a risky step in breaking the silence, and she credited that move not only to the theorists she'd read, but also to her fellow tutors and the students she'd worked with. She continued her reflection and related the breaking of silence in a tutoring session with a student from Liberia who talked about being treated as stupid by professors and people in the workplace. She wrote:

> He told me that although *I* may think he's smart, when he calls people and they hear his accent, they are rude to him. He explained that he has been turned away from many jobs, even when he was qualified. We are talking about a man who can speak three languages and who probably knows more than I do about the English language. It was one of the best talks I have had about racism and it did not feel uncomfortable that I was white and he was black. In fact, it felt necessary.

Marcia makes some very important moves here—moves made possible by her immersion in a reflective, diverse community of practice. For the following year's workshop, after many discussions with Frankie and Anne, Meg incorporated essays from *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (Rothenberg 2001) into her staff preparation course, a course that every tutor, both new and seasoned, attends each year.

This time, Marcia revisited the incident at the mall and added more. She wrote about a sixth-grade crush on an African American boy who, when he moved to Florida, told her he would miss her but that it would never have worked out anyway because of their racial differences. "I am angry with him. I feel ashamed and uncertain about myself. I am thinking that I will never befriend anyone like him again." She continued to

explore a series of incidents that examined her own complicity with racism, her failure to see the pain of another.

The second half of her paper returned to these incidents, now being read in the light of work with whiteness theory and the many discussions among the staff.

> I think back on the moments listed above, about my thoughts at the time, and I realize I have been racist. . . . It is hard for me to write this and to be completely honest while I am writing this. The incidents listed above are complicated and alarming to me. Racism is systemic. I am no exception to the reality—the truth. I am privileged. I feel guilty, angry, and embarrassed about all the times I failed to understand the system that sustains racism in this country. Since I started working at the Writing Center, I have become much more aware of my participation in what McIntosh calls a "damaged culture," a culture which enforces racism through white privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege, etc.

These significant and often shame-inducing moments are a kind of identity-*punctum*, we think: the sharp little wounds that catch us unaware and force us to acknowledge racism. But without the action that is the acknowledgement of the necessity for and the embrace of a revision of self-in-relation, without the palinode, those feelings paralyze us. Probyn (2005) tells us, "Ideas and writing about shame seek to generate new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present" (164). And the writing and thinking Meg's tutors do in staff education play out in the writing center after the course is over. When race is foregrounded, when we place whiteness studies in the context of recursive learning with a diverse staff, when we recognize our own shame, and when we break the silence about race, we can experience those spaces Guinier and Torres (2002) speak of where people "can experiment, reflect, self-correct, and share information." Only after this has happened can we "leave these intermediate spaces better equipped to exert collective counter pressure to oppose the dominant norms" (148). Here's how it's worked in a couple of cases.

In one of Meg's bi-weekly meetings, she and the tutors put aside the agenda when an African American tutor asked everyone to consider ways to resist the racism she'd experienced in her dorm. Another session was spent hearing—hearing the anger that a fellow student felt about his three Englishes, so-called "standard, Creole, and home." The tutors, having been immersed in reading and writing about race, find that their emerging antiracist identities begin to seep out into other areas—their families, their classes, and even into the more public forums of regional

and national conferences. When tutors gain power with one another and refuse to split their private and public selves, what any one tutor sees or has experienced is transformed into what might be seen and experienced by all of us.

We can, and our tutors can, make new knowledge out of these moments if we choose and have the will to do so. We and our tutors can be theorists. For when we conceive of shame as an affective dimension of human experience rooted in the social—in our need for, our interest in, one another—we are better able to conceptualize what we think of as the integral relation between individual identity and the collective intellectual, creative work of a community of practice such as a writing center. If, by democratizing our practice, we are to teach, support, and encourage tutors as theorists of race and racism, we will need to (re)center our recognition of the intimate and necessary relationship between a perpetually emerging self-identity and an evolving and dynamic collective identity as a community of practice.

<center>⁑</center>

We can't offer you a triumphal ending for we see the work of antiracism as ongoing and recursive. We each continue to feel we sometimes let ourselves and one another down with our attempts at antiracism work. But within a writing center, the labor of theorizing race and racial identity formation, like the practices of storytelling and community building in service of racial justice, requires a familiarity with and an ability to converse within/about a body of socially produced prior knowledge (an awareness of prior and ongoing knowledge production not only with regard to academic literacies, but also with regard to critical race theory and whiteness studies). The work demands a kind of constant, *active* self-consciousness: the ability to perceive ranges of choices relative to both disciplinary practices and to the performance of racial identity, and to imagine and articulate various implications and effects of taking one choice over and against the others. To work for racial justice within the context of a writing center requires that one conceive of, or possess awareness of, oneself as a knowledge producer within a social organization; that one demonstrates the willingness and ability to think and speak as an integral part of a "we," as a member of a community of practice; and that one demonstrates the willingness and ability to interpret and analyze the past, analyze and critique the present, and draw on interpretation, analysis, and critique to imagine and articulate alternative futures.

Less visibly, such labor also requires the acquisition and practice of *reflective* self-consciousness: the ability to situate one's own experience and perception in relation to the experiences and perceptions of others without re-centering oneself or one's own stories over and against others. Our stories, our theorizing, our notions of what constitutes community need to move, however haltingly, between conceptions of the self and the social. We must recognize that what and how we perceive and analyze is always necessarily mediated by the conditions of our own becoming. Our knowledge, both of ourselves and of others, must always be partial and situated. When we think about antiracism work in this way, we realize that the aim is not absolute knowledge, not the containment of error, and not the revolutionary eradication of racism or any other form of oppression (a hopeless purpose, we fear), but an unrelenting, unremitting willingness to revise our assumptions, our perceptions, our analyses, our critiques, and our practices in service of the possibility of more fully realized humanity—our own and others.

We offer the palinode in this chapter, in particular, as a way of thinking about, leaning into, and narrating both reflectively and critically, white shame—as a means by which we might enact a sustained engagement with the sources and effects of shame without repression or suppression. The palinode, however, is a panacea for neither the accretions of historical and current ideologies of white supremacy, nor the effects of white privilege—both of which find their expression in white consciousness and in the enactment (however well intentioned) of white identity. To be useful in this sense, the palinode demands a mindscape shaped by humility: a profound acknowledgment that we do not know all we need and desire to know, that the knowledge we do possess is provisional and contested, and that the contestation over knowledge takes place not outside of us, but within us (that we are made and remade in and of that struggle). To be useful, the palinode demands also a mindscape shaped by wonderment: a curiosity so fierce that the need and desire to learn have at least a sporting chance of burning through the vestiges of shame traditionally conceived (as that which must be avoided at all costs or, if unavoidable, suppressed and denied). The palinode demands of us that we be bold, but stipulates that with particular regard to the ongoing work of transforming white identity in the service of antiracism, our boldness be conditioned by and through our shame.

The palinode, and the processing of moments of shame, as we've described them here, also need a community of practice—supportive,

interested, invested others committed not only to negotiating their own identities but to helping any of us negotiate ours. We realize that much of what we've described in this chapter appears to be highly personal and individual. Our experiences, however, taken with our readings of both recent writing center scholarship and critical race theory, teach us the degree to which our sense of self-identity is profoundly relational. We cannot notice and allow ourselves to be disoriented, vulnerable, perhaps even filled with shame at moments of racism, in solitude. We must reflect and think collaboratively within our centers and with our colleagues—we need one another to work through such moments of conflict, to change our relationship to ourselves so we can change our relationship to others.

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6

BEYOND THE "WEEK TWELVE APPROACH"
Toward a Critical Pedagogy for Antiracist Tutor Education

Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan

This chapter is grounded in two primary assumptions. The first is that writing centers are always already raced. By this we mean that the work of and in writing centers is always implicated in the institutional racism that shapes all our work in higher education. This is true, we argue, whether or not we resist, acknowledge, or even observe racism in our writing centers. In 2005, one of many contributors who spoke out in a writing center listserv discussion against efforts to sustain a conversation online about race narrated her own hard work in combating racism in other contexts of her life yet defended her desire to, in effect, take a break from such efforts in order to talk on the listserv about what she described as the "normal problems of writing center life." These "problems" included "training tutors, talking to faculty, dealing with plagiarism, marketing, handouts, [and] sources." In contrast, we believe race functions within each of these daily writing center matters. For example, our own racial backgrounds and assumptions and those of our faculty impact how we communicate with one another; our decisions about how to interpret and respond to plagiarism are influenced by our own positioning with respect to arguments about colonization and capitalism—phenomena deeply implicated in debates of ethics, identity, and race; the way we market the work of our centers inherently reflects the kinds of racialized spaces we are creating and implicitly communicates who we are and who we imagine our audiences to be; the handouts we create are by definition invested in meanings that reflect our views about language, institutional standards, and race; and the sources we turn to inherently communicate particular world views that speak to and inform our own beliefs about all sorts of matters, including—whether explicit or not—racism. While these are but a few examples, we hope to show that we do

not believe any aspect of writing center work, no matter how seemingly mundane, is somehow neutral in our broader racialized systems.

The second assumption driving this chapter is that to question the work of tutor education is to question the work of writing centers writ large. Designing any tutor education program requires that we attend to foundational questions about our work: What is the purpose of a writing center? What function should a writing center serve in an institution? What are the most effective and ethical approaches to achieving these purposes? We strongly believe that it is through tutor education, whether in the form of full-credit courses, ongoing staff discussions, informal mentoring, or anything in between, that we inculcate—or sometimes re-vision—our implicit answers to these questions about writing center theory and practice.

Bringing together these assumptions about the inherently raced work of writing centers and the metonymic role of tutor education as a vehicle for shaping writing center theory and practice, we are left with the driving question of this chapter: If we believe that writing center work is always already raced, what roles do our tutor education courses play in the racism or antiracism of our institutions? If, as we suggest, there is no such thing as a race-neutral writing center, we argue that there are also no race-neutral approaches to tutor education. To critically interrogate racism in our tutor education courses is not a distraction from the "real" work of writing centers. The idea of choosing whether or not to "bring race into" our tutor education courses is not in fact a choice at all; race is already there. Rather than ignoring this reality and unconsciously perpetuating racist discourses and practices, we must do a better job of preparing tutors to recognize, understand, and grapple with the complicated ways racism shapes the collaborative work we do with student writers on a daily basis.

We formulate this point of view on the potential—indeed, ethical—imperative of antiracist tutor education, having been persuaded by conceptions of writing center work deriving from some of the primary tenets of critical education theory and pedagogy (see the collected works of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, bell hooks, and Henry Giroux). Such perspectives on education are grounded in the assumption that all education is inherently political, and that our job as students and as educators is to recognize our agency within the power dynamics that shape our institutions and societies and to critically and actively resist injustices. In short, we approach writing center work with the conviction that our efforts, individually and collectively, can and should change the world.

In order to realize the change potential within tutor education, we argue that writing center directors must look critically at how we have been designing and executing our tutor education courses in order to make a number of significant changes in how we approach our work. The most critical change, we argue, must be one in which we reframe our approach to these courses, shifting from tutor training programs to tutor education programs. Such a shift requires that we move away from simply teaching a disembodied set of writing conventions/processes, tutoring methods, or best practices, and towards guiding students to develop a critical lens through which to interrogate the implications of different choices. This shift requires that we move away from playing the role of stewards of the discipline by introducing tutors to conventional writing center lore and towards encouraging students to bring a fresh perspective of new possibilities for how we might better understand and bring to fruition the purpose of a writing center. Further, such a shift requires that we move away from understanding our courses as preparation for tutors to perform a job or service while in school and towards seeing such courses as a critical part of their broader educational experience that carries implications for how they will negotiate their greater roles in the world. Put simply, such courses, we believe, are not and should not be sites where we indoctrinate tutors into our own limited conceptions of "the" writing center practice and theory. Rather, tutor education courses are sites where we can and should work collaboratively with our tutors to re-imagine what writing center work can be.

Another critical change we argue writing center directors must make is to complicate our understanding of the ways in which people create injustices and therefore to complicate the ways in which attention to injustices is enacted in our courses. Too often we talk about forms of oppression—for the purposes of our discussion, racism—as isolated incidents of bigotry. By failing to critically examine the complex, multi-layered, multi-implicated, contradictory, systemic, and institutionalized ways in which oppression is perpetrated through webs of people, practices, and power, we risk failing to adequately respond to and resist the sorts of injustices we believe we intend to eradicate. Within the context of our writing centers, this means re-imagining tutor education as an opportunity to explore the various ways all aspects of our communities and practices intersect complexly with systems of oppression, rather than minimally addressing how isolated instances of bigotry, somehow separate from "normal" tutorials, might be handled differently from (or

perhaps within) the rubrics of practices we otherwise teach our tutors. In other words, we argue that for tutor education to better carry out its antiracist potential, racism cannot be addressed merely as a topic covered in class; rather, our courses must be structured in ways that invite larger theoretical exploration of the function of oppression as it informs every question and method up for discussion in the writing center. Such an argument might more clearly be understood as making a shift from a pedagogy of coverage to a critical pedagogy.

Both changes we have just discussed—shifting from tutor training to tutor education and from pedagogies of coverage to critical pedagogies—ultimately call attention to the fact that regardless of our specific choices and perspectives, the ways in which we invite tutors to grapple with the possibilities of writing center work inherently determine the functions our writing centers will serve. Given that, we must necessarily ask, if we are educating rather than training tutors, what are we educating them for, to what ends? Drawing on critical pedagogy, we answer by saying that we seek to empower tutors with critical lenses through which to interrogate their world and to explore and understand their own agency; understanding their own agency is critical to their ability to help writers do the same. In helping tutors (and by extension the writers with whom they work) recognize their own agency, we collaborate with tutors and students to have a meaningful impact on the world, both in the writing center and beyond.

In this chapter, then, we will first examine the writing center community's apparent reluctance to address race in our tutor education courses. Next, we will explore how using pedagogies of coverage to structure tutor education, despite the best of intentions, is insufficient in creating institutional change. We go on to offer, by way of suggesting possibilities, descriptions of two very different tutor education courses we have each designed, attempting to create antiracist writing centers through the lens of critical pedagogy. In doing so, we consider the messiness of our own practices; to be sure, our efforts are imperfect and we are continually refining these courses. We examine our failures along with our successes as part of our own reflective practice, but also as a means of illustrating how the particularities of specific contexts shape our work. Our argument, therefore, does not lend itself to a one-size-fits-all course design, but rather a broader sense of purpose that must be adapted and shaped to address the particular concerns of individual writing centers and communities.

BUT THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME!: FAILING TO ADDRESS RACISM IN TUTOR EDUCATION

Designing a tutor education program is no small task. Arguably, tutor education is one of the most important sites of our work as writing center directors; it is where our pedagogical and theoretical visions for our centers are transformed into praxis and where we enact our vision of the work writing centers can and should do. Given such significance, it is all the more frustrating when we have limited control over the space, time, and structure of our tutor education programs. Despite our own recognition of the profound educational experiences afforded our tutors through working in a writing center, many of our institutions continue to view our work merely as a service in which those who walk through our doors are the only ones with something (often remedial) to gain; as such, our institutions commonly fail to support us in teaching the sort of courses necessary for enacting the kind of vision of a writing center we have described. Certainly, many directors are forced to be resourceful in arranging staff meetings, ongoing workshops, tutor discussion groups, observation sessions, mentoring activities, or other professional-development strategies in lieu of teaching courses devoted to tutor education. Further, when we do teach credit-bearing courses, they are often structured in less than ideal ways, perhaps as one- or two-credit electives rather than as full-credit courses with a place in the curriculum.

Thus, as we design any tutor education program, we grapple with questions of time and priorities, constraints that often lead us to believe we must make a difficult choice between addressing racism or not. When we find ourselves with far too little time to prepare tutors for their work in our centers, many of us who would sincerely like to talk about racism feel we must instead turn our attention to other seemingly more practical, or "normal," tutoring issues: prioritizing concerns in student writing, employing productive questioning techniques, building writer confidence, and so on. Nevertheless, we believe that the either/or choices a pedagogy of coverage leads us to make—either address racism or some other topic—falsely position race as somehow outside of, peripheral to, or divorced from the everyday practices of our work. By excluding discussion of racism from our tutor education courses, we inadvertently perpetuate a writing center version of the very form of "new racism" that Victor Villanueva (2006) has explicated: we fail to account for the ways in which racism operates covertly within, and in fact creates the appearance of, such as a thing as neutral writing center work.

Our decisions to exclude or marginalize discussions of racism in tutor education very often boil down to our internalized assumptions about race and racism and our misguided perceptions of the relevance of race in our particular institutional contexts. For example, many white writing center directors who have opted to ignore racism in their courses do so as a manifestation of their own white privilege. The decision to leave discussions of racism out of tutor education assumes problematically that race is not an issue because the director, as a white individual, has the dysconscious power to assume it is not important. Similarly, directors who work in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) may assume that the presence of a majority of white students obviates the need to discuss race. In other words, when directors in these contexts make the decision to exclude race, they rely on the assumption that not addressing race will have little immediate personal consequence for themselves or for those writing center workers who also choose to ignore it. Such an assumption stands in contrast to recognizing the way racism is systemic in all of our institutions; to acknowledging the reality of the lived experiences of students, tutors, and directors of color; and to interrogating how each of us, regardless of our race, operates within these inherently racialized contexts.

In minority serving institutions (MSIs) and institutions with significant structural diversity, attention to race and racism is often excluded from tutor education as well. In these cases, where all or most students and tutors are of color, directors may assume that discussing race and racism is not relevant or that the institution and the writing center are, because of their populations, race neutral. Other writing center directors might mistakenly assume that tutors of color already have the critical lenses they need to recognize how race and racism shape writing center practice and to engage in reflective antiracist practices. Such an assumption may lead some directors to conclude that their students of color will already be able to negotiate the role of race in their writing center work. On the contrary, we must recognize that while our various identities and experiences may certainly shape our perspectives on racism, our racial identities alone do not automatically determine our level of critical consciousness about race. In fact, most critical theorists (e.g., bell hooks [2003]) believe that racism is able to thrive in part because those who are oppressed internalize the oppressive beliefs perpetrated by the oppressors; in other words, in addition to the racist webs formed by white people, a lack of critical consciousness by people of color about

how racism operates at an institutional level is part of what allows racism to thrive. Thus, failing to help students of color create lenses through which they can interpret and respond with agency to the ways that race and writing center work are mutually constructed ultimately results in the same perpetuation of a racist status quo.

While each of these contexts accounts for a certain lack of critical consciousness among directors of any race, there are reasons why directors who are critically conscious of race may nevertheless choose to exclude it from their courses. A director who is part of a racial minority in the context of her institution may have to negotiate the politics of race in ways that shut her down. For example, a director of color at a PWI risks being perceived by her white students as bringing race into the discussion because of her own personal agenda, or—worse—losing her job or having her safety threatened for her curricular decisions. Likewise, a white director at an MSI may risk skepticism or even aggravation by her students or colleagues about her presumed inability to talk about race, or, again, lose her job for straying from a particular sanctioned curriculum.

The decision to leave discussions of race off the syllabus in a tutor education course may be due to any number of reasons, but our concern is the *consequences* of such a decision, which we believe will affect all of us: our tutors, the writers with whom we work, the institutions in which we work, and the larger societies to which we contribute. For example, when we leave race out of the discussion, we allow tutors the opportunity to remain unmindful of how their writing advice may be racially biased. When we fail to help tutors recognize and interrogate standardized conventions, we inadvertently cast tutors in the role of assimilationist guides, who insist that students follow the conventions unquestioningly. When race is excluded from the conversation, we and our tutors fail to question the assumptions tutors make about students' perspectives or abilities based on the students' race. We also fail to prepare tutors to recognize, question, and challenge the assumptions that students may be making about tutors based on the tutors' race. When tutors do encounter explicit racism in student writing, they may feel unprepared or ill-equipped to address that racism. Similarly, as Michelle Johnson argues in this collection, tutors who are not comfortable talking about race and racism may not be able to adequately engage students who are grappling with questions of race in their writing. When we exclude discussions of race from our courses, white tutors in particular

are not challenged to be conscious of the climate students of color face within PWIs and the writing center.

Similarly, *tutors* of color may not be equipped with strategies for working across differences, as most writing center scholarship problematically fails to account for their experiences. Failing to help tutors develop a critical lens through which to explore racism likewise leaves them ill-equipped to think complexly about different and interrelated forms of oppression, including classism, sexism, and heterosexism. When discussions of race and racism are excluded from tutor education, tutors will be less conscious of and therefore less able or willing to assist with deliberate efforts to diversify recruitment; less proactive in their thinking about developing different activities, programs, forums, and strategies for combating racism; and less able to find connections between antiracist writing center work and other areas of their lives that could be enriched through such a critical lens. Tutors who are prepared to view writing center work as race neutral (except for when a person of color is present) are ill-prepared to question and re-vision "normal" writing center creeds and practices. Finally, we fear that tutors may walk away from their work in the writing center without considering their own roles (and the roles of students who come to the writing center) as facilitators of—and potential agents of change in—racist systems. In short, when we fail to attend to race in tutor education, we fail to fully prepare tutors to do their best work in recognizing and resisting injustices in the writing center and in the world. We fail to fully prepare tutors to work well with writers.

We make such observations not from a presumed place of superiority; both of us, having worked as directors and assistant directors in a variety of institutional contexts, have made the decision in the past to exclude or marginalize race from our own tutor education contexts. Laura, for example, taught several brief graduate student tutor orientation programs at a PWI without addressing race, excluding it from the curriculum because, despite her intended commitment to antiracism in other contexts, she had failed to consider the function of race within the writing center. The devastating impact of this decision was later repeatedly highlighted as two tutors of color revealed that many of the strategies presented in their tutoring guide did not account for their own lived experiences, and as a white tutor announced in a public forum that despite what was going on at other schools, racism did not exist in that particular writing center.

THE FAILURES OF THE "WEEK TWELVE APPROACH": "PEDAGOGIES OF COVERAGE" IN TUTOR EDUCATION

Although it is detrimental to antiracist efforts that many writing center professionals fail or refuse to recognize the need to attend to race and racism in tutor education, we also observe that a growing number of writing center directors do talk about race with their tutors. We have witnessed in informal conversations a number of writing center professionals eager to share the ways in which they talk about race with their tutors. In most such conversations, directors share readings included on their syllabi, point to a guest lecturer who came to class to talk about race, or spotlight a staff meeting that addressed a controversial topic, all intended to further antiracist efforts. While we recognize the good intentions these efforts represent, we have come to believe that these kinds of approaches—like the decisions to exclude race entirely—are nevertheless predicated on an understanding of race as a topic and thus can ultimately subvert our antiracist goals. Such efforts account for what we have taken to calling the "week twelve approach." The week twelve approach, which is a consequence of a pedagogy of coverage, entails covering discussions of race, multiculturalism, or, at its most vague, culture at an isolated moment, often late in the semester, rather than fore-grounding such issues or accounting for their relevance in our everyday theories and practices consistently throughout the course.

James McDonald (2005), though not focusing exclusively on race, observes this kind of phenomenon at play in tutor education textbooks. In his review essay examining how three recent tutor education texts "deal" with diversity, McDonald laments what he calls the "back-of-the-book" treatment of diversity and difference, where textbook authors implicitly reinscribe dominant perceptions of normative tutor and student identity and experience by relegating all Other students (such as ESL students or students with learning disabilities) to separate sections towards the back of the book. He argues that these "back-of-the-book sections tend to betray more complicated assumptions about . . . how we classify writers than we sometimes express in our theories" (66). Through this positioning, we limit our understanding of the ways in which difference operates at every turn in our work. Likewise, the week twelve approach to "dealing" with race in tutor education courses implicitly constructs distinctions between "normal" writing center conferences and "special" circumstances. Not only does this approach establish and sustain a problematic binary of white tutors as "normal"

and students of color as Other (excluding the experiences of—indeed the existence of—tutors of color), but it also precludes the possibility of coming to understand the ways in which racial identities are complex and the ways in which race and racism are deeply embedded in the systems of our institutions, not limited to one-time challenges in isolated sessions or interactions.

Further, Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz (2007) have examined the impact that (what we call) the week twelve approach to diversity had in their tutor education course and writing center. Kiedaisch and Dinitz write that, despite explicit attention to learning disabilities and ESL writers in their tutor preparation course, they found that new tutors seemed unable to transfer what they had learned in class to their consultations with student writers. Putting student papers side by side with tutors' reflective journals, the authors wonder with us how their tutors could have missed what was so obvious to them and to their readers—that Seth had a learning disability and that Lam's cultural background and language were shaping his writing (40–42). Rather than blaming their tutors, Kiedaisch and Dinitz turned a critical eye on their tutor education course. In the process, they re-examined the writing center scholarship they had been asking students to read. Looking at two key texts on learning differences and ESL writers, Kiedaisch and Dinitz observe that these essays, like their own class, belied their "explicit sensitivity and positioning" vis-à-vis difference (43). The essays they had been asking students to read, like the tutor education books that MacDonald (2005) critiques, ultimately cast students with learning disabilities or ESL writers as Other, as less able thinkers and learners, as deficient. Similarly, they came to see that the tendency in these texts to identify difference as something only student writers bring to the writing center reifies assumptions of tutors as "normal" and student writers as Other (44). Further, this positioning gives the impression that the Othered group in fact constitutes some sort of homogeneous group with clearly delineated boundaries between them and the "norm." In other words, it risks the sort of stereotyping, overgeneralizing, and, indeed, racial profiling that leads tutors to assume that all ESL students, for example, come to the writing center wanting tutors to be grammar editors and therefore should be "dealt with" using certain tutoring strategies, or—in the case of our discussion—that all students of color come from a particular class background and speak "non-Standard English" and therefore need tutors to serve as "insider guides." A critical awareness of these

kinds of problematic messages ultimately led Kiedaisch and Dinitz to redesign their course to more fully integrate questions of diversity into their daily discussions.

Though Kiedaisch and Dinitz (2007) mention race only in passing, we believe their critique of how difference is positioned in writing center scholarship and their revisioning of tutor education courses is insightful and relevant to us here as well. In fact, we have seen the problematic effects of the week twelve approach in our own experiences. Several years ago, when Karen was a writing center director at a small urban university, she taught a semester-long full-credit tutor education course, a small class of only three students—one white, one Latina, and one African American. When she designed her course, she followed the topical model she was most familiar with—addressing writing center history, theory, and key pragmatic issues. Because of the conversations about race that had taken place the semester before on a writing center listserv, Karen was thinking about race and chose to include several readings on it, but not until later in the semester. However, she had not yet reconceptualized the role of race in writing center work in any significant way and naively assumed her students would understand, or at least be interested in, the multiple and complex connections between race, literacy, education, power, and pedagogy. Thus, when the time came to discuss these texts, she was taken aback by one student's response. The African American student was adamant that race was not a factor in writing or writing center work and resisted forcefully what she saw as Karen's unfounded choice to insert it into the context. Karen struggled unsuccessfully to find a way to explain her position, to defend her conviction that race plays a part in our identities and work as writers. What we see now as we look back on this experience is how divorced this discussion of race was from everything else that had come before in the course. While Karen had been working with students to help them expand their vocabularies for talking about writing, she hadn't included race in that vocabulary from the start, and thus it seemed like an aberration to this student.

What this experience also reveals is that when we consider race only in the context of student-tutor interactions, we fail to recognize the extent to which all of our writing center practices are always already raced. In the case of the student above who had a strong sense of herself as a writer independent of her race, the introduction of race as a topic in the class was frustrating: to her mind, race was not a factor in her abilities as a

writer nor the lens through which she wanted her writing to be judged. Her concern was warranted, but—because of the way the readings and discussions positioned the function of race—she also misunderstood what Karen was actually proposing that they explore. A writing center worker on a writing center listserv once commented that it "seems presumptuous and stereotypical for a tutor to assume anything about a student based solely on that student's race," and thus asked, "Why should a tutor consider someone's race before considering issues that student wants to discuss?" Like Karen's student, this listserv poster reasonably misunderstood the intention to interrogate race as an intention to teach tutors to be better racial profilers—to learn to make assumptions about students' writing and needs based on their race. In contrast, we identify the need to teach tutors to understand and critically examine how institutionalized racism and racist pedagogies shape the work they and students do together regardless of the identities or races of the particular individuals involved. For example, many writing center tutors meet with students working to pass first-year composition courses, upper-level writing courses, or writing proficiency exams required on many campuses to earn undergraduate degrees. Building on the links that others in this collection, most notably Villanueva, Greenfield, Young, and Wilson, as well as other writing center scholars such as Grimm (1996, 1999), have established between "Standardized Englishes," pedagogy, and institutional racism, we argue that when our tutors work with students on projects related to these gatekeeping requirements—helping them revise first-year composition papers to accommodate implicitly racist standards, for example—tutors are engaging with and participating in a racist system *regardless* of the tutor's race or the student's race. The system is still racist even when both participants are white or even when both participants are of color. Such gatekeeping mechanisms reflect only one of the many ways racism is institutionalized in our colleges and universities and, by extension, our writing centers. This observation speaks to the need to support more critical and creative thinking in and about tutor education that will allow us to recognize and act upon opportunities for combating injustices inherent in even the most seemingly mundane conversations among writers. When our courses reinforce the notion that race only matters when a person of color enters the room (usually, in writing center scripts, when she enters as a student rather than as a tutor) or when a student makes an explicitly racist statement, we fail to allow for the development of critical thinking about race necessary for antiracist work.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: CHOOSING A LENS IN TUTOR EDUCATION

Having argued that neither leaving race out of tutor education nor covering it as one topic among many offers an adequate theoretical or pedagogical framework for preparing tutors to understand how and why race inevitably shapes our work, we now turn to considering how we might better integrate interrogations of racism into our tutor education courses and programs. In contrast to a pedagogy of coverage, which positions race as a topic that can easily be included or excluded, we advocate for a critical pedagogy, an approach that offers students conceptual frameworks through which to explore, come to understand, and act in response to each of the topics discussed. A critical pedagogy moves away from positing particular privileged subjects or perspectives as givens and instead uses critical questioning and analysis as a means to understand, challenge, and act in response to any and all material or ideas encountered, particularly ideas that present themselves as natural or incapable of change. A critical pedagogy in a tutor education class would create opportunities for tutors to interrogate and contribute to the work of an antiracist writing center by guiding them through a sustained and critical reflection on existing writing center theory and practices. Such a framework for approaching all facets of writing center work (its history, lore, common contemporary methods, and practices of individual spaces) would aim to, in the words of Ira Shor (Shor and Freire 1987), "unveil the limits of domination in a society where the system presents itself as invulnerable" (174) and help students come to recognize their own agency in shaping their work. Teaching through this framework would allow us to help tutors develop their own interpretations of writing center theory and practice, including the role of racism and other systems of oppression. Further, such a framework allows—even demands that—students to act on their new and evolving interpretations of writing center theory and practice, using them to challenge and change local practices in our writing centers and institutions.

As we have re-visioned our own tutor education courses, critical pedagogy has provided the vehicle for us as scholars and teachers to work with tutors to account for race in writing center work. Here, we will offer descriptions of tutor education courses we developed at very different institutions and describe our specific theoretical lenses by way of illustrating the possibilities for working with tutors so they learn to attend to race. In addition to describing our syllabi (which often in fact tell us

little about what happens in a course), we also describe our approaches to the material, the kinds of conversations we had with our students, and the outcomes and challenges of these experiences in order to more fully describe the critical pedagogy we advocate.

Critical Lens: Institutional Power

Laura is the coordinator of a speaking and writing program at a small women's liberal arts college. It is a PWI, though it boasts that one out of three students is an international student and/or student of color. While the student population is relatively diverse compared to other PWIs, students of color still express feelings of exclusion and prejudice, and white students overwhelming resist recognizing their institutionalized privilege. When Laura began her position in summer 2007, the program already had in place a particular tutor education structure: a two-credit, semester-long course that met once per week for one hour and fifteen minutes (a regular course is four credits), taught by the program coordinator; a workshop series taught by the coordinator and assistant coordinators for experienced tutors' ongoing education; and a series of tutor-led small-group discussion meetings for ongoing tutor education. Previous to Laura's arrival, the tutor education course was only loosely required prior to students' beginning work in the writing center (or the writing/speaking fellows program).

Laura's strategy for designing the tutor education course syllabus has been to move away from training students in particular methods and, instead, to introduce them to the discipline of writing center studies in ways that invite them to engage with, and intervene in, contemporary theory and practice; the guiding lens through which readings are chosen and class discussions are initiated is the writing center's relationship to institutional power. Importantly, power is not merely a topic that requires the exclusion of other issues, but rather a lens through which students are invited to grapple more meaningfully with each of the issues discussed.

The semester begins with a discussion of the history of the discipline; students read influential essays by scholars such as Stephen North (1984) and Muriel Harris (1995). By the second week, however, the conversation quickly moves to rethinking the discipline as students juxtapose the first weeks' readings with work by authors such as Nancy Grimm (1996) and Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski (1999), which directly and explicitly call into question arguments made by the previous scholars.

This juxtaposition is significant in that it shows students there is not one monolithic theory they must consume, but that scholars themselves have significant disagreements. And, importantly, given the nature of the critiques they are reading, writing center work is introduced to them as deeply vexed within questions of institutional power: How does the writing center position itself in relationship to the institution? Is its job to assimilate students? Serve as a mediator? Incite change? The discussion is usually started by having students go around the table, without interruption, to share one comment in response to and one question inspired by the set of readings. Once each student has had a voice, students dive in to respond to what struck them as the most compelling issues raised by their peers. When leading these discussions, Laura serves as a guide in pointing the students to key questions and compelling quotations from the texts, but ultimately expects the students to carry the conversation—which they tend to do with gusto. Importantly, for students who are new to questions of institutional power, who want to know what exactly it is they are talking about, Laura can offer definitions of individual prejudice, systemic oppression, and institutionalized oppression and introduce matters such as race, language use, citizenship, gender, sexuality, and other markers to move them from the abstract to the concrete; as Laura begins to offer these examples, students frequently jump in to offer their own examples of issues they see as implicated. The student responsibility here is key because it sets the stage for their understanding of their role as active agents in shaping the very work of the program.

In later weeks, the class moves to consider implications for tutoring "methods" through this lens. In some semesters, students have read selections from various tutoring guides, such as discussions on the writing process and the tutoring process by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner (2000) and practical strategies for tutoring sessions offered by Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli (2006). These readings have been immediately followed with a juxtaposition of essays on "minimalist" tutoring by Jeff Brooks (1991) and directive tutoring by Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns (1995). In more recent semesters, in lieu of assigning texts focused on practice, Laura has assigned more theoretical essays and relied on class time for discussion of practical implications. Rather than dictating to tutors which pedagogical stance they are required to take, students are asked to construct their own positions on what range of practices might be most effective. Importantly, Laura guides

them through this discussion by compelling them to consider how they develop their positioning through a lens of power; questions about whether to write on a student's paper, offer a specific suggestion, or ask a particular kind of question are explored through the invocation of questions about racial, cultural, linguistic, and other differences as well as their beliefs about the tutor's ideal relationship to the values of the institution. The class engages in this critical reflection not at the expense of providing tutors with practical strategies, but rather so students encounter these practical strategies through a critical lens. In this way, tutors are also better positioned to be able to revise, reject, or develop these strategies with a greater sense of intention and purpose because they are conscious of and invested in the broader institutional implications of their choices.

Antiracist work, problematically, can often be undermined when people synecdocically attempt to take on too broad or abstract a terrain of oppression, thereby failing to address—indeed, minimizing—significant particular issues. Specifically, discussions of racism often fail to be productive because they remain nebulous and ungrounded. The nature of this tutoring course—introduced through the lens of exploring power—risks a similar sort of diversion away from a concrete interrogation of racism, particularly as it plays out within writing center work. For this reason, in previous semesters, at this point in the term, once tutors were familiar with what it means to consider institutional power, the class turned its attention explicitly to race. This positioning was intended to allow the discussion of race to be a natural extension of the lens through which they had been reading writing center work up until that point—rather than an isolated, politically correct topic tacked onto the syllabus. It was also intended to provide students with a more focused grounding in matters of race that would bring into relief additional interrelated matters in future discussions, such as an institution's relationship with language and cultural diversity. To begin these more focused discussions, students read pieces by Anne DiPardo (1992); Nancy Barron and Nancy Grimm (2002); Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet (2007); and Victor Villanueva (2006). These readings provide possible definitions for racism and explore additional ways these scholars see racial difference and institutional racism informing writing center work. In more recent semesters, Laura has come to view that part of the syllabus as nevertheless falling into a week twelve approach pattern, and has worked to

integrate those readings and discussions throughout the course; there is no longer a day of readings explicitly on race.

Classes that follow continue the semester's trajectory of considering the function of power in ever more nuanced spheres. From here on out, additionally, racial difference becomes a more focused version of that lens. Students consider relationships among race, identity, citizenship, and language use through readings by Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), Lee Tonouchi (2004), John Rickford and Russell Rickford (2000), June Jordan (1997), and others who invite them to grapple with how intimately tied one's sense of racial (and other forms of) identity can be with language; as part of these discussions, again, students are asked to grapple with the implications of their choices for teaching and tutoring writing within a particular historical, educational, and language context.

After teaching three semesters of this particular course (by now Laura has taught nine), Laura began to notice a striking difference among her students and those who had taken different versions of the course with previous coordinators. Such differences were noticeable in both the complexity of thinking with which many tutors were able to talk about their work as well as the willingness and interest of tutors to engage in difficult conversations about significant matters, including racism. In informal discussions with her tutors, some of her former students mentioned their recognition of such differences in thinking among the staff as well (they even had taken to referring to this division as "old school" and "new school.") They cited the tutor education course as a reason for their disparities in thinking and suggested that the model of interrogating institutional power, as well as the ways various differences were discussed in every class period in relation to whatever topic was up for discussion, was a reason they felt their own thinking and investment in the transformative potential of their work was stronger.

While such anecdotal observations are encouraging, the course and the writing center are still imperfect. Through private conversations, tidbits of class conversations, student journals, and other moments when students have felt comfortable in revealing their thoughts and experiences, Laura continues to learn about how peer tutors of color in the program feel isolated within a sea of white faces at the writing center, feel their fears about the racism they may encounter in the writing center have been nightmarishly confirmed by the course readings on race, and feel uncomfortable about the kinds of statements made by their peers in class. Indeed, these experiences are consistent with those

reported by students of color about their broader experiences at the college, reports which undoubtedly offer but a glimpse into a much larger body of lived realities, the voices of which continue to find little welcome in our broader discourses. Similarly, certain tutors still resist the lens altogether and critique the program for being too "political." And certainly, despite the many positive outcomes of the course, racism has not been wholly eradicated from the center.

Laura has sought to find ways beyond the course to compel tutors to continue to be critical activists about racism on campus. In such an attempt, nevertheless, she has felt uncomfortable that her choices seem at odds with her own critique of a pedagogy of coverage approach. In particular, to strengthen the quality of an existing ongoing education workshop series for tutors—workshops that take on specific, practical topics within tutoring—she began to offer workshops that address anti-racism and writing center work. Such a choice felt both like an important opportunity to keep a conversation going, yet also like a misrepresentation of how racism operates when it is positioned as a topic to be neatly dealt with in a one-hour workshop. At the end of the first such workshop, however, a tutor proposed that the workshop be extended into a set of regular meetings or discussion groups. When asked if they would be interested in participating in a regular forum of that sort, the entire group of tutors enthusiastically agreed. Rather than leaving it at that, tutors immediately ran with the idea and suggested that the tutor discussion group on racism could bring in faculty, staff, and high-level administrators; others brainstormed that a series of discussions could be developed to address other forms of oppression on campus and to make visible the social justice possibilities of the writing center; another suggested that the series be built around intersecting forms of oppressions, rather than isolated topics at individual meetings. (This final proposal has since come to fruition and has now been run for over three semesters.) The little hour-long workshop ran well beyond its scheduled end time as the tutors energetically discussed possibilities for the future. One tutor reported that after the workshop she and another tutor went to dinner together and continued talking about racism for hours. We like to think of this moment as an example of success. While Laura did not have all of the answers herself, and indeed may have contradicted her own theoretical beliefs by isolating race as a topic in this way, the fact that tutors had developed critical lenses to challenge her choice to limit the conversation to a single moment in the semester and generate

possibilities for continued action is just what a critical pedagogy is intended to accomplish.

Critical Lens: Discourse and Literacy

For two years, Karen directed the writing center at an urban, public, historically black university (often referred to as a historically black college or university, or HBCU), and her approach to her tutor education course was shaped not just by student demographics but also by the historical and contemporary institutional politics of this particular HBCU. As Karen worked to understand her university's cultural and political context, she found William Tierney's (1992) analysis of tribal-serving institutions, which seems to apply to HBCUs as well, useful. These institutions, Tierney notes, are not immune from the "dominant mores of American society" (608). Even as HBCUs incorporate African American culture, history, and language throughout their curricula and, more importantly, seek to redress historical and contemporary inequities in education and counter the dominant racist culture, these institutions are still subject to pressure and standards imposed from without by accrediting and funding agencies (including, especially, the federal government), as well as dominant cultural values and attitudes (608). What this meant, then, was that the university where Karen worked was both explicitly committed to redressing social inequities, especially racism, but also still very much enmeshed in a racist culture and system and shaped by racist understandings of language and pedagogy, just as any other college or university is.

Adding to the complications was the fact that the writing center Karen was charged with directing was skeletal at best, running with two graduate student tutors and no operational budget of its own. As a result, Karen sought to re-vision what a writing center might become and how it might function in that institutional context. In addition to working to secure grant funds to support the writing center, she developed a pilot version of a classroom-based tutoring program, which included a two-semester tutor education/practicum sequence. The sequence sought to prepare students not only to become writing tutors but also agents of change in the campus's culture of writing. Prior to teaching the tutor education course, Karen noticed that the official culture of writing on campus focused almost entirely on students' deficiencies, as reflected by discourses about remedial writing courses, writing proficiency exams, and students' spoken languages and writing abilities. She also noticed

there seemed to be a vibrant unofficial culture of writing that celebrated students' creativity and mastery of language, as evidenced by frequent student-run open-mic performances and students' respect for particularly talented poets and performers. When Karen began re-imagining the work the writing center might do, she sought to prepare tutors to engage not just with the official culture of writing on campus, but also the unofficial, student-driven culture of writing; in doing so, she hoped to counter negative discourses about student writers from the ground up while also shifting students' view of the writing center from a place where poor writers go to a place that celebrates and welcomes all student writers.

Like Laura, Karen sought to design a course that encouraged students to engage critically, actively, and purposefully with contemporary theory and to use that theory to consciously shape their engagement with writing center practice. Given the particular context in which she was working, Karen chose to frame the course using the intersections of literacy, education, power, and identity as a critical lens. She chose this particular critical lens because she believed that it would guide students towards critical readings of the relationships between race, racism, and literacy education while still affording them some agency in how such conversations developed. From students in other courses, Karen had gotten a glimpse of the wide range of students' attitudes towards and interest in conversations about race: some students were critically consciousness; others were certainly conscious of racism, but didn't necessarily have a critical vocabulary for discussing it. Some students, often international students, resisted the idea that race shaped their experiences, and still others recognized the impact of race but sometimes tired of talking about it so much. Even this cursory understanding of the diversity of her students' understandings of, experiences with, and critical vocabulary for discussing race convinced Karen she needed a lens that would lead tutors into discussions of race while still giving them considerable flexibility for where those discussions would lead them. At the same time, she wanted her students, as Shannon Carter (2006) writes, to "understand that academic literacy expectations are not natural but rather cultural and thus arbitrary" (46). Such an understanding requires, of course, that tutors turn a critical eye on the very institution in which they are working to succeed and in which they have substantial investments in terms of time, money, and hopes. Karen hoped this lens would help students begin to unpack the often contradictory discourses

of empowerment and shame they (and she) regularly encountered on campus and, more specifically, to recognize and re-evaluate the often racist literacy and language standards they used to judge themselves and their peers.

To that end, Karen began the semester by asking students to engage with a series of readings on discourse and literacy, texts that would frame students' work for the semester. Karen chose not to foreground writing center scholarship in the course in part because her writing center was so skeletal that it hardly resembled the kinds of centers reflected in the scholarship, and she did not wish to spend an inordinate amount of time discussing why that was so. More importantly, she knew her students would rarely find themselves represented in writing center scholarship, which all-too-often locates "diversity" in the students coming to be tutored, not to work as tutors. Karen did not want her students' first impression of writing center scholarship to be one of alienation and invisibility. Instead, she wanted students to engage with writing center theory later in the semester, after already having been introduced to theoretical lenses that would enable them to analyze these kinds of gaps in writing center scholarship. Thus, in the first unit, the class read essays on literacy studies from *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook* (Cushman et al. 2001). As the course proceeded, Karen turned students' attention more explicitly toward writing center theory and practice, asking students to read scholarship by Andrea Lunsford (1991/1992), Marilyn Cooper (1994), Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), and others. During the second half of the semester, Karen worked with students to consider how they might imagine the work of the writing center in ways that built on their previous discussions of discourse and literacy. In turn, students began articulating their own stances, first, through planning and executing a campus-based literacy project designed to engage and begin to change the culture of writing on campus and, second, through their final research papers in which they used their particular university context to ground their engagement with literacy studies and writing center scholarship.

Throughout the semester, Karen worked to position herself as a guide and resource for students, especially as they worked to engage with often dense and layered readings. At the same time, she also responded to students' interests and inquiries, often letting the students steer the class down paths Karen did not anticipate but that proved to be fruitful. The most significant way students' interests shaped the class was their gravitation to James Paul Gee's (2001) work, which they returned to again and

again. Gee defines discourse as "*saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing combinations,*" as "forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes," and as a kind of "identity kit" (526; italics in original). Gee's articulation of discourse as an "identity kit" resonated with Karen's students, who began using it as a framework for unpacking their own experiences between and among family, community, church, peer, work, and academic discourses and discourse communities and the conflicts they sometimes experienced when their multiple discourses converged in particular contexts (i.e., when they used academic-based discourses in their home or peer communities or vice versa). Most of Karen's students were already familiar with the term *code switching*, but Gee's work, especially the concept of discourses as identity kits, helped them understand why, for some of them, code switching doesn't feel "right." Likewise, they found the concept of "mushfaking"— "partial acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to 'make-do'" (533)—useful for explaining their own experiences of performing discourses, academic and otherwise, that they had not yet fully acquired. Finally, they used Gee's work to understand the distinctions between acquisition and learning, and the consequences of acquiring, or not, particular discourses. More importantly to the context of this essay, Gee's work served as an entry point for class discussions about the ways race and racism shape literacy and literacy education and provided students with the lens through which they could examine and denaturalize the standards of literacy and language they were both seeking to meet and struggling against.

For example, in one class meeting students were discussing African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and several students, all speakers of AAVE, described the language as "bad English," "broken English," and "slang." Karen was not surprised by this characterization of AAVE: she'd heard it before from other students at that university. Understandably, students who had spent the better part of their lives being told by educators, family, and society at large that their language is inferior were skeptical of Karen's description of AAVE as a rule-governed version of English no better or worse, linguistically speaking, than "standard" English. Thus, by way of continuing the conversation, Karen asked students to consider why they believe AAVE to be "bad" English, why the language they speak with their families and friends is vilified while the versions of English that Karen, as a white, middle-class woman, speaks with her family and friends is not. These questions and the conversation

that followed prompted students to reconsider the racist attitudes about AAVE that they had accepted uncritically, though Karen certainly did not expect or succeed in convincing her students to champion the linguistic integrity of their own languages in one brief conversation. One student, though, opted to research Black English for her research paper, a choice Karen supported based on the critical pedagogy that framed the class as a whole and encouraged students to claim the agency to combat problematic assumptions. This student drew on the work of scholars such as Geneva Smitherman who provide a linguistic and political re-assessment of AAVE, and on scholars such as Gee who helped her explore the intersections of discourse, dialect, identity, and power. Later in the semester, when a classmate again referred to Black English as "slang," this student, who had voiced similar stances earlier, jumped into the conversation to correct him.

While students were eager to understand how they might analyze their own discourses, literacies, and identities in the context of the theories they had been examining, they were less able to recognize how they read other students' literacies through dominant lenses. As is often the case with novice peer tutors, they challenged dominant standards for literacy and writing in the context of their own experiences, but they had difficulty recognizing how they uncritically applied those same standards in the context of their peers' experiences and writing. Because Karen guessed her tutors might unconsciously enact this sort of double standard when they began working with student writers and their texts, she used an exercise in class she thought would provide her tutors with an opportunity to explore how the intersections of literacy, education, power, and identity shaped not just their own experiences but also how they read and evaluated their peers' writing. Specifically, she asked students to read three samples of student writing from a sociology course, one of the courses they would likely be assigned to work with as tutors the following semester. Judged "strong," "fair," and "poor" by the professor, these writing samples represented the range of writing they would be reading with future students. At this point, her purpose in sharing these texts was not to model tutoring practices. Rather, Karen asked students to describe, as neutrally as possible, what moves each essay was making and to assess where and how each of the essays did or did not accomplish the goals of the assignment.

As Karen anticipated, her students were stumped by the challenge to describe, in nonjudgmental terms, what was actually happening in

the essays. Instead, they quickly began questioning whether the writers of these essays, all of which included use of AAVE to varying degrees, belonged in college and whether they were up to the task of college-level writing. In other words, they moved from describing and analyzing the texts in front of them and, instead, to passing judgment on the writers of the texts; moreover, their critiques rested on the assumptions that AAVE is both a broken form of English and that writers who use AAVE are intellectually inferior. Again, Karen anticipated that this exercise would be a challenge for students, in part because she herself had been similarly challenged by the same exercise during her own tutor education and had repeatedly seen her colleagues, tutors and faculty alike, struggle to put theoretical commitments into practice when confronted with student writing. The exercise and the students' struggle with it thus opened way for a discussion about the extent to which we all have internalized "objective" standards and the extent to which we seek to uphold those standards with respect to others' work as a way of ensuring our own status and position within institutions. At this point, Karen asked students to revisit their conversations about the intersections of literacy, education, and power as a means for analyzing and understanding both their responses to their peers' writing and the gap between their newly emerging theoretical stances and their practice.

While Karen can point to threads such as this one as "success" stories, she nevertheless remains cautious about reading the class as a whole as a success for a number of reasons. First, her caution stems from the fact that the same local conditions that prompted her to pursue external grant funding in the first place resulted in the closure of the writing center entirely and Karen's departure from the university. Karen can certainly speak to the work her students did in conjunction with the two-course sequence she piloted, but she wasn't able to work with students as they brought their developing understandings of the politics of literacy education to bear on individual tutoring situations. Second, and more importantly to the argument of this essay, Karen remains ambivalent about her choice to use literacy and discourse as the primary critical lens of the course. Specifically, she wonders now if she chose this critical lens in part because it allowed her—a professor working in an institutional context that often did not support her pedagogical or administrative initiatives or grant her the authority, as a white person, to teach about race or racism—to rely on students' own experiences and insights as a way to define the boundaries of class discussion. Further, while she can point to

some of the ways her choice of a critical lens was productive for students' learning, she is also haunted by the possibility that her choice allowed her to dodge discussions of concrete instances of racism in lieu of more abstract discussions of discourse and identity. Though Karen has since moved to another university, these misgivings continue to provide her with a framework for assessing both the possibilities and limitations of this particular critical lens, pushing her to consider not just the avenues of analysis and action particular lenses might prompt but also those they might circumvent or stifle. Thus, while she remains committed to the assumptions that ground our work in this chapter, she also continues to struggle to put that vision to work, much as her former students struggled to put their newly developing critical understandings of literacy and discourse to work when they read samples of student writing.

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In our reflections on our experiences working to create antiracist tutor education programs, we have identified some common themes: we cannot escape the ways our institutional contexts shape our work; we are always confronting our assumptions, assumptions that necessarily shape our work; and we are, therefore, always limited by our own abilities at guiding these conversations.

Our hope, nevertheless, has been to encourage directors first to critically examine both our decisions to leave race out of discussions and the moments when race is interjected as a disembodied topic and, second, to use these critical examinations to retheorize our broader goals for tutor education and students' critical engagement and activism in their everyday work. Such retheorizing will require the writing center community to collectively continue to explore many of the questions posed or inspired by other contributors to this collection. What approaches work best in facilitating conversations about race? What function does shame serve in the learning process? How can we rally tutors to organize? How do we develop their critical consciousness? In what ways do we answer these questions differently depending on the racial identities of our students, ourselves?

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7

ORGANIZING FOR ANTIRACISM IN WRITING CENTERS
Principles for Enacting Social Change

Moira Ozias and Beth Godbee

> *A flock of geese can fly up to 1,000 miles without resting whereas a single goose can fly only about 500 miles. The geese nurture, encourage, and support each other to reap collective gains.*
>
> Michael J. Papa, Arvind Singhal, and Wendy H. Papa,
> *Organizing for Social Change*

> *We need to hold ourselves responsible for changing the cultural practices, the institutional conditions, the unconscious habits that contribute to structural oppression.*
>
> Nancy Grimm, *Good Intentions*

Despite an interest in antiracism, those of us in writing centers often have difficulty imagining ways to make broad social change within powerful institutions. The emphasis on individualized instruction can leave us mired in feelings that systematic change lies beyond our power as writers, instructors, researchers, and administrators. Much potential exists, however, for enacting social change, particularly when we acknowledge the necessarily collaborative and complex nature of this work. As the above geese analogy suggests, there is power not only in numbers, but also in shared leadership and collective action. While only one goose leads the V-formation, all members of the flock take turns in leading. The flock works together, conserving energy by shielding each other from wind and elemental forces. This model suggests the importance of careful attention to the group: to building relationships, setting shared goals, working collaboratively, and sharing positions of leadership. Just as geese gain distance by working together (literally by taking

turns in blocking wind resistance), we can also advocate for a more equitable and just community by working as a group. In fact, the geese's V-formation provides a model of collective action used by community organizers that can inform our work in writing centers, providing us with tools to rethink our current practices, to initiate new partnerships, and to put antiracism into practice—not only in our local centers, but in our professional communities as well.

Previous chapters have articulated why antiracism matters to writing centers; why we must work to dismantle institutionalized racism; why those of us in writing centers cannot hide behind rhetoric of a neutral, safe, or value-free space; and why literacy education as the heart of writing center instruction provides the impetus for making change. In this chapter, we align with these imperatives and suggest general principles of organizing that can help us sustain interest, momentum, and action toward antiracism. As Anne Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet (2007) write, "Since writing centers are situated within institutions which are themselves implicated in the power structures that wittingly or unwittingly foster racism, they cannot completely escape resembling and reproducing much of what students of color experience outside our spaces" (92). While we provide conceptual frameworks that can lead to practical implementations for writing centers, we also recognize the importance of working within unique institutional contexts to transform such power structures and the racism they foster. We argue, therefore, that organizing, like writing center work, involves careful attention to local and institutional culture, so that antiracism in writing centers should tap into and work toward the university's mission, campus initiatives, and goals—in addition to revising those aims when they conflict with antiracist visions for change, or when they support institutional conditions that, as Nancy Grimm (1999) describes above, "contribute to structural oppression" (108).

Because of this first principle—that organizing values and responds to local conditions—this chapter offers no step-by-step directions or easy answers; however, we offer a vocabulary and conceptual framework that both describes our everyday activism in writing centers and presents us with challenging, or "wicked," questions for rethinking the work of antiracism. This chapter contributes a bridging of theory—asking largely what it means to organize in writing centers—with practice—considering the implementation of principles not only in our writing centers, but especially within our professional communities. Our aim is to deepen

the dialogue about antiracist activism within writing centers by introducing language, research, and conceptual frameworks from fields with significant bodies of literature on organizing, including social work, communications, and management. In doing so, this chapter introduces those of us in writing centers to discussions from fields generating research in this area and helps move us beyond questions of whether and how we should engage in everyday activism to questions of how to conceptualize, assess, and more thoughtfully name and plan this work so the means (or process) clearly matches the desired ends.

Toward these larger aims, we move through the chapter in three parts. First, we define organizing and answer the question of whether we in writing centers should do this work by showing how we already are. Second, we identify guiding principles consistent with the aims of antiracism as well as the collaborative and dialogic pedagogies of writing centers. Drawing on cross-disciplinary research, we articulate three frameworks for organizing: (1) direct action organizing (Bobo, Kendall, and Max 2001); (2) a balance of strategies and tactics (Alinsky 1945; Mathieu 2005); and (3) a dialectic approach (Papa, Singhal, and Papa 2006). We find the most potential in this third approach, one we see aligned with current research on both writing centers and community organizing and so we focus our discussion here. Finally, to put the principles into action, we analyze an extended case study of our efforts of organizing in professional associations and invite readers to participate in similar analyses of their own local organizing efforts. Here we add participatory action research (Fine and Torre 2006; Greenwood and Levin 2006; Sohng 1995; Weis and Fine 2004) as a method aligned with dialectic organizing to suggest a future direction for assessing our organizing efforts. Participatory action research (PAR), like dialectic organizing, promotes ongoing reflection, horizontal relationship building, and democratic participation, thereby providing the means for antiracist work within one-with-one writing conferences and shared leadership of writing centers.

While we believe organizing can help shape activism across our local contexts, we also recognize that our own experiences and understandings of organizing are framed by our positions as two young, white women, both working in public research universities, and both identifying as tutors and students in addition to administrators. Throughout this chapter, we have woven cases of our activism into the discussion, *not* as representations of how organizing should be done (in fact, any cases as exemplars would fail to represent the potential for organizing across contexts), but instead as

illustrations of the dialectic tensions inherent in organizing. Deeply committed to both antiracism and writing centers, we have been involved over the past few years with activism in our local writing centers, on our campuses, and in writing center professional associations. Together, in collaboration with Frankie Condon, Rasha Diab, Nicole Munday, and others, we have worked to grow the Special Interest Group (SIG) on Antiracist Activism of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and the Midwest Writing Centers Association (MWCA). That work, along with our participation in programs and partnerships at the University of Kansas and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has provided us with a range of experiences and insight. We have found that organizing for antiracism, rather than being ancillary to our work as tutors and administrators, can and should be central to what we already know and call "writing center work." Not only can organizing help us improve the activism we believe is so important in writing centers, but experience itself can also influence what we consider to be the guiding principles of organizing.

When we embark on antiracism, we must be aware of power based on our individual identities: as authors, for example, our shared white privilege may allow us to earn credit for research on antiracism not readily attributed to scholars of color (hooks 2003, 26–27), and so we must advocate against this unjust credit system not only through acknowledging the work of others, but also through troubling unearned privilege.[1] The same is true of collective identities attributed to writing center practitioners: as representatives of the university, we are assumed to regulate academic literacies and White American English,[2] but are also positioned to push against this regulation. Throughout the literature on organizing and PAR, researcher-activists similarly attempt to disrupt

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1. As advocates of tutor research and as tutors ourselves, we believe strongly that scholarship on writing centers must speak to tutors and not only to directors. Organizing in writing centers would certainly entail a collaborative effort among all writing center staff—administrators, tutors, and support staff alike—recognizing that each person contributes to the leadership and direction of the writing center as a whole. Likewise, these values of collaboration and shared leadership in writing centers help direct our attention to the racial identities of potential organizers—of writing center staff members and student writers—who negotiate and redefine what it means for white people to organize with and alongside people of color. In this chapter, we speak to the writing center community at large, inclusive of tutors and writers, and attentive to the lived experiences and understandings of power we each bring to the work of organizing in writing centers.

2. We use this term from sociolinguistics, drawing especially from the work of Geneva Smitherman (1977; 2006), who uses the term as an alternative to "standard English" to highlight the racial and racist projects of which language is a part within the United States of America.

asymmetrical power relations that cast the organizer as leader and the researcher as knowledge broker. Guiding principles for organizing align with antiracism by challenging hierarchical power relations and promoting organizing as the work of all of us. Analysis of power—along with attention to equitable participation, shared leadership, and social justice—contributes to the rationales for and frameworks of organizing that follow.

WHAT IS ORGANIZING, AND WHY SHOULD WE IN WRITING CENTERS DO IT?

When many of us think about organizing, we imagine labor unions, striking autoworkers (or state workers gathered around Wisconsin's capitol), World Bank protests, and picket lines. We may even think of the organizing candidates do as they run for office or the mobilizing special interest groups do as they advocate for legislation in Congress. While these are all instances of organizing, they may not seem closely connected with the everyday, lived experience of writing center workers. But we do organize every day in and out of writing centers, often through habit or daily practice, without realizing or reflecting on our actions. Our systematic planning and strategizing are means of organizing, whether we recognize it or not. We organize when we assemble parts into a whole; when we attempt to make sense of what is disordered, jumbled, or messy; and when we work toward a wholeness that interprets or effects change within the individual pieces. In this sense, organizing in writing centers inevitably encompasses administrative activities such as hiring and scheduling tutors, developing tutor education programs, constructing resource collections, and sharing leadership. It also includes the pedagogical work in one-with-one conferences: enacting reciprocal learning, connecting writers with campus resources, building relationships, and discussing arguments and ideologies in texts. Every day in writing centers, when we talk with writers, record notes from sessions, and design research projects, we are organizing. These endeavors are difficult and fraught with irreconcilable tensions, yet the heart of organizing encompasses *how* we attend to tensions and paradoxes. While it is true that we are always already organizing—as tutors, administrators, and researchers—we must dig deeper to understand how organizing arranges our lives in ways that, when unreflected, can support the status quo, but when intentional and thoughtful, can also work against oppressive structures. We need to ask who is organizing, and for what intended and unintended purposes.

As authors, we recognize that "the ends" of organizing will vary, but we also believe that attempts to articulate those ends and to reflect on them will benefit us all. In writing centers, organizing for antiracism means *working against* and disrupting institutionalized racism as it shapes our interactions among writing center staff, with student writers, and in collaboration with other members of our campus communities; it also means *working toward* and seeking writing centers that reflect socially just ways of knowing, embrace critical questioning, and value the strengths of all of us. How we understand these notions of *working against* and *working toward* differ, but exploring the tensions—openly, as a staff—is not only a productive first step toward thoughtful organizing, but also a reminder of the connections between organizing and writing centers, as the questions are largely the same:

- Must the path toward change (or revision) include conflict, or can parties (writers and tutors) come to a mutually agreeable and beneficial consensus?

- Can we articulate universal principles for organizing (or writing), or must all organizing be context specific and context bound?

- Are professional or expert organizers (tutors) necessary for effective practice?

- Must all groups (or writing center staffs) be multiracial, or is there a place for racially homogenous groups to organize against racism?

These praxis tensions—conflict versus consensus, universal principles versus context-sensitive action, professionalization versus grassroots and ground-up leadership, coalition versus caucus membership—are familiar to us in writing centers, as our literature echoes these questions about participation, leadership, professionalization, and integration. We find that in the organizing literature, just as in literature on writing centers, questions such as these are more than theoretical; they also guide and are refined by practice. Further, they help connect what are often considered separate spheres of action: schools and communities. Organizing, like leadership itself, offers all of us in writing centers— directors, tutors, staff members, and writers who visit our centers—the potential for working against oppression and contributing to a just and equitable world, in and out of the writing center, however we collectively envision it. Organizing itself becomes part of the work of antiracism,

and so antiracist organizing must draw on the values, practices, and ideals of anti-oppressive and liberatory work.

In the next section, we present three frameworks of organizing that we see as compatible, although to differing degrees, with the aims of antiracism in writing centers. Any theory of organizing, like any definition of social change or antiracism, we believe, must be rooted in reflective action—a blending of reflection and action, theory and practice. Many times what can keep us from acting is a belief that we don't know enough, that we need to read more or educate ourselves before stepping into the work. While organizing should be thoughtful and systematic, we also worry that when reflection prohibits action, we fall into familiar patterns that reinforce the status quo, thereby organizing without intentional effort at antiracism. This additional tension between reflection and action motivates us to articulate principles of organizing, which provide us with ways of understanding our actions—more than a "how to" guide—toward critically articulating and making use of the dialectic tensions that drive our everyday work. In this way, we contribute to an understanding of writing center work as everyday leadership (Geller et al. 2005), within a new conceptual framework (Grimm 2009), and as enacted through identity politics (Denny 2010).

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZING FOR ANTIRACISM IN WRITING CENTERS

Many organizers ground their work in the focused and pragmatic strategies of direct action organizing, as practiced and outlined by Saul Alinsky, a labor organizer who first organized workers in Chicago's Back of the Yards district in the 1930s. Others find it helpful to balance strategies and tactics—to focus simultaneously on long-term and short-term goals with multiple institutionalized and improvisational ways of making change. Still others, such as Michael J. Papa, Arvind Singhal, and Wendy H. Papa (2006), advocate a "dialectic approach" based on complexity science and the notion that organizing is always nonlinear, contradictory, paradoxical, and messy, much like the literacy work that happens in writing centers themselves.

Of these three frameworks for organizing, we find dialectic organizing the most provocative and promising framework for understanding antiracism in writing centers. This framework is cumulative in that it allows for direct action as well as strategies and tactics, while simultaneously asking us to recognize the necessarily complicated nature of this

work. In what follows, we review these three frameworks, building to an argument for dialectic organizing and providing illustrations of its usefulness in writing centers working toward antiracism.

Framework 1: Direct Action Organizing

Perhaps the most commonly acknowledged framework, direct action organizing brings people together to address an immediate problem. As explained by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max (2001), authors of *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, activists who operate within this understanding identify a problem; agree on a solution; and draw on the strength of their numbers to pressure particular people, such as politicians, elected officials, or administrators, to implement change (11). Because of the focus on working through established institutional channels, the framework of direct action responds best to problems with specific, policy-driven solutions. In the case of antiracism, then, direct action organizing requires advocates to identify specific incidents or tangible parts of the much larger problem of institutionalized racism.[3]

Such an approach works well for addressing overt racism, including discrimination, hate speech, and prejudice in hiring, but is often inadequate to the task of undoing a university culture infused with whiteness and white supremacy that operate in often covert and implicit ways. The direct action framework focuses not necessarily on means, but on particular ends, which allow organizations and campaigns to declare success at having achieved their proposed solutions even when other dimensions of racial oppression remain culturally ingrained and unmoved, even within the organizations working for change.

Direct action organizing taps into what many of us in writing centers already do on a regular basis: planning campaigns to raise awareness around writing or some writing-related issue and building partnerships across our campuses and in surrounding communities. From our own writing centers, we see that direct action often provides the most clearly definable antiracist efforts. An example comes from the collaboration of UW-Madison's Community Writing Assistance (CWA) program

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3. A direct action approach involves a careful planning process of identifying goals, constituents, allies, opponents, targets, and tactics (Bobo, Kendall, and Max 2001, 33). The manual of the Midwest Academy describes three guiding principles for taking such action: first, efforts should be aimed at gaining immediate, concrete improvements in people's lives; second, people should gain a sense of their own power; and third, the organizing itself should alter power relations (11–12).

with community partners to offer a grant-writing workshop for members of neighborhood and nonprofit organizations in South Madison, a racially diverse quadrant of the city with low-income families and mixed-income housing. The CWA program was invited to partner with a number of area organizations, including the City of Madison Weed and Seed, Grassroots Leadership College, and South Metropolitan Planning Council, who collectively identified a problem—that people from the South Madison communities were frequently not submitting community-improvement grants or not being approved for grant money, while other neighborhoods, particularly those with more money and predominantly white residents, applied for and received grants annually. The workshop was an immediate solution to distribute information about local grant opportunities, to share insight into grant writing, to analyze successful grant applications, and to offer feedback on community members' proposals.

While we have yet to see the outcome of this workshop, the idea behind it matches direct action organizing, as organizers identified a problem, proposed a solution, and then strategized a set of tactics to reach the end goal—a fairly linear process that highlights the tension of organizing as both a process and an end product. Partnering organizations worked together, and different constituents from the writing center, including tutors and a director, were involved in planning, publicizing, and teaching the workshop. The same problem might have led (or might lead in the future) to alternative solutions, such as advocating for the granting organizations to alter their evaluation criteria, or to ensure that the South Madison community receives a grant annually. With the problem of inequitable access to and distribution of grants, varied solutions could arise, but one way of understanding the action of any group working toward a particular solution is direct action organizing.

Framework 2: Balance of Strategies and Tactics

Many organizers also depend on distinctions between strategies and tactics to guide them through planning for both long-term, long-reaching and short-term, immediate change. Alinsky, for instance, distinguishes strategies as overarching plans from tactics as deliberate acts, or "doing what you can with what you have" (1971, 126). The Midwest Academy similarly defines strategies as an overall design for building power and tactics as particular ways to make a group's power felt, such as through protest, petition, or other display of numbers (Bobo, Kendall,

and Max 2001, 31–33). A strategy, therefore, might involve the campaign's mission or the commitment to nonviolent protest, while tactics might include e-mailing petitions, planning teach-ins, and picketing a campus common area. This distinction between long-term planning strategies and more immediate tactics presents organizing work as linear and programmatic. Inputs produce outputs. Working social and political networks to make change is often more complicated, however. The common reliance on measures of time or scale as the primary distinctions between strategies and tactics downplays what we see as more complicated negotiations between working strategically (positioned within organizations) and tactically (disrupting from outside). Rather, negotiating the apparent binary of strategies and tactics includes recognizing a range of personal, political, and institutional dimensions that also play roles in organizers' planning and action.

Paula Mathieu (2005) deepens and complicates scalable notions of strategies and tactics, helping university people understand the political and social nature of working strategically as well as tactically for transformation and change. For Mathieu, strategies are more than ways of working toward long-term, programmatic goals; they are rooted in Western notions of property, and, therefore, control practices and relationships in order to "minimize temporal uncertainty." Strategies are made possible by what Mathieu calls a "victory of space over time" (16), as strategies help to create a sense of stability that relies on measurability (showing success or improvement over time) and rationality (assessing means as logical to the overall aims). More than simply working toward long-term goals, strategic thinking is affiliated with and often occurs within organizational space, so strategies themselves are often symbolic of the slow change that characterizes organizations like our educational institutions.

Mathieu (2005) helps us understand that organizers must also work from a place that "belongs to the other," engaging in tactical thinking from outside the organization. Drawing from Michel de Certeau, Mathieu writes that tactics take advantage of "opportunities" and depend on "a clever utilization of time, the opportunities it presents and also the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (16). Tactics, then, allow people not only to gain power in places belonging to others, but also to seize the moments for which strategic planning cannot account. As much as bureaucracy organizes our lives, it cannot account for the totality of our time and work, nor should it, as Anne Geller (2005) asserts in "Tick-Tock, Next." Writing centers are uniquely positioned to work simultaneously as

institutional agents and amplifiers to "turn up the volume"—the "noise" (Boquet 2002, 67)—of students, staff, and community members who remain un(der)served and oppressed by racism. As Elizabeth Boquet emphasizes, making noise can involve one person, or "it can also be a many-person undertaking. And the many-person version is quite likely to yield different results" (60). By doing what we in writing centers do best—collaborating—we can work strategically and tactically, with students, faculty, and administrators to first amplify the noise of racism and then (re)organize the systems of which we are all a part.

The multiple or dual approach implied within a negotiation of strategies and tactics leads us to conduct organizing through a combined approach of collaboratively planning long-term, structural change as well as watching for daily, unexpected opportunities. Programs of consciousness raising (and *conscientization*) usually occur both strategically and tactically through a multitiered approach of disseminating information and engaging in dialogues, both planned and spontaneous. For example, tutor leaders at the University of Kansas planned education curricula around building an awareness of how race and privilege affect tutoring practices. While the regular staff meetings provided opportunity to structure readings and discussions, "downtime" conversations provided unstructured time for talk. One white tutor was especially troubled by a reading on privilege, claiming that the methodology the author used could not prove racism as the cause of customers' differential treatment in retail stores. After the formal meeting, another white tutor seized an opportunity in the breakroom to describe how she saw this racist treatment of her partner, a black man, every day in stores, on the streets, and at school. This consultant seized a tactical opportunity and took a risk to speak what she knew to be true to another consultant. Together, they worked toward a better understanding, uncomfortable and imperfect as the process was, of how students and tutors of color at KU may feel spending time in a writing center with a mostly white staff. While tutors were already working strategically—intentionally building readings and conversations about racism into staff meetings—the learning opportunity was enhanced by the ability to work tactically, to seize those moments when challenging questions are asked or difficult situations arise. Directors can increase the likelihood of such tactical conversations by hiring a staff with diverse racial identities and experiences and by building conversational "downtime" into tutors' schedules.

In negotiating the apparent binary of strategies and tactics to organize for antiracism, we also encounter other apparent binaries: inside/outside, short term/long term, small scale/large scale, and planned/spontaneous. Like the balance of strategies and tactics, what may at first appear to be an oppositional dichotomy can often be recast as a productive dialectical tension. Writing center practitioners are prepared for negotiating these dialectical tensions; our discipline offers us experience in thinking about the tensions between peer/expert, process/product, nondirective/directive, global/local concerns, and writer/writing. As practitioner-researchers skilled at resisting and negotiating oppositional and paradoxical thinking, we have much to learn from a framework of dialectical organizing, which helps us re-see the principles of direct action and a balance of strategies and tactics in more complicated and contradictory ways.

Framework 3: A Dialectic Approach

In *Organizing for Social Change: A Dialectic Journey of Theory and Praxis*, communication scholars Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that organizing, as a human activity that is simultaneously individual and social, is also inherently dialectical. As recognized through the negotiation of strategies and tactics, dialectical nuances characterize the work of organizing, as well as writing centers. After all, as Harry Denny (2010) describes in *Facing the Center*, "Writing centers make local, material, and individual all the larger forces at play that confound, impede, and make possible education in institutions" (6). Just as new writing center tutors and administrators may work toward simplification and "neatness" in our work, those new to organizing may also want to resolve tensions that arise in the process of organizing. Aiming toward such resolution, however, fails to acknowledge the complex nature of social systems and organizations, as well as teaching and learning. For example, when working toward antiracism in writing centers, we may wait to take action until we have devised a fully participatory organizational structure. Not only does this postpone our action, but it may also increase the work that needs to be done. While we aspire for full democratic participation, we should also recognize that autocratic pressures may mount over time. Rather than being dissatisfied with rising tensions or noting them as weaknesses in our organizing, a dialectic approach asks us to recognize tensions as evidence of change and to work within them to further the process. Unlike the direct action approach that promotes articulation of

a policy-driven problem and solution, the dialectic framework emphasizes the paradoxical nature of both means and ends, which are inextricably linked within dialectic organizing.

Such a dialectic approach to organizing recognizes the realities of making change within our social world; it also provides us a lens with which to view organizing that is congruent with writing center pedagogies. As Boquet (2002) articulates in *Noise from the Writing Center*, "Order develops out of chaos, not through the elimination of it. Moments that threaten the stability of a system are also moments that may, in the words of information theorist Eric White, 'provoke systemic transformation'" (51). Further, Boquet argues that for the writing center "to function as an apparatus of educational transformation," we must "imagine a liminal zone where chaos and order coexist" (84). Writing center directors and tutors embrace the chaotic endeavor of collaboration, entering into the dialectical tensions laid bare in this relational work. Andrea Lunsford (2001, 96) and others note that centers based on collaboration do not present easy models, rather more difficult but potentially more just models of writing centers. Like Lunsford, Grimm (1999) theorizes writing centers "in which accommodation is mutual and personally transformative, in which history does not have to be erased and systems become more flexible" (xvi). "To change a worldview," she says, "one needs to find and name its contradictions, to locate the places where it leaks" (92). In these leakages, the noise breaks through. Tutors, writers, and directors alike have to grapple with the chaos, with the dialectic tensions. In these articulations of writing centers and writing center pedagogy, scholars recognize the value of uncovering dialectic tensions and negotiating rather than eliminating or silencing them. Dialectic organizing requires many of these same abilities: to suspend judgment, listen deeply, look for the unseen, and recognize our own positions and assumptions. As tutors, we all do this daily. As administrators, we try.

Four of the many tensions that characterize writing centers and organizing efforts are the focus of Papa, Singhal, and Papa's (2006) research of organizing for social change: control and emancipation, oppression and empowerment, dissemination and dialogue, and fragmentation and unity. These dialectics do not represent either/or choices, but the mutual existence of seemingly incompatible parts that nonetheless depend on one another. Papa, Singhal, and Papa remind us that even as we are working toward one end of the dialectic—for example, the emancipation of Bangladeshi women from poverty through microlending

from the Grameen Bank—we inevitably draw on the other end—by also exerting control over the lives of borrowers who work together to determine social criteria for bank membership. The dialectic represents a scenario in which two components may be reconciled into one unified whole, as in the example of reflective action, in which thought and action can be brought together, *or* in which the two coexist or exist at odds with each other, as in the example of oppression and empowerment or the earlier framework of strategies and tactics. To make change within complex organizations, it is helpful to use the principles Papa, Singhal, and Papa find representative of complexity science: (1) mutual causality, (2) the butterfly effect, (3) valuing outliers and positive deviance, and (4) celebrating paradoxes by asking wicked questions. Because we see a direct correlation between dialectic organizing and antiracism, we now describe each of these principles with examples of how they might operate in writing centers and in our professional community.

Mutual Causality

First, the concept of mutual causality can be seen whenever we work toward change in one way or on one issue and find that we are simultaneously influencing other issues and areas of people's lives. An example in community organizing comes from the Carter Center's involvement in the Sudan and Uganda since the late 1970s, when efforts to eradicate guinea worm disease brought leaders together and allowed for peace negotiations. We can also recognize such mutual causality on our campuses when in advocating for an increased student voice in departmental decisions, opportunities also open for increased talk about writing in or across disciplines. Much of the work we do in writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing center outreach programs can result in mutual causality. Every semester the UW-Madison WAC program distributes a newsletter to faculty and teaching assistants across campus. While this newsletter supports the aims of WAC by bringing attention to writing, providing support for writing instruction, and also highlighting instructors' innovative teaching, it also allows the program directors to act as student advocates—encouraging fair grading criteria, seeking student input into course design, and recommending one-with-one conferencing. In a recent themed newsletter on "writing with an accent," the assistant director distributed information to instructors across campus about English language learning (ELL) and the difficulties many multilingual writers who are also students of color face in writing assignments. Rather

than present student writers within a deficit model that puts the burden of change on them, the newsletter focused on educating and asking instructors to rethink their expectations and interactions with multilingual writers. As a form of mutual causality, the newsletter furthered the aims of WAC, building bridges across disciplines, while also addressing one type of racism we see on our campuses through the stereotyping, Othering, and subsequent harsh evaluations of many multilingual writers. This example, we believe, shows how mutual causality results not only in multiple organizational benefits, but also in the overlap of anti-oppressive organizing. As we participate in antiracism, for instance, we are also working against colonization, nationalism, and other oppressive forces shaping our institutional lives.

The Butterfly Effect

Wisdom embodied in the "butterfly effect" urges us to value small contributions: a butterfly that flaps its wings in Peru, it is said, can affect the weather in Colorado. Put more prosaically, "Small changes in input conditions, when sustained over time, can often cause cascading huge effects" (Papa, Singhal, and Papa 2006, 236). Because social systems are complex and adaptive, variables are rarely independent or dependent; rather, they are simultaneously both. While the butterfly effect seems to privilege causality, for organizers its value lies in helping us attend to small moments. When looking backward, we may never truly know that one decision led directly to a corollary outcome. When we trace change back to small moments, however, we see that the choices we make in them contribute to larger currents that hold the possibility for change. As an organizing tool, the butterfly effect gives us a model for thinking about the far-reaching influence of small, everyday moments in larger social-change work.

Acknowledging such conditions can help us celebrate small gains. In the KU Writing Center, for example, we have found that when tutors of color work in a predominantly white writing center, the daily work and talk changes. Whether the consultant is a Middle Eastern man or an Asian or African American woman, other staff in the center are suddenly faced with difficult decisions, such as what to do when visiting writers refuse to work with these consultants or question their credentials and experience. The group also has to change its ways of talking about multilingual writers or "underprepared students" when "they" become "us." Sometimes all it takes is a welcoming smile to a visiting writer, a small conversation, and

encouragement to apply for a position. The effects on how the center engages students in learning can be profound. The butterfly effect, then, encourages us to acknowledge the significance of single acts and how these acts can inspire, call to action, and grow movements toward change. We might ask retrospective questions: What if Ghandi had never read Thoreau's work? Would members of the UW-Madison Writing Center have formed a Social Justice Committee if Victor Villanueva had not spoken at the 2005 IWCA/NCPTW Conference? How would our lives be different if we had not been involved and influenced by others dedicated to antiracism? No matter what we name as the flap of the butterfly's wings, we see that small contributions and decisions have decidedly far-reaching effects, and our daily work can be enriched by looking for small, micro-level ways to effect change.

Valuing Outliers and Positive Deviance

Like the principles of mutual causality and the butterfly effect, which ask organizers to make small changes and to value action that has already taken place, the practice of valuing outliers allows communities to find internal solutions to their problems without requiring outside resources. Also called positive deviance, this principle asks communities to recognize the small, unacknowledged pockets of positive practices and then to build on this local wisdom to make broader change. An example comes from Vietnam, where in the 1990s many children were malnourished. Rather than looking for knowledge and resources outside the community, organizers identified those families who avoided malnourishment and learned they were foraging for shrimp and adding sweet potato greens to their meals—positive practices that were subsequently shared with all community members (Papa, Singhal, and Papa 2006, 238–239). Using the positive deviance approach, organizers worked to identify positive deviants in the community and to make them "visible and actionable" (239). By valuing outliers and positive deviance, groups can make change by building on their strengths, even if these strengths are commonly acknowledged as strange, or unacknowledged altogether.

Consider, for example, what has happened at KU as we have hired more multilingual writers as consultants. As we see how these tutors work effectively with other multilingual writers, consultants have begun to learn how silence in a session can be profoundly productive or how allowing a writer to brainstorm in her native language can spur revision.

While research may indicate that these practices are helpful, tutors give a different kind of hearing and imagination to practices they see themselves in their own centers. As these multilingual consultants take on leadership and teaching roles, racist hierarchies that our writing center inherited from our surrounding campus community suddenly turn on their heads. The same "they/us/we/them" now scratches throats; its contradiction highlights the racism and language privilege in writing center talk. Similarly, attention to friendship networks, to successful multiracial tutoring relationships, and to collaborations that surprise or challenge our usual patterns of interaction can help us recognize positive deviance. Acknowledging and then tapping into these outlying practices can suggest pathways for change.

Celebrating Paradoxes

In addition to recognizing hidden strengths and positive deviance, we can celebrate paradoxes that suggest change in complex social systems. Such paradoxes as the simultaneous need for "centralized coordination and decentralized initiatives" and the need to "foster team building and reward individual achievement" (Papa, Singhal, and Papa 2006, 241) are unavoidable and present opportunities for creative and innovative change solutions. To become more adaptive and to continue ongoing learning and growth, we might draw strength from opposing ideas through critical questioning, creative problem solving, and deeper learning by posing wicked questions—or those questions that have no obvious answers but that "help expose people's straight-jacketed assumptions about an issue, context, or situation" (242). Such questions might include how can we chart a course for the future when we don't know what's to come? Or how can we be both a system and many independent parts? Or how can we, as writing centers, be both an integral part of our larger institution and provide an alternative to it? Those of us who embark on antiracism may also ask wicked questions that tap into the four dialectics that Papa, Singhal, and Papa claim are central to any organizing work: control and emancipation, oppression and empowerment, dissemination and dialogue, and fragmentation and unity. Discussion and action based on questions expose assumptions and open opportunities for imagining new ways forward.

An example from our own experience comes from a year-long discussion about the name and mission of the Social Justice Committee (formerly the Inclusivity Committee) at UW-Madison. The committee,

which sponsors monthly article discussions, creative workshops, community participation, and other activities, was started in part to sustain conversations around race and racism in addition to other anti-oppression work. When the group began in 2005, following Villanueva's keynote address, it was called the "inclusivity committee," but writing center staff members quickly began asking what we might consider wicked questions: Who is excluded by an inclusive model? Where are boundaries or borders of inclusion? By assuming the inclusive model, the committee also tacitly communicated that what needed to be changed was membership rather than culture. Some group members argued that the inclusivity model acknowledged the power of some of us (for example, to extend inclusive membership), but failed to question how our daily spaces, practices, and habits of being might need to be changed. From these conversations, we decided as a group to rename the committee to represent both its broad scope and the aims of what we are working toward: social justice.

"Wicked questions," those with "an embedded paradox or tension" (Papa, Singhal, and Papa 2006, 242), remind us of the kind of Trickster mindfulness that Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet (2005) ask writing center practitioners to adopt. In *The Everyday Writing Center*, the authors describe Trickster moments as "joint-disturbing:" "Trickster toys with some of our most sacred binaries: certainty and uncertainty; knowledge and ignorance; change and stability; boundaries and fluidity," and in doing so, exposes our complicity and potential to challenge institutional practices (27–28). Trickster, then, toys with many of the dialectic tensions that organizers embrace in order to create social change. By asking wicked questions, organizers can seize Trickster moments, exposing the cracks between binaries and the gaps between reified policy and real practice. Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet call us to embrace uncertainty in an effort to challenge ourselves toward more responsible writing center practice. We hear Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) echoing this call as they ask organizers to recognize mutual causality, understand the butterfly effect, build on positive deviance, and celebrate paradoxes. These principles invite—even demand—our joining together to do the hard work of imagining, creating, and acting for change. We now turn to a case that illustrates the potential of dialectic organizing—more than direct action organizing or the balance of strategies and tactics—to facilitate reflection and collaborative knowledge construction as we organize for antiracism in writing centers.

CASE STUDY FOR ENACTING PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZING

As a way to consider enacting the principles of dialectic organizing, we turn now to an extended case study of our work with the IWCA and MWCA Special Interest Group (SIG) on Antiracist Activism. This cross institutional initiative, we believe, speaks to the value of guiding principles for organizing both across and within unique institutional cultures. In many ways the formation of the SIG itself represents direct action organizing. Members of our professional associations identified a lack of discreet space for talk about matters of race and racism, prompting the creation of the SIG as just such a place: a place to talk openly about challenges members face on their own campuses and matters of racism at the regional, national, and international levels. Along the way, members proposed two projects that would bring the group together to work on making concrete changes. The first project seeks to connect under-funded urban high schools that are chronically under serving African American and Latino/a students with college writing centers, which might provide resources and a pathway to college (and to writing center work) for many students. The second project—relationship building between the MWCA and tribal colleges in the region—would similarly provoke the association to rethink many of its core assumptions and constituencies. We understood that MWCA itself would need to change in order to become a more open and trust-worthy organization for tribal colleges, so we talked about learning from tribal colleges by attending their conferences.

All three of these initiatives—the creation of the SIG itself and the proposals to create collaborations with high schools and to build relationships with tribal colleges—draw on direct action strategies. Organizers identify a particular policy, practice, or situation that needs change; then propose a policy-driven, tangible solution; and finally work toward the achievement of that plan. While these strategies represent a start, we think a dialectic approach toward organizing for antiracism would (and will) offer the groups more creative and effective means toward making change at the local, regional, and national levels. Direct action can certainly occur in conjunction with dialectic organizing, but the dialectic conceives of antiracism as everyday work in addition to planned campaigns. By cultivating dialectic thinking and acting, the SIG will be reinvigorated and strengthened as we work toward fostering more equitable writing center cultures and practices.

One risk an organization with an overwhelmingly white membership runs as it embarks on antiracism is the risk of perpetuating oppression

by taking a paternalistic stance toward the Other. While direct action organizers would not advocate such a stance, a focus on direct action can open the possibilities of "doing for" and "doing to" rather than "doing with." As members of the MWCA SIG have talked formally and informally about potential projects, wicked questions of "why" often arise. Why should the organization encourage more students of color from urban high schools to work in writing centers? Why should the organization connect with students and faculty at tribal colleges? It does not suffice to say these projects will "make our organization more diverse." When we strive for a more racially diverse membership without interrogating how our organization came to be so racially homogenous in the first place, and without asking why it remains that way, we put the responsibility for organizational change on new members, rather than on those of us who have, over time, made the organization into what it is today. As relatively long-time members of MWCA and IWCA, we take responsibility for contributing to the current culture of these organizations and the ways they close off spaces for tutors, directors, and scholars of color. We think a dialectic approach to organizing helps us remain aware of these challenges and tensions as we work to organize against racism in all its forms. For this reason, we turn now to the possibilities offered by the dialectic approach, drawing on mutual causality, the butterfly effect, valuing outliers, and celebrating paradoxes. This analysis, we hope, illustrates how models can help us imagine new futures and ways of working toward them with socially just means, means that can be adapted and revised in varied local contexts.

While the principles of mutual causality and the butterfly effect may seem easier to apply in retrospect than to use as a future-focused strategy, they can help us cultivate a radical sense of hope that our work will result in change, whether we see it immediately or not. To understand mutual causality, we might look to the potential of our work to effect change in multiple arenas: for example, to recognize a range of oppressions—sexism, heterosexism, classism, and others—overlapping within racism. As we are engaged in antiracism, we are often working against other oppressions as well, so the principle of mutual causality can help us see that our activism need not conflict with social justice more broadly. As we attend to injustices in our centers and organizations, we may find partners and build momentum by identifying those who are working against these other oppressions—for example, by partnering with the LGBTQ SIG that has formed within IWCA. In working toward social justice, however, it

becomes important to name each oppression, giving voice and legitimacy to the lives of people who experience them differently. Otherwise we run the risk of reproducing the "new racism" that Villanueva described in his IWCA keynote and subsequent article (2006). When applying the principle of the butterfly effect to our thinking about antiracist organizing, we can recognize that our actions can result in changes we might not have predicted. We can use a historical perspective to help us see what events, situations, and strategies have been most far reaching. For example, we know now that Victor Villanueva's IWCA keynote resulted in many conversations, projects, and SIG meetings, which together have created spaces in which writing center practitioners can talk about issues of racism. We can also tell you that Frankie Condon's work on race influenced both of us to begin interrogating these issues for ourselves: with a simple e-mail, she and Michele Eodice put us in touch with one another, and the effects on our personal and professional lives cannot be overstated. An e-mail. Putting two colleagues in touch with one another. And before we knew it, we were imagining and planning a SIG and an article.

Just as important as seeking socially just and effective ends are the means by which they are sought. By valuing outliers and celebrating paradoxes, those of us in writing centers can access and build on creative and innovative strengths we previously overlooked. If our SIG were to apply the principle of valuing outliers to the projects of recruiting students from underserved urban high schools and building relationships with tribal colleges, we might ask ourselves these questions: Where are these collaborations already happening? What writing centers have formed strong relationships with urban high schools? What writing centers have already begun to build relationships with tribal colleges, and how have these partnerships emerged? What student services or academic programs on our campuses have been successful in reaching First Nations students? Rather than looking outside our communities for knowledge or resources to make change, we can look at what we are already doing well and build on those strengths. We can also strengthen our organizations by celebrating the paradoxes in our work. Wicked questions can be raised in strategic ways, in board meetings and planning committees, and also in tactical ways, taking advantage of informal conversations. Celebrating paradoxes involves the inevitable push and pull of dialectical tensions, but explores them in such a way that the creative and innovative possibility of our organizations can be leveraged for antiracism.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The questions and tensions revealed by a dialectic approach to organizing suggest the importance of participatory action research (PAR) for ongoing reflection and partnership in knowledge creation with all stakeholders. PAR is both a qualitative research method and a theoretical perspective that has historically developed adjacent to community organizing; its origins can be traced to community organizer Kurt Lewin in the United States and to theorists and practitioners Orlando Fals Borda, Paulo Freire, and Ignacio Martín-Baró in South America (Weis and Fine 2004, 96–97). More recently, educator-researchers such as Sung Sil Lee Sohng (1995), Robin McTaggart (1997), Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin (2006), Michelle Fine (2006) working with Lois Weis (2004) and María Elena Torre (2006), and others call for PAR as a way to share power, learn together, and dismantle oppressive systems, replacing them with more participatory and democratic governance and culture. PAR asks institutionally recognized researchers to collaborate with folks whose expertise goes unrecognized by the institutions with which their lives intersect. In this way it extends the impetus of that strand of writing center scholarship that seeks to highlight and draw from the expertise of peer tutors (e.g., Brown, Fallon, Lot, Matthews, and Mintie 2007; Fallon 2010; Fels 2010) and promotes cross racial, cross status research toward antiracism. Further, it is aimed not only at generating new knowledge but also at making change, as the "action" part of "participatory action research" requires participant-researchers to bring about change based on what is discovered through the research process.

Rather than assuming we are moving forward and doing "good work" because we have "good intentions" (remembering Nancy Grimm's [1999] warning for all of us in writing centers), PAR provides us with tools and a critical lens for viewing the work of the SIG, and more broadly, our writing center organizations, local efforts, and one-with-one conferencing. Both organizing and PAR offer a dialectic approach and the following concrete guidelines for planning and assessing our everyday work:

- developing both immediate and long-term approaches to antiracist social change,
- attending to both local/contextual and general/systematic inequalities,
- valuing individual and group well-being for both personal and social transformation.

Rather than all of us following the same step-by-step movements, PAR suggests we attend to local contexts and engage in dialectic thinking in partnership with all those influenced by our institutional spaces (i.e., campus and community writing centers). PAR embraces action and reflection, dissolves distinctions between expert and novice, and asks us to reimagine the relationship between research and justice, thereby challenging us to thinking dialectically.

As we consider undertaking PAR within the SIG, we ask the following questions: Who produces knowledge and for whose interests? How can we redefine expertise so that it is shared and leveraged toward action? What PAR projects are important not only to those of us in writing centers but also to our community and campus partners? What work might, could, or must be done independently, and what must be done collectively? As the research method perhaps most closely aligned with social movements, PAR can provide us with knowledge needed as the SIG moves forward with not only direct action but especially dialectic organizing toward antiracism. As with organizing, the processes of participatory research are neither easy nor comfortable, but others have gone before us in doing such work. By focusing on PAR as participation, action, and knowledge for the sake of doing, we are better able to work toward solutions to the complex problem of racism.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

PAR is both learning and action. So is organizing. And so is writing center work: one-with-one conferencing, mentoring, planning, and directing. All of us in writing centers bear responsibility for enacting change; we are leaders in shaping the world around us, as it is and as it ought to be (Branch 2007). We acknowledge that we are always already organizing as we talk with writers, facilitate workshops, promote writing across the curriculum, and plan staff education. We are organizing in our everyday lives in and out of writing centers, but we must ask ourselves toward what ends and through what means. To invoke educator-activists Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990), who themselves draw on Latin American author Antonio Machado: "We make the road by walking." We learn the work of antiracism by doing it. What this means for us in writing centers is that we need to seek socially just ways of knowing, talking, and writing together. We can learn from direct action, a balance of strategies and tactics, and certainly a dialectic approach to organizing. We can also use PAR to challenge conventional knowledge production and

to take action while learning. While these frameworks can help us move forward, we must take the risk of moving into discomfort and welcoming change, especially the kind that cannot be predicted by an instruction or training manual. Dialectic ways of knowing, learning, and building relationships will help us amplify the noise of racial oppression only if we recognize the tensions and leakages that can become sites of systemic and educational transformation.

Organizing for antiracism in writing centers is a complex process, but we are reminded of the flying geese and the strength they gain from shared leadership and collective action. When working together, the action involved in antiracism becomes invigorating: we find that the more we throw ourselves into organizing, the more we are inspired to continue this work. We learn to see new ways of acting that change not only our organizational approaches to antiracism, but also our lived, everyday interactions in and out of the writing center. Through enacting socially just means, we can learn to be in relation with others in more equitable and genuine ways, thereby becoming the change we want to see in the world. After all, organizing is not just about making social and political change; it is also about helping people, organizations, and communities reach our full human potential.

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THREE

Research, Critical Case Studies, and the Messiness of Practice

8

BIAS IN THE WRITING CENTER
Tutor Perceptions of African American Language

Nancy Effinger Wilson

> *Those who control political power also influence the standards by which languages are judged, supported, and advanced within educational academies.*
>
> John Baugh, *Beyond Ebonics*

In *The Study of Literature*, George Watson (1968) notes that "Tibetan tea, which is partly composed of rancid butter, is revolting to Western tastes if considered as tea but acceptable if considered as soup" (73). Watson uses this example as commentary on the influence of reader expectation upon reader reaction. It is also an apt corollary to my discussion of African American Language (AAL) in that the westerners' taxonomy for what tea *should be* shapes their reaction to alternatives (note that they find the tea not simply different but "disgusting") just as a belief in what English *should be* has, at least in the past, shaped educators' reactions to AAL (also found not simply different but "ignorant").

The success of academics such as Geneva Smitherman, H. Samy Alim, and bell hooks, who all use AAL in their scholarly writing, suggests that the academy has budged somewhat in its stigmatization of AAL. Certainly the increase in research into AAL is an encouraging sign. As a writing center director, I was particularly curious if tutors, so often portrayed as interlocutors who shuttle between the academy and the student population with openness and acceptance, recognize and acknowledge AAL as a valid English.

To tease out tutor attitudes toward AAL, I surveyed 144 faculty members and tutors, asking them to rate the extent to which various sentences bothered them (a rating of one signified "not at all bothersome" and five "extremely bothersome") and to comment on those rankings.

Five of the fifteen sentences included AAL markers; five included bound-ary violations, wrong word, and punctuation errors; and five included language use typical of certain English Language Learners (ELL), such as missing articles and syntax problems (see table 1).

Although ratings often differed significantly between participants, when analyzed in conjunction with participant comments, certain pat-terns surfaced, most notably a clear bias against AAL. Even more alarm-ing, AAL markers became indicators of some fundamental flaw in the writer. For example, in the survey, tutors wrote of AAL sentences, "This sounds like a two year old talking," and "This sentence appears childish and unprofessional." In contrast, when respondents sensed the writer was an English Language Learner (ELL), both faculty members and tutors were forgiving of any deviations from Edited American English (EAE). Clearly the issue was not simply the English used, but the indi-viduals associated with that English variety.

The pedagogical ramifications of this conflation of writing/writer and the denigration of AAL markers/writers are serious. John Russell Rickford (1999) notes that negative reactions to AAL lead teachers to hold "low expectations of such students, to assign them inappropriately to learning disabled or special education classes, and to otherwise stunt their academic performance" (283). All of these actions stem from an assumption that an AAL speaker/writer lacks intelligence, a clearly unfounded assumption but one that some of my survey participants also voiced.

This chapter is intended to encourage writing center staff—tutors but also administrators and trainers—to examine their attitudes towards AAL. Even if one ultimately chooses to advocate EAE because the acad-emy demands it, that choice should be made transparent to the client, with an emphasis on the validity of AAL. I'm sure we all agree that con-descending attitudes towards AAL and AAL speakers/writers serve no pedagogical function whatsoever, and we need to analyze why this would occur, especially among tutors.

SURVEY OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDE RESEARCH

The correlation between how an individual speaks/writes and the bias others demonstrate toward that individual is well documented. Indeed, Aristotle's *ethos* hinges on how hearers' perception of the speaker affects the speaker's argument. In 1969, G. Richard Tucker and Wallace E. Lambert asked participants to listen to a variety of English speakers and

to make judgments regarding each speaker's upbringing, intelligence, friendliness, education, disposition, speech, trustworthiness, ambition, faith in God, talent, character, determination, honesty, personality, and considerateness. They found a nearly unanimous perception of the Network speakers (European American, educated) as having the most favorable profile of traits. Four years later, Bruce Fraser (1973) replicated the Tucker and Lambert experiment (with minor variations) with similar results: the students from an all-black southern college in Mississippi received the lowest marks in those same categories.

Unfortunately, teachers have been found to exhibit similar prejudices. Orlando Taylor (1973) discovered that teachers of all races held negative attitudes towards nonstandard dialects, especially so in schools with only European American children. However, teachers in predominantly black schools and teachers in schools with mixed student populations had significantly more positive attitudes toward nonstandard dialects and AAL than teachers in schools with predominantly European American student populations.

More recently, research by Theresa A. Bennerson-Mohamed (2002) and H. Samy Alim (2006) has revealed that while some pockets of acceptance for AAL exist, by and large whites use this notion of "standard" English both as a way to grant privilege to (some) whites and deny it to others. For example, Bennerson-Mohamed (2002) administered a twenty-five-question Language Attitude Survey to twenty-three full-time and thirty part-time faculty in the SUNY-Binghamton English department. Of these participants, 65.2 percent strongly disagreed that "Ebonics (Black English)" is an inferior language, 8.7 percent mildly disagreed, and 26.1 percent were neutral; no one marked "mildly agree" or "strongly agree" (91). Although the survey revealed general acceptance of "Ebonics," Bennerson-Mohamed is cautious, noting that the faculty "may embrace language variation for all of its richness and variety but that is where it ends" (111). In particular, Bennerson-Mohamed found that even though the faculty members acknowledged the value of "Ebonics" for African Americans, in interviews they noted it was the English teacher's duty to teach and enforce the distinction between "correct" English and "substandard" English. Similarly, Alim (2006), researching in the 1990s, found that the high-school teachers he observed in Philadelphia consistently spoke of their black students' spoken language as something to "eradicate" and "combat" (59). Alim notes:

> What we have, then, for a "standard" in the U.S. is nothing short of the imposition of white linguistic norms and ways of speaking in the service of granting access to resources to whites and denying those same resources to as many others as possible, including poor whites (linguistic supremacy operates similarly for varieties of a language as well as languages other than the dominating language, whatever that may be). (67)

In fact, AAL's stigmatization has been proven so often that further research would seem to be moot at this point. However, previous studies may be outdated, and none investigate whether such stigmatization occurs in the writing center setting as well. I wanted to test Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski's (1999) assertion in "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center" that writing center tutors' liminal positions as instructors and students place them in "a unique position to teach marginalized students how to negotiate diverse discourses" (53). Or, instead, do writing center tutors stigmatize AAL and its speakers just as classroom teachers do?

In an earlier study I administered, forty-one English instructors evaluated written, nonstandard Englishes (African American Language, English as a Second/Foreign Language, and nonstandard European American English). The instructors' ratings averaged 3.67 on a five-point Likert scale. The overall "most bothersome" sentences were AAL, with a mean score of 3.83. The ELL sentences received a mean score of 3.52, the "least bothersome." The nonstandard European American English sentences fell in the middle with a mean score of 3.59. However, instructors' scores covered the complete range of one to five for any given sentence, undermining the notion of one true "standard."

When I administered the same survey to 103 writing center tutors across the United States, I found that the tutors' ratings resembled those of the faculty. Such a finding is not surprising given that tutors typically acquire their tutoring positions precisely because they are aligned with "accepted" academic discourse, with Bruffee's "conversation of mankind." Furthermore, that alignment yields benefits that tutors may not wish to have challenged. Even so, I was surprised by the number of tutors who reacted to AAL with indignation, superiority, even anger, as though others' deviations from EAE were an affront to the tutors personally, whereas ELL errors were forgiven and excused.

I say I was surprised by the findings, but in actuality it wasn't so long ago that I held a similar bias. Even in my creation of this survey, I should have included sentences in correct EAE in order to remove the

insinuation that all the survey sentences (including AAL sentences) contained "error." Intellectually I know correct AAL is not the same thing as "error." As Ralph W. Fasold (2005) explains in "Distinctive Linguistic Characteristics of Black English," "the differences between Standard English and Black English are in no sense careless deteriorations from Standard English. Rather these speech forms conform to grammar and pronunciation rules which are just as rigorous as any rule in a grammar text" (33).

Why, then, did I not catch this slippage? I can claim I was using the taxonomy of my targeted population—deviations from EAE have been associated with "errors" in the past. I can also claim I wanted to see how individuals weighted different deviations from EAE, so why would I include "standard" sentences? However, such explanations suggest a consciousness of my actions that I did not actually possess.

In actuality, I believe my misstep comes from my twenty years of teaching experience as a white woman in a predominantly white university. Just as I cringe when I hear "if I was" instead of "if I were," I have trouble not reacting negatively to a sentence such as "he be going," even though I know this form is standard AAL. It boils down to the fact that AAL is not my language, and I preserve my position of authority, perhaps even a feeling of superiority, by privileging EAE. Thus, despite my honest and earnest attempt to show others' bias against AAL, I demonstrated bias.

In this respect, I am not alone. Marcyliena Morgan (2005), in "Theories and Politics in African American English," notes that the controversy often accompanying research on African American language varieties "reflects the multilayered political and ideological issues embodying scholarly work with any marginalized group that is marked by language use. It also introduces the problematic of both researchers and/or members as social actors in this process" (241–42). For this reason, I am encouraged by the fact that a few tutors did rate the AAL sentences as "not at all bothersome." I believe they saw past my flawed survey design and rejected the view of AAL as error. With a different survey instrument, perhaps more individuals would have come to that same realization.

So, a significant question arises: Does my mistake nullify my study? I don't believe so. The participants' comments are, I believe, honest reflections of their feelings toward deviations from EAE and toward the students who use deviations in their writing. Moreover, even the leading nature of my survey cannot be blamed for the degree of anger exhibited

toward AAL sentences/writers, and emotion spared ELL sentences/ writers. Such a finding supports the argument that EAE is a racialized standard, an important step in understanding and preventing racism, albeit unintentional, in the writing center.

STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH (SAE)/EDITED AMERICAN ENGLISH (EAE)

Because this study is based upon deviations from so-called Standard American English (spoken), and Edited American English (written), the terms should be defined and problematized. Peter Trudgill (1999) offers a linguist's perspective of SAE/EAE, acknowledging that "standard" is a socially constructed concept reliant on public perception rather than a language truth, and "Standard English is thus not the English language but simply one variety of it" (118). In fact, according to Wiley and Lukes (1996, 526), standard English ideologies in the United States perpetuate the European American hegemony and serve as gatekeepers, as is the case with standardized exams. As a result, EAE becomes a type of "social capital facilitating access to education, good grades, competitive test scores, employment, public office, and economic advantages for those who have mastered the standard language" (515).

These scholars' insights inform this study in that although the sentences being evaluated contained deviations from the "standard," this researcher understands that this is an arbitrary determination. Despite the arbitrariness of the term "Standard American English," the myth of some ideal English nevertheless holds tremendous power over instructors of English and demands interrogation.

THE STUDY

This survey was initially administered to forty-one English faculty members and then to 103 writing center tutors from across the United States, 64 percent of whom were undergraduate tutors; 24 percent graduate tutors; 5 percent faculty tutors; and 7 percent "other." The fifteen sentences in this survey reflect what Wiley and Lukes (1996) cite as presumed indicators of "underprepared" students: they are "likely to be 'nonnative' speakers of English or students of 'limited' English proficiency. Some are likely to be foreign born, and others are 'dialect' speakers of American English or of other World Englishes, or monolingual speakers of English 'who just never learned to write'" (513). The following table shows the breakdown of sentences in my survey:

TABLE 1

Breakdown of survey sentences

ELL	Nonstandard European American English	AAL
#2 Missing article	#1 Wrong word	#6 Zero copula
#4 Wrong article	#5 Fused sentence	#14 Ain't
#11 Wrong pronoun	#12 Fragment	#18 Multiple negations
#15 Syntax	#13 Non-restrictive comma	#21 be+verb+ing
#24 Misplaced adjective	#16 Missing apostrophe	#23 Demonstrative "them"

After rating each sentence on a Likert scale, respondents could include a comment. These comments fell into three categories: (1) concession for ELL writers; (2) condemnation of poorly prepared, lazy students; and (3) allowance for AAL, but not in academic writing.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In a 1996 America Online poll seeking people's comments on "Ebonics," "the vast majority of . . . responses were not just negative, they were caustic. Ebonics was vilified as 'disgusting black street slang,' 'incorrect and substandard,' 'nothing more than ignorance,' 'lazy English,' 'bastardized English,' 'the language of illiteracy,' and 'this most ridiculous made-up language'" (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 6). The instructors' and tutors' comments in my study similarly conveyed such disdain, not only for the sentences in the survey but also for the individuals who might write them:

- "I hate this!" (faculty)
- "Apostrophe issues are my pet peeve. Again, students often come not understanding or not applying the rules of punctuation." (faculty)
- "How often does the student make errors easily fixed by opening a dictionary? It's a good word to screw up. . . . Better than 'Granite, I new better.' It could be a sign of growth; more likely, however, it's laziness." (faculty)
- "Run-on sentences infuriate me." (tutor)
- "The sentence appears sloppy and is difficult to understand." (tutor)

Note the parallel between the "Ebonics" comments from America Online and the comments from this study: disgust, anger, superiority. One might therefore assume that the comments from my survey were directed toward the most stigmatized sentences in the survey, those written in AAL ("Ebonics"). In fact, the comments were directed toward sentences from nonstandard EAE, patterns not associated with a specific race.

I open my discussion with this particular point in order to emphasize that, even if standard American English is hegemonic and racist (see earlier discussion), the participants' responses cannot be explained solely as a reaction to the student's race. Anyone who violates the rules of EAE is decreed "nonstandard," including European Americans.

I also should note that the tutors' overall ratings were lower than the faculty members' ratings, reflecting less concern with surface issues. As one tutor replied repeatedly, "We are taught as undergraduates that this is a lower-level concern. I have trained myself to ignore these small problems until the content and other higher-order concerns have been addressed." Indeed, many tutors stated their criteria for judging an error had to do with deciding whether or not the reader can understand the sentence's meaning:

- "I understand it [fragment]."

- "This [fused sentence] is not as important because the meaning is still clear."

- "[Missing apostrophe] doesn't affect meaning."

- "To confuse prescience with precedence is a problem, but not too serious. Word confusion happens."

Such attention to global issues of rhetoric and understandability distinguished the tutors' responses from the instructors' comments.

And yet, the tutors in this survey did pass judgment, and at times highly racialized judgment. For example, many tutors' attitudes shifted markedly from supportive to accusatory when they were asked to evaluate AAL sentences. Some tutors did apply the same standard of intelligibility to the AAL sentences, and a few tutors drew a distinction between how they personally felt regarding AAL and how professors might judge it. One tutor wrote:

It's not a big problem for me, but I would try to make the student aware that this is a construction often used in African American Vernacular English

(AAVE), which because of the hegemonic nature of the University environment is often derided. In this situation, I feel that it's my responsibility to make the student aware of this issue while acknowledging my own discomfort with the way different varieties of language are marginalized.

Unfortunately, this individual's point of view was rare. Several tutors made comments that reflect a racialized standard, substantiating the claim that standard American English is the privileged language of middle-class European Americans. For example, regarding the sentence, "Those people be messing with me," tutors commented:

- "To me this is uneducated gheto [sic] talk even though quite a few of my friends speak this way I still have a problem with it."

- "You know better. Don't write a sentence like this."

- "It makes the author sound uneducated."

- "This type of mistake should never be accepted."

- "Ebonics is not written English."

- "It's just someone's voice coming out."

Similar derogatory statements were made against all five of the AAL sentences, including several references to the language sounding "childish."

The faculty comments were similarly negative, although many faculty members approved of AAL when used for effect (i.e., intentionally). Of course, this distinction between "intentional" and "unintentional" language use is also problematic, privileging written over verbal language and SAE over non-SAE, since "natural" use of AAL is still seen as "wrong." Furthermore, this distinction between "natural" and "intentional" must be based on a subjective and ultimately biased judgment. Here are some of the instructors' comments:

- "This one's just been drilled into me."

- "Proofreading issue or colloquial? Tough to tell. Effect. When used properly, I love it."

- "Depends if the student is quoting or misrepresenting our poor language."

- "As a cultural artifact and in slang, fine. In academic essays, tsk. tsk."

- "!no!"

- "Depends on context."

- "If the context is formal, & this isn't a quotation, then I'd say '5.'"

- "Never."

- "Sentence is completely unclear and vague."

- "I rather like the mixing of syntax."

The faculty members' and the tutors' comments parallel Bennerson-Mohamed's (2002) findings in her interviews with professors: "For these professors, there are clear divisions between [Standard English (SE)] and [Black Dialect], and each of these languages is viewed as appropriate, but in different places. Faculty see SE as the only acceptable form in the classroom" (106). Or, as Smitherman (2006) notes, "In the minds of everyday people (and, unfortunately, even among some of my non-linguist academic colleagues—hello!), languages have high status, but dialects do not" (15).

However, when AAL markers were perceived as ELL markers, both tutors and faculty were forgiving. Indeed, excusing the ELL (ESL) writers is a recurring theme in both groups' comments:

- "Grade depends on ESL student." (faculty)

- "Unless working with ESL student." (faculty)

- "Usually an ESL error, so I'm more understanding." (faculty)

- "ESL student more acceptable than native speaker." (faculty)

- "If the student is a native speaker, this could signal improper use of vernacular in formal writing, which can make the writer appear illiterate. . . . If found in an ESL writing sample, I would first ask if the writer is influenced by something heard or read. In either case, I'd watch for other vernacular constructions and try to persuade the writer to avoid them." (tutor)

- "If native speaker, it may just be sloppiness—perhaps an editing error. If ESL writer, not so much of a problem—just needs to be informed of standard English usage." (tutor)

The language used to discuss the ELL markers and the language used to discuss the AAL markers is profound—the survey participants expressed distaste and even disdain towards AAL, whereas they were understanding and compassionate towards ELL. What is the salient difference between

the two groups? ELLs might be racial minorities, after all, and AAL speakers/writers are not necessarily racial minorities. However, I think the issue is less about reality than perception, and I believe the participants presume AAL writers to be African Americans and the ELL writers to be foreign students studying in the United States. Even though it is possible that survey participants associated ELL with immigrants to the United States rather than international students, none of my survey participants level charges against the ELL sentences that align with Heinz Kloss's (1971) four ideological arguments that contribute to monolingual ideology: (1) the tacit compact agreement, which is built on the assumption that individuals must forfeit their minority language in order to become real citizens; (2) the taken-and-given argument, which is built on the assumption that minority immigrants receive so much by moving to this new country, they must give up their language rights and conform to the new language; (3) the antighettoization argument, which suggests that adhering to a nonstandard language is a choice, one that leads to social and cultural lags; and (4) the national unity argument, which argues that minority languages will prove divisive. Instead, my survey participants showed no sign of being threatened by the ELL writers or of condescension, and as a result I believe they envisioned ELL as the language of international students who have no intention of becoming "real citizens." For this reason, John Ogbu's (1999) distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities is particularly useful.

VOLUNTARY VERSUS INVOLUNTARY MINORITIES

Ogbu's (1999) hypothesis is that voluntary minorities (represented by the ELL sentences) and involuntary minorities (represented by the AAL sentences) perceive language differently. Ogbu explains, "Immigrants do not think that accommodating white American ways of talking threatens their language identity. They do not imagine that it requires them to give up their own languages or dialects to be able to learn the standard English" (154–55). In contrast, nonimmigrant minorities such as African Americans

> seem to think that they are required to give up their own way of talking to be able to talk like white Americans. Accommodating White-American ways of talking seems to threaten their sense of dialect identity. Furthermore, they more or less hold white Americans responsible for eliminating the problems caused by the dialect difference, because white people created the problems by depriving them of their original languages. (155)

Although Ogbu uses the framework of voluntary versus involuntary minorities to explain African Americans' attitudes toward Edited American English as opposed to voluntary immigrants' view of Edited American English, these contrasting attitudes also influence how each group is, in turn, perceived. AAL becomes not merely nonstandard—it is a show of defiance, a favoring of the individual's speech community over the academy.

David O. Sears, Jack Citrin, Sharmaine V. Cheleden, and Colette van Laar (2001) label this phenomenon "ingroup attachment" and "outgroup antagonism." Ironically, the teachers' and the tutors' comments cited above reflect an "ingroup attachment" against the AAL "outgroup," an antagonism not shown the ELL writers. Of course, the use of AAL may be an issue of perceived rhetorical propriety in that, in the classroom rhetorical situation, professors may consider student use of AAL too informal. However, the derogatory comments suggest something more is involved, an anger that the AAL writers made no effort to conform; indeed, perhaps the writer intentionally did not conform. To protect the superiority of EAE, these defiant rejections of it may be declared "ignorant" rather than "alternative," resembling westerners' disgust with Tibetan tea. As Kathryn A. Woolard (1998) asserts, "Purist doctrines of linguistic correctness" usually shut down only those groups whom the dominant group sees as a threat (21).

On the other hand, the ELL writer is excused because second-language interference, not defiance, is deemed the cause. Furthermore, the ELL writers present no threat and no conflict. They are visitors, one might even say guests, who are perceived as bringing in money rather than taking away opportunities and money from U.S. citizens. Furthermore, international students of necessity have financial means and will return to their home country, eliminating the concern that an inability to use English perfectly will lead to the "ghettoization" that Kloss (1971) discusses. Finally, international students are outside the national system (they cannot vote; they are not citizens), so they are absolved of any civic responsibility to learn English in order to participate in the government. In other words, unlike African Americans, international students' presence in the United States is viewed as nonthreatening, even flattering. As a result, ELL writers are not judged as harshly as AAL writers.

CONCLUSION

Marilyn M. Cooper (1994) observes in "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers" that precisely because most tutors are students and have not yet been fully inculcated into the

academy, "the pressure on them to promulgate beliefs and practices that serve the purposes of the dominant group is less organized and less direct, although it is certainly not absent" (106). No, it is not. Although instructors' ratings averaged 3.7 whereas the tutors' ratings averaged 3.06, tutors' comments about AAL were significantly more caustic and indignant. Thus, despite all the gains in AAL scholarship and the efforts of AAL scholars to counter bias, some tutors still do not recognize that AAL is a valid variety of English. Sadly, that judgment against the language was transferred to the writers themselves, supporting Morgan's (2005) assertion that "in the United States, comments about the language of African Americans are consistently linked to comments about African Americans' cognitive ability and culture" (240). If the tutors had wished to express concern regarding the appropriateness of AAL in an academic setting, they would not have demonstrated such emotionality in their comments. I am reminded of westerners who didn't just respond to Tibetan tea as "different" but as "disgusting" in an effort to retain their own taxonomy. After all, when operating within their own system, westerners do not experience such culture shock.

In the same way, instructors and tutors uphold the standards of the university, including the demand that students use Edited American English, because this is the taxonomy they know. Too, when operating within that EAE system, they know the rules. It is for this very reason that ratings of fused sentences and fragments were consistently high; violations of sentence boundaries are understood as "serious" errors. We need a "standard," even if one does not actually exist, to avoid chaos. How would we judge what was "good" otherwise? In "English Only and U.S. College Composition," Bruce Horner and John Trimbur (2002) discuss this reification of Standard English, noting that

> by "reification," we mean the treatment of something, such as spoken and written language, that is always in process, located in and subject to ongoing and varying material practice, as a fixed, idealized entity removed from the vagaries of time, place, and use. In this regard, reification is what makes things seem inevitable, given by the fact of their being instead of their history. (596)

My point is not that we should refrain from pointing out deviations from EAE, but that we should also historicize and contextualize EAE, acknowledging the validity of other Englishes such as AAL, to recognize that deviations are just that and should not be viewed as ignorance. As

Mina Shaughnessy (1977) pointed out in *Errors and Expectations*, rather than "sectioning off students' problems with writing," professors should develop "a readiness to look at these problems in a way that does not ignore the linguistic sophistication of the students nor yet underestimate the complexity of the task they face as they set about learning to write for college" (13).

I use the pronoun *we* here because my own experience with this project has been eye-opening, to say the least. My slippage in the creation of the survey reflects a struggle I continue to have with aligning my own writing and that of my students with a hegemonic, European American "standard" while simultaneously desiring the success that comes with becoming a part of that hegemony. But this "standard" should never be upheld at the expense of the individual. We all should be on guard against conflating writing and writer, and using the label of "error" too freely or hurtfully.

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9

DIVERSITY AS TOPOGRAPHY
The Benefits and Challenges of Cross Racial Interaction in the Writing Center

Kathryn Valentine and Mónica F. Torres

In November of 2006, the executive board of the International Writing Centers Association approved a statement in which it announced a major diversity initiative. This statement opens with an acknowledgement of writing centers as "inherently multicultural and multi-lingual sites that welcome and accommodate diversity." It strikes us that one goal of this collection is to consider the ways in which racial diversity operates in writing centers and to examine whether they have, or have not, "welcomed and accommodated" that diversity. The emphasis on accommodation, both in writing center scholarship and in the International Writing Centers Association statement on diversity, implies that diversity is a problem to be solved. While it is true that cultural differences are, in fact, something that colleges and universities need to thoughtfully engage, seeing them as a problem is, perhaps, less than productive. The question that keeps coming back to us is, can we see diversity as something other than a problem?

In the last fifteen to twenty years, empirical research coming out of colleges of education has attempted to answer this very question. This work by scholars such as Patricia Gurin, Sylvia Hurtado, and Mitchell Chang reframes the "problem" of diversity. These scholars, at least in part responding to legal attacks on affirmative-action admissions policies, suggest that rather than being a "problem," diverse student populations offer potential benefits for both individuals and institutions. Primarily they suggest that culturally diverse student populations, and more particularly meaningful interactions across those populations, offer students important opportunities for cognitive and social development. That is, interacting across cultural differences positions students to perceive and think and act in ways that contribute to their intellectual

development. Diversity may be a "problem" in that such interaction will not necessarily be easy, comfortable, or neat, but these very challenges may also serve a fundamental mission of higher education—the cognitive and social development of its student population.

We believe writing centers provide an ideal site for thinking about the academic benefits of cross racial interactions. First, they are by definition places of interaction. The tutorial operates in and through interaction between writer and tutor. From the beginning, writing center tutors, directors, and scholars have been working to understand interaction as a productive strategy for learning. In addition, we believe writing centers are also ideal sites for thinking about issues of diversity on their respective campuses. Because they often serve students enrolled in general-education writing programs, writing center staff are likely to work with a full range of the students enrolled at the college or university, including students from racially and ethnically diverse populations. Given these two circumstances—the writing center as a site of student interactions, in general, and the potential for cross racial interactions, in particular—this educational research on the value of cross racial interaction on college and university campuses seems particularly useful.

In this chapter, we attempt to enter into these conversations. We do that by first outlining the scholarship in both writing center research and education research on the instructional value of interactions, and more specifically, cross racial interactions. We believe these reviews of the scholarship provide what we think of as topographic detail: the contours of the discussions that have occurred over the last few decades in both arenas. We next present findings from our own empirical study of cross racial interactions in colleges and universities on the U.S. side of the United States-Mexico border. We offer this part of the chapter as an illustration of the sort of journey we think awaits us when we choose to explore cross racial interactions as a productive strategy for student development—the trail may be clearly marked in some places but may take an unexpected turn or head up a steep hill just down the road. Our findings were often counterintuitive and sometimes troubling. These results required that we actively engage with students' perceptions, with the scholarship, and with each other as we navigated in and through the data. Finally, we offer recommendations for both practice and research based on what we are learning from our work. Ultimately, we argue that what this engagement tells us is that racial identities and racial interactions are not only complicated at a theoretical level but are even messier

at a practical level. For example, what we've learned from this research complicates our common-sense understanding of who students are and how they interact. This research suggests that when students come to writing centers we cannot take their physical attributes or last names or family backgrounds or regional affiliations as unproblematic confirmations of their identities. Nor can we assume that when students and tutors interact across racial lines, they have achieved some sort of racial harmony. In short, what we see is not what we get. And so while these complicated circumstances often pose theoretically rich and professionally engaging problems, they also suggest that cross racial interactions are less a problem that can be solved and more a terrain we must engage as we travel across its contours, a journey that is not completed once and for all but navigated and appreciated one feature at a time.

PEER TUTORING, COLLABORATIVE LEARNING, AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

Writing centers have long been viewed as places of interactions focused on students and tutors' collaborative work with writing. Central figures in the early work of writing centers defined these interactions through a focus on peer tutoring and collaborative learning. This definitional work can be seen quite readily in Kenneth Bruffee's (2008) "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" (originally published in 1984), with its emphasis on peer tutoring as a form of collaborative learning between "status equals" (211). This focus is also evident in the work of perhaps two of the most well-known figures in the field, Stephen North (1984) and Muriel Harris (1995), whose *College English* articles define the center as a place of peer-centered, collaborative learning.

    The articles by Bruffee, North, and Harris have become something of an orthodoxy for writing center practice. They provided a justification for writing centers: the collaborative space of the tutoring session offered tremendous potential for learning. In addition, they supplied philosophic foundations (the value of nondirective tutoring, for example) that influenced writing center practice. It is important to note, however, that several key assumptions undergirding these articles and later practices are now considered problematic. Specifically, these articles assume and suggest that the collaborative environment of the writing center is a space of equity/equality and that the nondirective approach to tutoring benefits all students in similar ways. Both scholars and practitioners in the field have troubled these notions. One focus in

this regard has been on critiquing the emphasis on nondirective tutoring which assumes interactions are nonhierarchical and which emphasizes a notion of peership. In 2003 Peter Carino, for example, suggested that tutors be trained to more effectively recognize the roles of power and authority in center interactions with an emphasis on tutors taking responsibility for the limits of their knowledge.

Along with criticizing approaches to center interactions that disregard the possibility of unequal power relations through an emphasis on peership and nondirective techniques, scholars have also addressed aspects of identity (often through the concept of multiculturalism, diversity, or marginalization) and the ways in which identity confounds any easy assumption of equity and equality in the tutoring situation. Such work often calls for centers to become places of critical reflection as students and tutors collaborate and attend to difference through writing. For example, Andrea Lunsford (1991) suggests that "collaboration leads not only to sharper, more critical thinking (students must explain, defend, adapt), but to deeper understanding of others" (5). However, she notes that collaboration can also work to reinforce existing power relations and thereby "lead to the kind of homogeneity that squelches diversity, that waters down ideas to the lowest common denominator, that erases rather than values difference" (7). Addressing this issue, Thomas Fox (1994) argues for attending to the way dominance can function in student tutorial groups and offers suggestions for building on the promises of collaborative learning. Extending this work, scholars such as Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski (1999) have explored the ways in which writing centers can be refigured as "contact zones" rather than sites of acculturation.

Despite this attention to understanding how diverse identities may be brought to bear on what we do or don't do in writing center work, little scholarship has focused specifically on cross racial interactions in writing centers. Exceptions to this include such work as Anne DiPardo's (1992) semester-long case study of an African American tutor and a Navajo student. DiPardo argues that in order to achieve the benefits of collaborative learning in cross racial interactions, a tutor will need "to become a reflective and vulnerable practitioner" who remains respectfully curious (141) and who "monitor[s his or her] ethnocentric biases and faulty assumptions" (142). Following DiPardo, Grimm (1999) takes up this attention to cultural identities and writing center interactions through her vision of postmodern writing centers "as places where

students [including tutors] learn to negotiate and understand the contact and conflicts of differences" (14).

More recently, two articles explore the perspective of white, middle-class tutors working with students of color. A third article, also from a tutor, discusses the need for writing centers to address the connections between race and writing. In the first, Kathryn Valentine (2006) offers an account of working with a student in the writing center in which multiple relations of difference, including race but also religion and gender, influenced the interactions of the student, teacher, and herself as a tutor. She proposes a question-based approach for those interested in addressing diversity and being open to noticing not only consensus but also disagreement in their teaching practices. In a similar exploration, Sarah Innes (2006) discusses her own shifting understanding of what it means to work across racial difference as a white, middle-class writing tutor (by exploring her work with two African American students). In particular, Innes points out the temptation to mythologize about literacy and racial difference in writing center interactions and encourages tutors to move away from creating myths about the students they work with. Finally, Bethany Davila (2006) discusses how writing center interactions can and should "provide students with awareness and understanding of how race and writing intersect" (2).

In addition, writing center scholars have recently begun to draw attention to racial diversity through work that considers tutor training and racial diversity (Barron and Grimm 2002), writing center directors and the management of diversity (Weaver 2006), and antiracism work and writing centers at white-majority institutions (Condon 2007). Also, Beatrice Mendez Newman (2003) makes an important contribution in discussing the role writing centers can play in increasing access for borderlands Hispanic students. She notes the importance of tutors taking a directive approach and understanding the context from which borderlands Hispanic students' academic problems emerge. This move to more fully address race within the writing center is important. These scholars build on the early work of Bruffee, North, and Harris by assuming the importance of collaboration in writing centers, and they develop that work by productively problematizing collaboration through attending to matters of racial and ethnic difference.

Because writing centers are places of interaction and because the field has a long commitment to exploring those interactions, writing centers seem to be an ideal site for faculty, tutors, and students to

engage scholarship on cross racial interactions. We believe an engagement with this scholarship and with research projects related to it can help inform both writing center research and practice. In particular, we are interested in what this scholarship and our research tells writing centers not about how to solve the problem of racial differences but rather how we might more effectively navigate the terrain of cross racial interactions at our campuses. This is particularly important at a time when we are seeing increasing structural diversity at campuses across the country.

THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF CROSS RACIAL INTERACTION

In considering this demographic shift, it is important to ask, what exactly does it mean to have cross racial interactions? What special value do these interactions offer to individual students or to colleges or universities more generally? How do these interactions address the question of what it means to "welcome and accommodate" diversity on campus, especially in the writing center?

This scholarship, emerging from colleges of education over the last fifteen to twenty years, largely reframes the diversity issue in higher education as one of value. Rather than seeing diversity as a problem, this scholarship suggests that diversity is a value not yet or not fully appreciated by college and university administrators, faculty, or students. These studies provide evidence for the academic value of what they call "genuine interactions" across racial and ethnic difference: cognitive and social benefits for college students. Essentially, relying on the work of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Gordon Allport, researchers suggest that the experiences college students have with others whose backgrounds and beliefs are different than their own create the sort of cognitive dissonance or discontinuity that serves as fertile ground for cognitive and social development (Gurin et al. 2002).

Some scholars report a full range of cognitive gains including active thinking and intellectual engagement as well as the development of specific academic skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and writing (Gurin et al. 2002). Other scholars make similar assertions about the cognitive benefits of diversity. Mitchell Chang et al. (2006), for example, found that students who had high levels of cross racial interaction reported significantly larger gains in critical thinking ability and problem-solving skills. In an experimental study, Antonio et al. (2004) concluded that when students had interactions with others they perceived as different or novel, including others who are racially and

ethnically different, they engaged in greater levels of integrative complexity, which is defined as the "degree to which cognitive style involves the differentiation and integration of multiple perspectives and dimensions" (508). That is, students were better able to understand differences between perspectives but also to integrate various perspectives into their own thinking.

While a good deal of research has focused on cognitive gains, researchers have also discovered that cross racial interactions produce a range of social gains in students. Chang et al. (2006) found that students with greater frequencies of cross racial interaction reported gains in ability to accept different races/cultures as well as higher levels of intellectual and social self-confidence. From his results, Antonio (1998) determined that interracial interaction fostered what he called cultural understanding as well as leadership ability. Other studies (Gurin et al. 2002; Engberg, Meader, and Hurtado 2003) posited similar findings: students who interacted cross racially and cross ethnically were more likely to develop the cultural skills and attitudes necessary to participate and lead in a diverse democracy.

It is important to understand what sorts of interactions produce these gains. Virtually all of these scholars argued for more than "structural diversity," the numerical representation of diverse groups on a college or university campus. They are much more interested in what Gurin et al. (2002) call "genuine interaction": "Genuine interaction goes far beyond mere contact and includes learning about difference in background, experience, and perspectives, as well as getting to know one another individually in an intimate enough way to discern common goals and personal qualities" (336). Essentially, these interactions, which can happen in formal spaces such as the classroom and academic support programs, and informal spaces such as residence halls, work-study jobs, and dining areas, focus on similarities and differences, positioning students to develop their own identities and ideas in relationship to and with others.

Interestingly, while these scholars thoughtfully articulate the need for more focused attention on diversity issues on college and university campuses, they also point to some of the complications of doing so. The evidence is clear that when students engage in interactional diversity, they are likely to experience cognitive and social gains. However, this finding is less clear when one examines the data just below the surface. In a number of these studies, while most students benefit from interactional

diversity, racial and ethnic groups experience these gains differentially. In a 2007 study by Victor Sáenz, Hoy Ning Ngai, and Sylvia Hurtado, for example, white students responded more positively to structural diversity than did nonwhite students; leadership training activities had a greater impact on Asian students than white students; and academic support activities had a greater effect on Latinos than on African Americans. While this scholarship does tell us that genuine interaction holds some promise for our student populations, it also tells us that there is no single or simple answer for developing and implementing strategies that promote and support such interaction.

Several features of this research struck us as particularly important for writing centers. First, we appreciated its emphasis on the potential pedagogical value of both formal and informal interactions amongst college students. This acknowledges that student learning takes place in a broad range of locations. Second, and perhaps most important for our argument here, is these scholars' attention to the idea of genuine interaction. Often, calls for diversity are explicitly about structural diversity, increasing the numbers of diverse students on campus. Genuine interaction among diverse populations invokes a much messier, more complicated notion of diversity. It goes beyond the sheer presence of diverse students to include diverse human beings in relationship to and with each other. And finally, it reinforces the notion that race is not a problem to be solved or an obstacle to be overcome, but an opportunity—sometimes difficult, often productive—to be explored. These scholars suggest that this much more complicated notion of racial diversity positively contributes to students' cognitive and social development, and, consequently, offers distinct advantages for students and for the institutions serving them.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ON TWO BORDER CAMPUSES: A RESEARCH STUDY

This scholarship in education has proven to be valuable for our thinking about cross racial interactions in the writing classroom and in the writing center. When each of us arrived at New Mexico State University (NMSU) in 2002 and 2003, respectively, we both worked closely with the writing center. Mónica was interim director for 2002–2003, and Kathryn became the director in 2003–2004 and has been directing the center since that time. We also taught general-education writing courses and shared an interest in exploring the role racial identity plays in a variety

of teaching situations. In our work with the writing center, we both were committed to helping tutors explore how issues of diversity might impact their work with students.

At that time, we had some relatively clear expectations about what it meant to be at a university with a significant minority student population. (In a typical year, over 40 percent of students enrolling at NMSU identify as Hispanic.) We assumed that students would have some understanding—given the diversity of the population—of their racial and ethnic identities and the racial dynamics at play in the region and perhaps even in the larger society. Students who enrolled in our classes, however, resisted our assertions of race and racism as prevalent forces in contemporary culture. They suggested, even argued, that race was not a particularly critical feature of their lives. This gave us pause. We had not yet considered, as we would later, some of the historical or geographical factors that might help explain how college students at an institution less than forty-five miles from the United States-Mexico border considered race/racism a less than significant factor in their lives.

And so we began to ask questions about the ways in which contemporary college students at institutions like ours understand their own racial/ethnic identity and the racial/ethnic identities of others. These questions led us to the work of scholars such as Gurin, Hurtado, and Chang. What we found in their work problematized what we were hearing in our classrooms and our writing center. While students were suggesting that race did not matter, these scholars were articulating that it did. We found ourselves at a crossroads. How could two populations—students and scholars—see the value of race in the lives of college students so differently? And what could we do to clarify this issue? And so while this journey began with conversations in our classrooms and writing center, it soon led to a major research initiative with a multifaceted inquiry: How do students characterize their own and others' racial/ethnic identities? Do students interact with others they perceive to be racially and ethnically different from them? Do students interact in ways that researchers suggest produce cognitive and social benefits?

In the following section, we discuss the findings from one part of this research project, survey data collected at a community college and a university located in the United States-Mexico border region, which focused on understanding how students in writing classes were experiencing cross racial interactions. We are currently in the process of analyzing additional data to help us further address these research questions

as part of an ongoing research project. This is a cross-disciplinary project in that we are working in collaboration with two colleagues in the field of education, Dr. Eduardo Casillas Arellano (University of Texas at El Paso) and Dr. Mary Prentice (NMSU). Working with a cross-disciplinary team allows us to explore this complicated issue from a range of perspectives and research methods.

MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE: WHAT WE ARE LEARNING FROM OUR RESEARCH

We share these initial findings from one part of the study in this chapter because we believe there is much to learn from this work in thinking about diversity and interactions in the writing center. What we are learning from our research is beginning to help us map the landscape of diversity relevant to writing students.

The findings we discuss here are based on a quantitative questionnaire we developed and administered with Dr. Arellano. (An article on that research is published in *The Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 2009). The questionnaire asked college students enrolled at border colleges on the United States side of the United States-Mexico border to report on several issues related to racial and ethnic identity: if and how their racial backgrounds impacted their lives, and if and how they interacted with college students from racial and ethnic groups other than their own. Our participants were students enrolled in 200-level general-education writing classes at a four-year and a two-year institution. We collected 307 usable questionnaires for a response rate of 95 percent. Most of the students were enrolled in at least twelve credits (93.5 percent) and the majority was attending a four-year institution (79.9 percent). Most students were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four (87.2 percent) and had been attending college for one to two years (71 percent). They represented a range of majors. In terms of gender, approximately half the students who responded were female (52.8 percent) and approximately half were male (47.2 percent). The students' racial diversity was reflective of the diversity of the border locations of the colleges: American Indian/Alaskan Native (3 percent), Asian (1.3 percent), black or African American (2 percent), Hispanic or Latino (40.3 percent), white (34.3 percent), and other (19.1 percent). Of those students selecting "other," a little less than half described themselves as "White/Hispanic." While we are characterizing students' racial diversity in fairly conventional ways here, we do realize this is a limitation of the survey. That is, we realize such a

characterization does not get at some of the complications of understanding how students perceive their own racial or ethnic identity as well as how they perceive the racial/ethnic identities of other students. We hope to address this aspect of our inquiry through our ongoing research. What the survey data does offer us is a broader view (with responses from over 300 students) of students' perceptions on cross racial interactions.

There is no doubt that our findings confirmed, at least in part, what we already knew: the issue of race on college campuses is complicated. But to say that is to say nothing new. What is more interesting are the specific complications manifested in the data and what those manifestations suggest about race and race relations in higher education. Four of our findings suggest several features of this landscape: (1) students felt their backgrounds did not have a strong effect on their lives; (2) students reported having cross racial interactions; (3) these interactions generally occurred in public spaces; (4) these interactions were largely viewed as positive. Individually and collectively these findings indicate that the topography is complex and that what we learn from this topography is multilayered. In terms of the writing center, what these features suggest is that important work can be done in understanding how students see themselves and their interactions and how these views may inform the daily practice of writing centers.

When we asked students if their racial backgrounds affected their lives, less than half (47.4 percent) answered "some" to "a great deal." (The language we use here reflects the wording of the survey; it indicates that less than half the students chose "some" or "a great deal" in response to our question about how their racial backgrounds affect their lives.) Even fewer students reported that the language they most often spoke with their family had an effect on their lives, with 38.1 percent reporting that it affected them "some" to "a great deal." This trend generally held for other categories, such as the effect of their gender on their lives. Overall, more than half the students consistently reported that their backgrounds did not have a strong effect on their lives. This finding raises some interesting questions for universities and colleges. Institutional discourses and scholarship in any number of fields suggest that racial and linguistic backgrounds do, indeed, affect life chances. But if students don't strongly believe that when they come to our writing classrooms and writing centers, pedagogical approaches based on these assumptions, however factual, may be less than effective. What this finding suggests is that we must be careful with assumptions we make about racial and linguistic

backgrounds, and we must design instructional approaches that thought-fully navigate the differences between student perceptions and institu-tional discourses. This is not to say that we ignore what research has quite clearly articulated—that background does matter—only that we should continue to work to understand how students see themselves racially, ethnically, and linguistically, and how that understanding might help us more fully serve the student populations who come to us. This is the case because we cannot assume that students from similar racial or ethnic groups have developed a particular consciousness nor can we know how the various aspects of students' identities will shape their interactions.

When we asked students about their interactions with students of a different racial or ethnic group, they reported that they did have con-tact with students who were racially/ethnically different from them. Specifically, most students reported that they socialize "some" to "a great deal" with people from different races both on campus (78.5 per-cent) and off campus (76.2 percent). They also reported that they work with racially diverse students "some" to "a great deal" in classes (76.9 percent). In addition, students largely characterized their cross racial interactions as positive (92.5 percent). These findings are important for several reasons. First, they confirm the presence of structural diversity at these border colleges. That is, students report that they have and take advantage of opportunities to interact across race in a variety of contexts at border schools. In addition, the frequency of positive responses sug-gests that students tend to see their experiences with cross racial or cross ethnic interactions as normal and positive.

At first glance, these findings might indicate that colleges and univer-sities with similar racial diversity to those we surveyed have little work to do in regards to race: students are already interacting across race. In addition, given that the students surveyed were writing students, it is likely that the writing center may be one of the locations where they have positive cross racial interactions. However, a closer look at our data tells us we should not come to such a hasty conclusion. A closer look allows us to see beyond the quantity of interactions to the quality of interactions. For example, despite finding that students have contact with racially and ethnically diverse students, we found that students are less likely to study outside class with people from different races, with only 55.4 percent reporting that they do this "some" to "a great deal" (in contrast to the higher percentages discussed above). We also found that most students never or rarely interact across race in private spaces

such as dorms or apartments (58.4 percent). In addition, when students characterized cross racial interactions, they reported that they never or seldom witnessed racial conflicts (81.4 percent) or had negative interactions (85 percent). While some would argue that the presence of a diverse student population on campus is enough, these findings interest us because they complicate this type of easy understanding of what it means to interact across racial difference as well as what it means to work with diverse student populations.

For example, we feel this set of findings indicates that what seems to be a racially harmonious environment might be more complicated. Students seem to be telling us that they have positive cross racial interactions in public spaces such as classrooms and places for socializing, but that they are less likely to interact in private spaces. We worry that students feel they know how to get along with those different from them but may not form more meaningful relationships—meaningful enough to have regular contact in the more private spaces of their lives—with people from different races. We wonder if it is possible for students to become complacent about cross racial interactions. Perhaps this complacency could be a result of the structural diversity in border colleges, colleges with significant minority populations, which allows students to regularly experience racial diversity, and consequently to see it as normal, but at the same time allows them to maintain distance from substantive or genuine interactions.

In addition, this set of findings also prompts us to question to what degree students are having interactions that would be considered genuine. In particular, the idea that students experience little to no conflict around cross racial interactions suggests they may not be engaging in genuine interactions, which would include knowing each other well enough to discern both similarities and differences. We believe this sort of interaction, interaction that positions us to engage commonalities and differences, would involve some degree of conflict. For students to report little to no conflict does not tell us that students have achieved some sort of racial harmony; rather, we believe, it tells us that students may not be engaging in the sort of meaningful or productive interactions scholars in the field of education suggest spur cognitive and social development. As a result of the questions and answers our research has offered, we believe there is much to learn about cross-racial interactions in the writing center and that this learning should involve attention to both research and practice as individuals and the field as a whole should work with both the challenges and benefits of racial diversity.

NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WRITING CENTERS

It's important for us to note that while both of us have research and teaching experience in regards to racial diversity, we are only beginning to address this issue more specifically in the writing center. And so, while we offer a number of recommendations for writing centers, these recommendations are not based on a belief that we have the key to accommodating racial diversity in the writing center. Instead, these recommendations are aimed at engaging writing centers in the ongoing work of addressing racial diversity through and as interaction. Ideally, these recommendations will lead not only to changed practices but also to a commitment to approaching diversity through a continual process of learning. In this view, diversity is not a problem to be solved once and for all but an ongoing feature of our institutional and social landscapes. At the center of our recommendations is the idea that we have much to learn about racial diversity and that this learning should be an ongoing process involving both practice and inquiry.

In terms of practice, the first recommendation is that writing centers be assertive when it comes to hiring. While structural diversity does not ensure genuine interactions, it is a fundamental condition for them. As a result, writing center directors should take care to recruit, hire, and support a diverse population of tutors. In the case of our center, this presents quite a challenge because we are staffed solely by graduate assistants and do not choose who works in the center per se. In this regard then, our efforts to recruit and hire diverse writing center tutors must also combine with our efforts to recruit and enroll diverse graduate students in our programs. Despite these limitations, we have begun efforts to diversify our staff. One way we have done this is by obtaining funding (through an institutional grant) to support a writing center tutor to work with first-generation and minority students in the sciences. Because the center made hiring decisions related to this grant, we were able to hire a tutor who is a first-generation Hispanic student who has experience with technical and scientific communication to tutor online and to pilot a writing fellow program. We are also pursuing the possibility of housing undergraduate tutors supported through student services in the writing center. This would allow us the possibility of recruiting a more diverse staff in terms of both areas of study and race and ethnicity. While only in the initial stages, we are hopeful this collaboration with student services will lead to the center's employing undergraduate tutors from a variety of backgrounds.

Our second recommendation is that writing centers be structured around encouraging ongoing and genuine interactions. For example, along with others in the field, we recommend that centers consider the importance of offering students ongoing, weekly appointments with the same tutor. We make this recommendation because we believe ongoing appointments will most likely result in students and tutors coming to know each other well enough to discover common goals and personal qualities as well as differences in perspectives and backgrounds. For those centers who do not currently have or who are unable to support such a setup, we recommend that they encourage students to return to the center for multiple visits and to work with the same tutor. For example, in our own center, we switched to a web-based appointment system so students could more easily sign up with the same consultant and work with that consultant over the course of the semester. We also hope that all centers continue to emphasize the important rapport-building aspects of writing center tutorials that have been a consistently valued element of writing center work and that can be extended to our work with cross racial interactions. Above all, we encourage writing center directors to foreground the value and importance of genuine interactions across race.

Our third recommendation is for writing center directors to design tutor education in ways that encourage the kind of genuine interaction discussed earlier in this chapter. Again, "Genuine interaction goes far beyond mere contact and includes learning about difference in background, experience, and perspectives, as well as getting to know one another individually in an intimate enough way to discern common goals and personal qualities" (Gurin et al. 2002, 336). In order for genuine interactions to be central to writing center practice, tutors need to know how to value and understand differences and similarities between the tutor and the student. One way tutor education can help tutors move toward this knowledge is by challenging tutors to explore the assumptions they make about the meanings of students' racial and linguistic backgrounds at the same time as they recognize that these meanings are worked out on a changing landscape. Research illustrates that we can't make assumptions about the meanings students attribute to their racial identities or backgrounds. Nor can we assume structural or regional diversity guarantees productive interactions. For tutor education, then, rather than providing tutors with generalized characteristics of one group or another, we might offer them the more complicated stories of racial and ethnic identities emerging in our institutions

as reflected in the research conducted by writing center scholars as well as scholars from other fields.

Recognizing that interaction is reciprocal, it is not enough for tutor education to only address students' racial identities. This education must also help tutors come to a deeper understanding of their own identities. One way to do this would be for tutors to keep a reflective journal on what they are learning about their own racial identity (or other aspects of their identity) as they work with other students on writing. They should also be encouraged to explore the ways in which they feel race is or is not an influential factor in their lives or in their work with writing. This practice could also be extended to group journaling that many centers incorporate into their tutor education programs. Such journaling could also be an opportunity for directors to introduce developments in whiteness studies, which is particularly important if they work with a predominantly white staff. Scholars working in whiteness studies have shown the significant need to examine whiteness as a feature of the racial topography, yet this emphasis has not fully made its way into writing center work. We anticipate that such work could help tutors situate their own understanding of identity/ies within the larger context of their writing center communities. It could also prepare them to not only understand the identities within their immediate communities but also to undertake the ongoing work of navigating racial diversity in other circumstances.

We firmly believe that tutoring practice and the preparation of tutors for this practice are only two facets to be considered here. Being culturally competent is not something an individual or an institution settles once and for all. As a result, we believe ongoing inquiry can be critical for a center seeking to address the needs of a diverse student population. Our most pressing recommendation is that centers conduct research to better understand how students perceive their racial identities and backgrounds as well as how they perceive and experience cross racial interactions on their campuses. Based on our work, we think writing centers might be surprised by what they learn. Student experiences may at once confirm and disrupt understandings of students' perspectives on race as well as how they interact across race, which can create opportunities for writing centers to consider how to make the most of cross racial interactions in the center for their educational value.

To carry out such investigations, writing center researchers might conduct surveys to gain a broader perspective of their institutional or

regional context, or they might use narrative research or discourse analysis to focus more specifically on the students who use and work in their writing centers. Such research can be used to extend the field's interrogation of peer-based tutoring relationships by more fully addressing the role of racial identity in student-tutor interactions as well as issues of power, knowledge, and writing. We see this research as moving us toward answers to questions such as the following: How is the power differential between students and tutors affected by racial identities? What additional learning or benefits might students and tutors experience in tutorials involving cross racial interactions?

The value of this type of research will allow us to rethink the structure of our writing centers as well as to design tutor education programs based on the messy realities of our own institutional contexts. While we are early in this process ourselves, we anticipate being able to use what we have learned from our research to create professional-development opportunities and materials that include attention to cross racial interactions. For example, new tutors in our center (all of whom are graduate students, many of whom are white) often expect a particular kind of student diversity to be present in the writing center when they first arrive at NMSU. Many tutors assume the Hispanic student population will have difficulties with standard American English. While this may be true for some of the students tutors work with, it is definitely not the case for most students. Any research we've conducted can provide a more dynamic understanding not only of the student population but also of what it might mean for tutors to interact with these students.

A related recommendation is less about conducting research and more about reflecting on the ongoing process of understanding diversity on college and university campuses. We encourage writing centers to engage in research—whether textual or empirical, conducted by themselves or others—not as an end point, a destination arrived at, but instead as an ongoing attempt to understand the terrain of race, writing, and education. Importantly, research can remind us that the terrain of racial relations, as well as the landscape of learning in higher education, is in need of continuous mapping. For example, we could work with tutors, in informal and formal ways, to explore what it means to participate in building knowledge about students who use our writing centers as well as what it means to construct the writing center as a site of learning about issues of diversity. What we think is particularly important for the tutors we work with is that this is an opportunity to learn how

to learn. That is, the work we are hoping to undertake with tutors will engage them and us in coming to know about students at our school and also in coming to understand there will always be limits to what we know, limits that inform our interactions in positive and negative ways. Ideally, conducting research will also prepare them as professionals in the field to engage this process in other contexts. In other words, we hope tutors learn not only about the diversity on this campus but also about how to learn about diversity in other settings.

Our experience with this research project suggests that addressing cross racial interactions in the writing center might require a different orientation to understanding and working with racial identities and racial interactions. This orientation entails several recognitions: that diversity, especially racial diversity, is not only a challenging issue for writing centers in the twenty-first century but also an opportunity to more fully benefit from the learning possibilities of writing center inter-actions; that "welcoming and accommodating" diversity might not only entail addressing problems but also looking for opportunities through which students and tutors alike can develop academically and socially; and that any work with racial diversity in the writing center should be largely understood through a framework of interaction and as an ongoing process. Therefore, our engagement with this landscape must also be dynamic, as we address racial diversity as a challenge and as an opportunity, drawing on new areas of learning, such as the work we discuss from education, as well as more familiar areas, such as the many features of writing centers that position us well to engage in dynamic work with cross racial interactions.

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10

RACIAL LITERACY AND THE WRITING CENTER

Michelle T. Johnson

"All the tutors were white."

> James, self-described African American male

"I would have liked to have had a consultant of a different race, however there were none in the room."

> Taylor, self-described white female

James held high hopes for his first semester in college. He desperately wanted to believe that the diversity marketed to him as a high-school senior would in fact be the norm across the university campus. He was excited about the diverse enrollment in his racial literacy course: African American, black, white, biracial, multiracial, Hispanic, Native American, and Filipino. Taylor remarked that she chose to register for Freshman Seminar 116: Racial Literacy because she wanted to step out of her comfort zone. She was curious and studious, often encouraging the white female who sat beside her to "give the class a chance." In the classroom James and Taylor embraced the semester's racial literacy journey—of probing race as a discursive construct and as a visible and invisible component of literacy development. The task proved more difficult when it came to the writing center. Immediately, they had to confront their assumptions about race and writing, race and tutoring.

During the fall of 2007, I taught a racial literacy freshman seminar, and as part of the course, I conducted a study about student perceptions of and experiences using the writing center. I began the study and the semester with the following questions: What happens when students have to make meaning of race while writing and they seek advice from the writing center? What happens when students who choose to learn about the social construction of race and racism from a critical literacy

perspective ask for help from a writing tutor who chooses not to or cannot engage race critically? Does the writing center enable or disable a student's racial literacy development? How should a racial literacy instructor integrate writing center services into the classroom and still provide students with a critical learning experience? What role, if any, should the writing center play in racial literacy development? As I will show, teaching racial literacy and integrating writing center services is a messy practice that requires constant reflection for students and for me as the instructor. Nevertheless, racial literacy praxis in the classroom and in the writing center can help move the field from the stagnant practices of racial liberalism to the transformative practices of racial literacy.

Racial literacy is the understanding that race, as Stuart Hall (1997) describes, is a signifier that operates at a discursive level and informs our literacy definitions and practices. Racial literacy as a theory and pedagogical practice falls under the rubric of critical literacy and critical race theory but argues for a more directed and deliberate examination of the construction of race and racism via language. As a course, racial literacy is an extension of the rhetoric and composition program, fulfilling a reasoning and discourse general-education requirement. In other words, after successful completion of English 101 or an equivalent, students may enroll in English 102 or Freshman Seminar 116, both of which I teach under the heading of racial literacy.

As a former writing center consultant at the university and community college levels, I am aware of the benefits students receive from the writing center. I am an advocate for more funding, personnel, publicity, and integration of the writing center into the center of intellectual inquiry and academic practice. The University Writing Center (UWC) of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro (UNCG) functions within the rhetoric and composition program, which is housed in the English department. It is a global writing center in the sense that any student or employee of the university can use it free of charge. Its director is a rhetoric and composition specialist and close friend. Advanced undergraduate and graduate students staff the center as consultants; undergraduates enroll in a three-credit tutoring course and graduate students attend workshops prior to the opening of the center. The director and her assistants also participate in writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) initiatives, serve on committees, research, attend conferences, and publish in the field. According to the UNCG writing center's website:

The mission of our UWC is to connect writers with readers. This helps to make good writers better writers. It also encourages students to develop an awareness about themselves as writers that will help them after they leave the UWC. To support this philosophy, our center practices a collaborative approach to sessions, where students and consultants engage in one-on-one conversations about writing—conversations that center on shared knowledge and expertise, as opposed to hierarchical instruction that treats writing center sessions as remediation. Understanding our center as a place where collaboration and shared knowledge guide our practices supports a view of writing center work that grants both students and consultants authority, rather than consultants alone, which is critical. If we are truly to help students become better writers over time, they must be in control of that process and participate actively in their writing center sessions.

Given the UWC's purpose and my knowledge of its day-to-day practices, I feel comfortable requiring my students to attend the center, not only in my reasoning and discourse courses, but also in my women's studies and African American studies courses where writing is a form of evaluation. The semester I conducted the study of my racial literacy course I required all twenty-two students to attend the writing center at least four times during the semester, preferably once a month for each writing assignment.

Using experiential data collected from my racial literacy classroom and from student reflections of their writing center consultations, I examine the messiness of teaching racial literacy and requiring students to attend the UWC, where racial literacy has not been directly or deliberately addressed. First, I define *racial* and provide a snapshot of Freshman Seminar 116: Racial Literacy. Second, I describe how I integrated the UWC into a racial literacy seminar and the pedagogical strategies employed in class. Third, I present student perceptions and beliefs about their UWC sessions, placing their responses into three categories: evasion, appropriation, and engagement. Fourth, I examine my difficulties with evasion, appropriation, and engagement as an instructor and as a scholar. Fifth, I look to the future of racial literacy teaching and tutoring.

My purpose here is not to judge Greensboro's UWC, writing centers in general, directors, staff, or my students, but to complicate our discussions of literacy, race, teaching, and tutoring in an effort to push us, including myself, to risk and to reveal more. My argument is not new; we know on some level what ails us all: literacy instructors (and I include writing center consultants in this category) must stop avoiding critical examinations of race and must begin a discursive analysis of

race construction, specifically how we maintain race and racism through language. What is new, however, is my insistence from the perspective of racial literacy, along with the authors in this collection from various other perspectives, to probe the inner workings of race, literacy, power, and writing center practice. This task, as I will show, is neither easy nor clean; it is messy. Nevertheless, once we begin to name or to identify the parts, the conflicts, and the assumptions, we can use the mess to make meaning and to move forward.

RACIAL LITERACY

> *"Why even say race if it doesn't exist?"*
>
>   Lisa, self-identified biracial female

Before I move into discussing the study of my racial literacy classroom and the integration of writing center services, it is important that I more clearly define racial literacy as I see it. In *Race, the Floating Signifier* (1997), Stuart Hall posits, "Race is more like a language than it is like a way in which we are biologically constituted." Race is a "floating signifier" in that it was (and is) constructed as a sign to give meaning to physical differences, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features.

> And those things gain their meaning not because of what they contain in their essence but in the shifting relations of difference which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field. Their meaning, because it is relational and not essential, can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation.

Race, according to Hall, is a discursive construct; it operates like a language. We, the people, make race what it is and make differences what they are when we categorize—through thought and language—and we shift these categories and meanings of differences over time.

Because race is a discursive social construct does not mean that racism and its physical, psychological, and material effects do not exist. Racist violence, for example, is a consequence of and a method by which the system of race is maintained—discursively, politically, materially, and so forth. But race, as we claim to know it today, began with the need to name and to categorize physical differences in order to create and maintain a system of power. My racial literacy praxis begins with this recognition of race as a floating signifier.

The study of race as a signifier—racial literacy—falls under the umbrella of critical literacy as theorized by Paulo Friere and Ira Shor,

among others. Freire, the leading theorist of critical literacy, and Donaldo Macedo (1987) push us to see literacy as "reading the word and world." Racial literacy, as an extension of critical literacy, emphasizes reading the word *race* in a racialized world and examines how we read the world as a result of race. This type of racial literacy is necessary for a number of reasons, two of which I discuss here.

First, because, as Victor Villanueva (2006) explains, if we no longer speak of race or racism, they get ignored. When we pretend they do not exist, we reify the invisibility of white privilege and power, and we give stamina to the "new racism," more subtle, insidious, and blended forms of racial oppression. Villanueva argues that language facilitates the new racism by using politically correct terms to mask race and racism: diversity, identity, culture, multiculturalism, and ethnicity. These words function as tropes "signal[ing] what is to be said and what is not to be said" (5). As critical literacy instructors, we, too, can fall victim to masking race and racism because the tropes are standard parlance in our field and are safer pedagogically.

Second, racial literacy encompasses understanding the connections among racial construction and socialization; racism; literacy behaviors such as reading, writing, viewing, and speaking; and individual and institutional values and practices. We must address why we do what we do in terms of language and communication or else we will continue to perpetuate the status quo, which suggests that if we employ a racially liberal approach like colorblindness or multiculturalism then we have addressed the problem. In essence, we continue the racist socialization process already embedded in classrooms and in the larger society. To address this, Jane Bolgatz (2005), in *Talking Race in the Classroom*, presents a book-length examination of racial literacy and race talk in secondary classrooms. Bolgatz explains:

> Racial literacy is a set of social competencies. Being racially literate means being able to interact with others to challenge undemocratic practices. Racially literate students are willing to break the taboos of talking about race. They can hear and appreciate diverse and unfamiliar experiences. They are genuine about their feelings. They recognize that they have much to learn, and they know how to ask questions. . . . Racial literacy is not simply a matter of speaking and listening, however. One must view racial issues through a critical lens that attends to current and institutional aspects of racism. Racially literate students understand that various forms of racism have developed historically and that they can contest these practices. (1–2)

Bolgatz's analysis and examination of race talk in the classroom provide helpful insights to navigating the minefield of race and encouraging racial literacy development. I extend Bolgatz, however, by emphasizing the discursive construction of race and how our literacy behaviors today—our reading, writing, viewing, and speaking—are informed by race as a signifier, or to use Kenneth Burke's (1966, 45) terminology, how race functions as a "terministic screen" that directs and deflects our attention toward and away from particular representations of reality. *Race*, unfortunately, is a term that we are loathe to understand and that shades and clouds our ability to see, to interpret, or to make meaning in such a way that even our best racially liberal intentions fall short of racially literate practices.

If our classrooms, writing centers, faculty meetings, journals, conference panels, and other public discourse spaces become places of silence, debilitating dissension, intimidation, and violence when race enters the conversation, then what does it *really* mean to be literate in a racialized and racist society? How can we (myself included) call ourselves literacy professionals and literate beings when such a large part of our societal structure cannot be read, cannot be spoken, cannot be viewed, cannot be written with critical clarity? A student-teacher conference with James illustrates my point.

James came to my office to discuss his paper about the "black box" on the U.S. Census form. The assignment required each student to self-identify according to government stipulations on the census and then to write a paper defining what his/her box(es) mean(s). James wrote that the "black box" meant he had "less cranial and mental capacity than non-black people." He went on to write, "To say that all blacks have the same brain mass is eccentric. Surprisingly, there is no gene that says I am black." After reading the paper, I was interested in James's word choice "eccentric." He explained that he had used a thesaurus, a common strategy for emerging writers. So, I wasn't that surprised by the awkward wording. What surprised me, however, was his *reason* for using the thesaurus. I asked James why he felt like he had to use a thesaurus for his paper, and he stated that he always searches for "long or exaggerated words" when he has a white teacher because they expect more.

"So, are you saying I am trying to act white?" I teased him, relying on a presumed cultural connection we shared.

"Naw, naw," he laughed.

I wanted to know more about his racial literacy processes, but I did not want to steer him too much. So we discussed another aspect of his paper.

I could tell James continued to think about my "acting white" comment because moments later he interrupted me to say, "It's not that I think you are trying to act white. I guess you remind me of white teachers."

"How so?"

"It's not that my black teachers weren't smart or good. It's just that, you know, we didn't have to do as much. I'm not saying they were bad."

"Of course not," I assured him.

"Yeah, that's it. You remind me of my past white teachers."

I took notes during that exchange and asked James to explore this more in his final paper.

He wrote:

> When I write my papers for courses in which I have white instructors, I often use long or exaggerated words to try to prove my point. Also, I noticed that I work harder on class work assigned by my white teachers than those who are black. However, there is one exception to this. Ms. Johnson, my FMS teacher, demands a certain respect and level of work ethic that I would expect from my white teacher. Although I've slacked off in the classes of my black teachers in the past, I don't do it in my FMS class because she reminds me of my white teachers. I know that blacks constantly feel the need to prove themselves to white people, or as in my case, blacks who remind them of white people, but I never knew that I did it so subconsciously. I must say that noticing a thing like this was proof that my racial literacy was changing.

James's reflection demonstrates his racial literacy development, his awareness of the ways language, power, and race (and racial mythologies about intellect and work ethic) collide. For me as a racial literacy instructor, James's articulation of why he used a thesaurus and how racial socialization impacts his literacy development, are more important than understanding the history of census categorization or biological determinism. After classroom instruction and a student-teacher conference, it was time for James to visit the UWC.

RACIAL LITERACY IN THE WRITING CENTER

"But they aren't in our class."

Taylor

During fall semester 2007, students in my racial literacy seminar were required to attend the UWC four times during the semester, preferably once a month for each paper. Most of them fulfilled the requirement as outlined; others found themselves literally racing to the writing center before the end of the semester. My analysis focuses on four

students—James, Taylor, Keisha, and Lisa—the four students who provided the most critical analyses of their racial literacy development throughout the semester and who attended the writing center more than the required four times. I also provide snapshots of whole-class discussions about writing center experiences in general. What follows is a discussion of student responses from their pre and post writing center consultation forms, their class discussions, and written reflections. It is important to note that the students' responses represent their personal perceptions about the UWC consultations.

To prepare my students for their consultations, I detailed specific UWC policies: consultants should not write on student papers, should not assign the paper a fictional grade, and should not steer clients to write about particular themes, topics, or issues. On the other hand, consultants should listen to the needs of the clients, should engage the client in a dialogue about the paper, and should meet the client where he/she is in the writing process. It is not my intention to critique the UWC's policies in this chapter; instead I focus on my students' perceptions of their writing center consultations and the impact they had on racial literacy development. In all my courses, I require students to outline their goals for the consultation and then to reflect on their visit. I do this because a student's literacy development, regardless of the subject, should not only be measured by the final product, but also by the process, including his/her integration of university-wide services, be it the speaking center, multicultural resource center, or writing center. For first-year students, I provide more guidance in pre and postconsultation forms.

Preconsultation questions:

1. What is racial literacy? (Describe it in your own words so you can help the consultant understand the course and the assignment.)

2. What are your expectations for the session?

3. At what stage are you in the writing process? (Invention, outlining, drafting, revising, or proofreading and editing). Why are you seeking assistance at this stage in the process?

Postconsultation questions:

1. Did the session meet your expectations? Explain.

2. What did you all discuss?

3. How much do you think your consultant understood about race and writing? Explain.

4. Name a positive aspect about the session.

5. Name something that could have been improved.

6. What else would you like to say?

I recognize that preparing students for the writing center can be problematic in that my agenda as the instructor has the potential to overpower their agendas as writers. Nevertheless, these questions not only help students communicate their needs but also communicate the emphasis of the course. Question number one challenges them to articulate what racial literacy means and what the course is about to consultants who are unfamiliar with the topic. Unlike writing a paper for a literature course or a history course, most consultants have no background with racial literacy or have never heard of the course. As such, my students must be prepared to explain what they are learning and how the course fits into the general-education curriculum. The consultation forms also provide students with material they can use to write their course reflections about their racial literacy development. I encourage students to look across the spectrum of their learning and engagement with university services and reflect on if and how their racial literacy has changed. The pre and postconsultation forms constitute one element of their semester racial literacy journey.

From these forms, class discussions, and student reflections, I placed student responses into three categories: evasion, appropriation, and engagement. Again, these are my terms and categories, not the students'. And, just as racial categorization is problematic, the taxonomy I construct presents problems too. For it is not my intention to stigmatize or to define student experiences or UWC consultants as racist, antiracist, racially liberal, or the like. My intention is to unmask the messiness of racial literacy teaching with an integration of writing center services. To do so, I must give space to student voices and perceptions of their experiences.

Evasion

> *"She kept talking about commas."*
> Keisha, self-identified African American female

In this section I provide an analysis of student responses regarding their stated purposes for attending the UWC and the actual services

they received. I place the responses on the heading "evasion" because students perceived consultants' aversion to discussing "racial papers," as my students called them. Questions two and three ask students to state their intentions for the session and their writing process stage. I am not sure if students relay this information to the consultants; I encourage them to, nonetheless. A class discussion about writing center consultations revealed that students who stated that they needed help with the "message" or "ideas" in their papers were redirected to issues pertaining to grammar. Keisha, whom I will discuss at length in another section, noticed the consultant kept focusing on commas, when indeed Keisha wanted to talk about her ideas, "how to say more," she explained. Another student indicated, "He [the consultant] didn't help me with my paper but I fixed some verbs and misspelled words."

Grammar is safe, appears raceless (although we know it isn't), and in some cases, is easy "to fix." When students in a racial literacy course meet a consultant who would rather insert commas in a paper than insert him/herself into a dialogue about race and writing, the session can become disabling to the student's writing, thinking, and racial literacy development. For example, Taylor indicated that she wanted to know if her ideas about the "white box" on the U.S. Census form were "all over the place." Instead, she received a lesson in proofreading and editing. On her postconsultation form she responded to these two instructions:

1. Name a positive aspect about the session.
   Taylor: "I cleaned up some errors I had and learned some new rules."
2. Name something that could have been improved.
   Taylor: "Next time I will proofread my paper better before I take it to them."

One of the dangers of evasion is students who are not in the proofreading and editing stage may begin to feel as if they did something wrong, that they have to fix all grammar errors before they discuss other aspects of the paper. I sensed embarrassment in Taylor's reflection that she should have caught the mistakes before going to the writing center, although she just wanted to see if her paper "made sense."

Student awareness of evasion is a critical step in the racial literacy process, and the students and I begin discussing this on the first day of class. "How do we evade talking about race?" I asked them.

"We don't talk about it."

"We say racism doesn't exist."

"Everybody gets upset and just walks away," they responded.

"How do we evade writing about race?" I continued. This question was more difficult because most students revealed that they either have never written about race or only study race in terms of Black History Month. We went on to discuss how difficult it is to read "racial stories" in class, and to say "racial words."

"Everybody gets quiet," or "The teacher changes the subject." Everyone agreed. As the semester progressed, we discussed how to be aware of evasion in our writing, namely, how we use politically correct words to avoid offending readers, how we write about a handful of culturally approved topics (Martin Luther King, Jr., the Holocaust, "my black best friend in elementary school"), or how we write about feelings and individuals, not actions and institutions. So when the time came to prepare for the first visit to the UWC, we had already discussed fears of exposing our "racial writing" to strangers who are not in the course. "They [writing tutors] won't get it," my students told me.

"And if they don't, then tell me why you think they didn't get it. Write about what happened," I responded. Before the end of class, I warned them against getting bogged down in grammar. "We have time for that. Concentrate on telling your story."

It is possible that my students' papers were, in fact, ready for proofreading and editing, but the students did not know it. Or, given the classroom preparation, the students could have been overly sensitive to any grammatical reference. Whatever the case, the students perceived that although the consultants were "nice" and "friendly," they did not address the students' needs.

Appropriation

> *"The tutor suggested that I change 'colored' to African American. She felt the term colored was too bold for my paper."*
>
> <div align="right">Keisha</div>

In this section I focus on student perceptions of consultants encouraging them to use politically correct language. Across campus, first-year students engaged in a discussion of the All-Freshman Read book *Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons. I gave my students the assignment to choose a word from the text and write a paper defining the word given its historical, contemporary, and literary context. Some of the words students chose were *colored*, *white trash*, *nigger*, *white*, and *bastard*. As I mentioned earlier, racial literacy requires research into the etymology of racialized

terms in an effort to understand how race signifies, and by extension how other words signify race. We discussed the obvious terms such as *nigger* and the not so obvious such as *disadvantaged* or *at-risk*. Racial literacy also involves deconstructing language to see how it is used to maintain systems of injustice. Because we in the United States refuse to address race and racism seriously and publically, when we encounter these terms, we ask the speaker to make a public apology, act as if we do not hear the word, or relegate the speaker to the category of racist. We function similarly in the classroom and in the writing center. Although my students did not experience a consultant writing on their papers or steering the overall message of their papers, they did experience consultants mincing at "racial words" and suggesting they "say it another way." Lisa told the class and reflected in her semester paper that every time her consultant came to the word *white* while reading her paper aloud, the consultant's voice lowered to a whisper. Although she did not suggest that Lisa replace *white* with another term, her appropriation of the word while reading it suggested to Lisa that this was a term that should not be spoken or shared in public.

Lisa's classmate Keisha chose to write about the word *colored*. We discussed this word in class at length because it appears on the first page of the novel and because a white female in the course related that her father taught her to use the term to describe blacks because it was less offensive. The word *colored* precipitated lengthy discussions of acceptable and unacceptable terms. In the epigraph, Keisha explains why the consultant asked her to change *colored* to *African American*; "It was too bold for my paper," Keisha noted. I place Keisha's response in the category of appropriation because the consultant's remarks (as perceived by Keisha) signify an act of taking possession of something without permission. Using *colored* was central to Keisha's paper and to her racial literacy development. It signaled for Keisha as a student and for me as an instructor that her literacy would not be confined to politically correct discourse. I also use the term *appropriation* because of the implication of property removal, to take someone's property without permission—be it physical or intellectual. Keisha was in the process of claiming her property, her racial literacy. To have her words appropriated by someone with more perceived literacy authority (sanctioned by the institution) threatened Keisha's agency and undermined destabilizing academic hierarchies that writing center theory and practice seek to disrupt with peer tutoring.

If Keisha had followed the advice of the consultant and replaced every occurrence of *colored* with *African American*, she would have had a more difficult time with the assignment given she had to include analysis of *Ellen Foster*. However, she did not change the word; instead, she wrote about her experience: "I didn't want to use 'African American.' I wanted to use 'colored' because that is what was in the book. I hope I don't have that consultant again. It's like she didn't even read my paper to see what it was about, just kept telling me it wasn't right to use 'colored.'"

Engagement

> *"He was excited about my paper. He said he knew you."*
>
> Taylor

Although most students perceived that some consultants displayed discomfort in the session, avoided the racial content of the papers, or suggested they change their papers to sound more politically correct, these same students reported successful UWC sessions wherein consultants engaged the content of the paper and the students. One class discussion yielded a number of comments about successful consultations.

First, the consultants displayed a level of excitement and interest in the topic. This perception of my students was important because it signaled that the student had an ally in the difficult task of making meaning of race in writing and writing through race. "My guy had obviously read past racial papers," a student told the class. Whether or not this was true, my student sensed that his consultant had experience with "racial papers," and as a result, did not attempt to evade the topic or appropriate his words. Second, students perceived some consultants had been trained or educated in racial literacy. Contrary to comments from the beginning of the semester when students indicated fear that the consultants would not "get it," some students met graduate students who had attended a racial literacy workshop I facilitated and/or were knowledgeable of critical race and literacy theories. Excitement and knowledge made all the difference for my students.

Take James's semester reflection as an example:

> Since being in this class, I've become more observant of human behaviors and the way people, including me, think when it comes to race. After writing my first paper for this class, I went to the writing center. I was a little nervous because I knew that there wasn't a single black writing consultant in there. The title of my paper was "What it means to be black," and there were several times in the paper where I referred to the many advantages of white people.

> As my consultant read my paper, she was agreeing with it. I couldn't believe that a white person was actually acknowledging their advantages. I thought that all whites were simply in denial when it came to race.

Reading James's comments, one can be tempted to equate "agreement" with "engagement." It is not my intention (and I can't speak for James) to suggest that consultants have to agree with student ideas or arguments about race. What is important from my perspective as an instructor is that the consultant engaged. Racial literacy requires engagement, as should writing center consultations. More importantly, James's racial literacy expanded as he acknowledged his preconceptions about whites, denial, and race. Nervously, he anticipated a white consultant denying that racism in the form of white privilege even exists. Amid the whiteness of the UWC, James confronted his own racial literacy biases and reported repeat visits to this particular consultant.

I return to Taylor, a studious seminar student and UWC client. She went to the UWC seeking a nonwhite face. Her semester reflection examined her initial assumptions:

> At the beginning of the semester I was really excited about learning about other cultures and races. I wanted to get out of my comfort zone. I guess that is why I wanted a tutor who wasn't white. When Mrs. Johnson asked me why I was looking for a non-white person, I wasn't sure. I guess I thought all white people would agree with me and the tutor would question what I was writing. After being in this class, I realized I wanted somebody different so I could learn from them. Maybe they could help me understand race better and what they have to go through.

Taylor and I discussed a draft of her reflection in conference. I asked her if she still believed that all white tutors think alike. After her experience with a white male graduate student, she explained, "There are white people who know about race. . . . He asked me questions, sort of like you do in class that made me think harder." Similar to James, Taylor was becoming more racially literate because she was recognizing how racial perceptions affected her tutoring expectations. This developmental process would have been hindered, however, if she had not met with a consultant willing to engage racial literacy.

During that conference, I also wanted Taylor to recognize that her desire for a nonwhite tutor to teach her about race was just as problematic as her belief about white tutors. I asked her to recall a classroom discussion when an African American male asked a Hispanic American

student to explain why "illegal aliens" come to the United States. She recalled that everyone in the classroom looked at the student, waiting for him to teach the rest of the class. That day we discussed the concept of native-informant, of racial minorities being held as representatives of and spokespersons for a group. We also discussed exoticization, difference, and Otherness.

"Oh," she said, remembering the look on her classmate's face during the illegal alien discussion.

"We all do it sometimes," I assured her.

"But why are they all white?. . . The tutors?" She was angry now.

"Now that is a good question. I look forward to reading your final paper."

THE FUTURE OF RACIAL LITERACY TEACHING AND TUTORING

I began this essay with two quotations, one from James, an African American male, and the other from Taylor, a white female. Both students made similar remarks about the "whiteness" of the UWC, neither of which I addressed directly. For all of my education and teaching about racial literacy, I admit that their comments surprised me because, as I reflect now, the whiteness of the university, the writing center, the English department, and the majority of my courses has become a given, an unexamined, accepted norm. It just is. Even as I work to unearth it in language, the terministic screens of race and white supremacy direct my attention toward words and deflect my attention away from bodies—the material consequences of racism. Hence the danger and criticism of focusing on race as a discursive construct.

Evasion for me as a racial literacy instructor means not answering the question, "Why are the tutors all white?" Because that would lead into questions about professors, about honors courses, and so on. I would have to ask my good friend and director of the writing center, "Why are all the tutors white?" For now, I want to reserve for them a little bit of the myth—the myth that college is the great equalizer, that UNC-Greensboro is the most diverse university in the North Carolina system, which means its faculty, administration, and curricula are diverse, too. I want my students to hold on to a portion of the myth; after all, they are first-year students, I tell myself. So, I evade.

I am not immune to appropriation of my students' literacy just as writing center consultants aren't. Certainly, complete ownership of one's literacy is impossible, but I must be careful not to shape my students' racial

literacy in such a way that they cannot develop critical awareness for themselves. It is delicate balance, so I evade in order to avoid appropriation. I also believe that the more people and resources students engage from a racial literacy perspective, the better chance students have of creating their own meaning from the chaos that ensues. I do not have the last word nor the only truth about race, language, and power.

Finally, my engagement with racial literacy in the writing center presented problems from a personal and professional perspective. Personally and professionally, I am good friends with the director. We have presented papers together about whiteness theory. We studied for comprehensive exams together. We drafted our dissertations together. We wrestle with race and language theory together. So, my engagement is clouded by the desire to present a nonracist picture of the writing center, and by extension, a nonracist picture of my friend. But, what I reveal about personal relationships, institutional dynamics, race and language, and academic scholarship constitutes my own racial literacy development. Similar to my students, I am on a racial literacy journey, with no definite destination, because race floats and racism morphs.

Engagement through knowledge and training holds many promises and transformations, however limited. The student responses I described provide insight into race and writing pedagogy in the classroom and in the writing center. They show us what can happen when we teach for racial literacy in a vacuum or when we provide some level of racial literacy training to tutors. They also show us what happens when we do nothing. Racial liberalism—the order of the day—prevails. We succumb to the feel-good pedagogies and the avoidance remedies. Or, we teach grammar.

I conclude by addressing questions I raised earlier. What role, if any, should the writing center play in racial literacy development? As many of the authors in this book have noted, the writing center is not a race- or racism-neutral space. It is a part of the larger academic institution, a part of the larger society, and a part of the world where race and racism, in various forms and degrees, still shape the lives of individuals and influence the values and practices within institutions. That being said, if the writing center does not work against systems of racism via literacy, then it inadvertently works to maintain the system. Similar to my racial literacy seminar, the writing center can only do so much towards dismantling racism because it is a part of the academic institution. Nevertheless, writing centers must do something, just as rhetoric and composition studies must do something. And racial literacy is something writing centers can do.

What can writing center directors do to promote racial literacy within their sphere of influence? James and Taylor provide one answer. Writing centers can actively recruit students of color, not to promote diversity on the surface or to pacify critical colleagues, but to disrupt a literacy system that privileges whiteness from birth to college and beyond, a system that deliberately underprepares students of color for college, internships, and tutoring jobs. Writing centers can integrate racial literacy into tutor training. The students who perceived their sessions being the most successful indicated that their consultants had some familiarity with racial literacy. One of my reasons for designing a racial literacy course was my frustration with talking around race and racism in multicultural curricula and then springing such a volatile topic on students with no time for them to prepare. What happens in classrooms—evasion, appropriation, anger, and denial—also happens in writing centers when directors do not prepare consultants. Certainly, directors cannot prepare consultants for every volatile topic or every newly developed course. Nevertheless, by now, with all of our theorizing, writing, reflections, panels, and experiences, we know that race remains our Achilles heel. And so, if literacy is our business and yet we are illiterate when it comes to teaching and tutoring students to read, write, speak, and view race critically, then the literacy we espouse is incomplete.

Finally, does the writing center enable or disable a student's racial literacy development? How should a racial literacy instructor integrate writing center services into the classroom and still provide students with a critical learning experience? The primary instruction for racial literacy occurs in the racial literacy classroom. However, racial literacy cannot be developed within a vacuum. Racial literacy should not only be an individual enterprise but also an institutional enterprise. And, given writing centers' unique rhetorical emphasis on one-to-one collaboration, the institutionalization of racial literacy as a collaborative act through literacy instruction can position writing centers at the forefront of moving rhetoric and composition studies from racial liberalism to racial literacy.

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11

BREAKING THE SILENCE ON RACISM THROUGH AGENCY WITHIN A CONFLICTED FIELD

Jane Cogie

If I understand myself on the model of the human, and if the kinds of grieving that are available to me make clear the norms by which the "human" is constituted for me, then it would seem that I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world, if not my First Worldism.

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

In our own way, because of what we [as whites] know instinctively about white dominance and power based on skin color, we experience our own double way of being in the world: what we know is right conflicts with how we believe we should act as ethical human beings. We often do not "see" it or "feel" it and can rarely articulate what it is that makes us uneasy. Yet it is there.

Julie Landsman, "Being White"

The comedy begins with our simplest gestures. They all entail an inevitable awkwardness. Reaching out my hand to pull a chair toward me, I have folded the arm of my jacket, scratched the floor, and dropped my cigarette ash. In doing what I willed to do, I did a thousand and one things I hadn't willed to do. The act was not pure; I left traces. Wiping away these other traces, I left others. . . . When the awkwardness of the act is turned against the goal pursued, we are in the midst of a tragedy. . . . Thus we are responsible beyond our intentions. . . . That is to say that our consciousness, and our mastery of reality through consciousness, do not exhaust our relationship with reality, in which we are present with all the density of our being.

Emmanuel Levinas,
"On Thinking of the Other: Entre Nous"

In attempting to foster diversity in my writing center, I, perhaps like many other well-intentioned white writing center directors and tutors, have found it difficult to leave behind the imprint of my First Worldism (Butler 2004, 46). Such an imprint can follow us in our writing center work whether we attempt to avoid racial inequities through remaining race neutral, believing that race need not be an issue if everyone is treated as an individual, or we attempt to actively address those inequities. Yet it can help to know, when deciding between the two approaches, that the consequences of our actions lie beyond our control, as Emmanuel Levinas (1998) suggests. To our discomfort at being unable to shed the markers of race that can complicate our communications across racial lines, Levinas adds the crucial emphasis that "we are responsible beyond our intentions" (3) and thus must partake in the comedy of unintended consequences. If we are part of this comedy whatever we choose to do or not to do, as Levinas suggests, we may as well be willing to act, especially within situations that pose no clear right response, despite the further awkwardness such actions can entail. The route of active involvement, of putting oneself out there, is almost always a better alternative than silence since such involvement, imperfect though it too will be, can at least bring with it the chance for dialogue and change.

In this chapter, I focus on my center's effort to take action on issues of race in a spring 2007 semester-long, classroom-based tutoring project in a section of Black American Studies (BAS) 215: Black American Experience in a Pluralist Society, after years of sporadically offered discussion-based workshops on diversity that left the tutors and myself essentially unchanged, reflecting outwardly rather than inwardly on the problem of institutional racism. In discussing this risky experiment for tackling this problem, I emphasize the significant burdens it placed on some of the project's players and yet the way in which the very messiness of this project—including our inability to escape our First Worldism—shed light on our own participation in institutional racism and on the necessity of action to prepare us for a more meaningful role in bringing about change.

My decision to undertake the BAS 215 project was driven by a determination to break from my tacit endorsement of the status quo that resulted from not understanding the implications of institutional racism for every white who benefits from it and from being overly preoccupied with the difficulty of responding adequately to such issues. Yet with that determination came a stream of questions that were inescapable in this

project, given its configuration involving mainly white tutors entering the BAS 215 class with 97 percent African American enrollment and a curriculum focused on the experience of African Americans in a racist society. The questions I asked preceded my decision to undertake this project in January 2007 and extended, without clear "yes" or "no" answers, well after its completion in May of that year: Can mainly white tutors (two African American grad students and one Asian American undergraduate being the only exceptions) enter a majority black classroom and not simply reinforce the power of the dominant culture we were aiming to disrupt? Would the BAS 215 students perceive the project as an invasion of their space by gatekeeping tutors and by the center's white director, who, housed in the English department, had had no previous connection to the Black American Studies department? If so, would not the tutors, rather than myself as the project's organizer, take the brunt of whatever student resistance might in fact arise? Along with these questions, I faced several others: Might too much of my impetus in taking on this challenging project stem from my desire to gain more funding and recognition for the center and for me as its director? Finally, is more harm than good likely to result from this project, thus making inaction advisable until a better alternative for breaking the silence were to come along?

In reflecting on these questions after the project's completion, the participating tutors and I found a number of readings helpful to sorting through this experience with its uncomfortable mix of opposites: polarizing tensions between the predominantly white tutors and predominantly black BAS 215 students in contrast to many moments of academic and personal connections between these two groups. Among the readings that most illuminated such contrasts were Judith Butler's theory of agency, John Tagg's theory of leadership, and Julie Landsman's reflection on her lived experience of both theories.

THEORY TO FOCUS PRACTICE: THE BENEFITS OF ENTERING A CONFLICTED FIELD

Most helpful in Butler's (1997) theory of agency for understanding our project is her suggestion that awkwardness and imperfection in expressions of power can help the person who owns the power reach a purpose beyond it. When our own power is disrupted, the possibility exists for us to gain agency which "exceeds the power by which [the agency] is enabled. One might say that the purposes of power are not always the

purposes of agency. To the extent that the latter diverge from the former, agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power" (15). So we as subjects are held in check by the habitual roles that define us. Yet, when a break in the smooth carrying out of these roles is exposed, we are able to act in relationship to the others within that conflicted field rather than simply in relationship to the institutional mandate. Thus, Butler's theory helps us perceive awkwardness within a racial context as an opportunity to cross boundaries between black and white rather than as a failure to shed one's privilege.

Reinforcing the opportunity offered by breaks from prescribed roles is John Tagg's theory of functional leadership, endorsed by Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet (2007, 10–11) in *The Everyday Writing Center*, particularly since this approach to leadership requires "the participation of others in order [to accomplish something]" (Tagg 2003, 338). Tagg contrasts the benefits of this type of leadership with the limits of purely structural leadership, which, much like Butler's prior power, is prescribed by the institution (338). He contrasts these forms of leadership to suggest the transformation teachers must undergo if academia is truly to promote "a deep orientation to learning" (97). For more engaged learning to occur, the academy must reject the superficial learning of the "'cool' cognitive economy" in what Tagg terms the "Instruction Paradigm college," in which teachers expect students to absorb knowledge handed down to them, and instead embrace the "'hot' cognitive economy" of the "Learning Paradigm college" (97) in which teachers dare to engage students as players, allowing them to learn through participation in the process of making knowledge (175). Tagg elaborates on his definition of functional leadership through the generalized example of teachers "acting as they wish their students would act" and thus transforming their students' expectations of the teacher's role and the overall hierarchical dynamic of the teacher-student relationship (347). As Tagg emphasizes, drawing on Parker Palmer, "The most effective leader is not one who fills space, but one who opens it" (338).

Landsman (2006) provides an example both of agency within a conflicted field as described by Butler and of functional leadership as described by Tagg, when she upends her students' expectations about education by demanding change from herself as well as from them. In recognizing the problems linked to her role as a white teacher of students of color, she notes the discomfort yet liberation she experienced:

> [My liberation] has to do with connecting to the world in a new way, a way that feels my whole self is allowed to participate. It is not easy or comfortable. I often make mistakes, yet I would not trade the way I think or feel now for the comfort of ignorance of my white race and class advantages for anything. I find I have a new fearlessness. . . . I have been opened up to a real world I sensed was there yet was afraid to acknowledge before reading McIntosh, Thandeka, James Banks, Sonia Nieto, Beverly Tatum—to name a few. (21)

In her students' trusting and open responses to her in-class writing assignments, such as in the students' completion of Landsman's (2005, viii) seed sentences "I hope never again. . ." and "I wish. . . ," it is clear that, as a leader, she has opened spaces rather than just filled them.

As Landsman (2005) points out, however, many whites can find it difficult to reach beyond recognition of their own privileged status and unintentional racism to the sort of fearlessness she has achieved and functional leadership she has learned to provide for her students through her own willingness to take risks. Reaching realizations through reading cathartic texts, though helpful, does not necessarily assure a readiness to act. Many whites—and I write here out of my own experience—are "so afraid [they] will say the wrong thing, and so [they] say nothing" (Landsman 2005, xi). Fear-based silence in teachers and tutors can be reinforced by overlapping yet potentially conflicting academic goals, such as between the goal of promoting the individual student's development and the goal of meeting the standards necessary to academic success. With no clear right approach to addressing this conflict, particularly given the whiteness of the standards teachers and tutors are asked to enforce, silence—concerning the limits of either goal taken alone or the tensions of addressing such limits with the students these standards impact most—may appear the best choice.

Before turning to discuss further my rationale for undertaking the BAS project and the dynamics of agency and leadership that played out in the BAS 215 classroom during spring 2007, it seems worth noting my more limited use of Butler's (1997) theory of agency as compared to Nancy Grimm's (1999). In reimagining the academic identity kit tutors need to contribute to the creation of a "multi-cultural democracy" (71), Grimm draws on Butler, among other theorists, to argue that tutors need to break from habitual expressions of power and become aware of their own multiple selves and themselves as Other and that, they, in turn, can and should raise the awareness of students concerning the arbitrary dominance of academic discourse. She argues, from there, that

tutors should help students learn to negotiate with academic discourse rather than simply following the expected standard unawares (79). In arguing this agenda as necessary to achieving social justice, Grimm allows each of us, regardless of our take on the specifics of her agenda, to see the need for action.

My own use of Butler (1997) is more open ended, focusing less on a plan of action for tutors working with diverse students in a conflicted field and more on the potential a conflicted field holds, allowing tutors to see that a willingness to experience discomfort with their own structural role may well be necessary if they are to take the risks necessary to tap into the potential for interaction across racial lines. In pressing the benefit of specific actions, Grimm (1999) dwells less than I do on the likely ongoing messiness of such encounters, however well the tutor is trained, and less on factors that can complicate this process, not just during the period of training tutors but in subsequent encounters within conflicted fields. Perhaps because of her focus on the need for action and the assumption that action is ultimately worth the risk, she does not provide many details on how tutors can discuss the dominance of academic discourse and the dangers of enculturation without seeming to impose their own agenda on the student or to condescend to that student, who at least on some level is surely already aware of that dominance. On the more theoretical level, Grimm does respond to this issue, affirming the two-way and ongoing nature of postmodern writing center work, with clear emphasis on the fact that the tutor as well as the student must continue to change, such as in the statement with which she concludes the "Redesigning Academic Identity Kits" chapter from *Good Intentions*:

> To cultivate the arts of the contact zone, to coax people out of their safe houses into a mediation of differences, we need to first cultivate the psychic space for negotiation to occur. This is not as simple as developing new tutoring strategies or a new code of ethical principles; rather, it is as difficult as regarding ourselves as Other. It requires a willingness to scrutinize our role and responsibility as change agents within the institution. When we learn to do this with some degree of facility, students may decide, in some cases, to match our expectations; in other cases, they will teach us how to redesign our social futures. (79)

Lacking details on how this interaction might proceed may well have contributed to Christina Murphy's (2006) critique that Grimm does not, in her postmodern writing center, account for "the interplay of identity

within the cultural systems that the academy, the writing center, the student, and the peer-tutor occupy" (275). In the context of our BAS 215 project, I take Murphy's interplay of identity to refer to something like the participating tutors' recognition that what the BAS students had to teach them stemmed not just from the students' difference but from the students' own complicated and overlapping relationships to language, culture, and the academic institution, what Grimm (1999) might call the tutee's own multiple selves.

Murphy, in emphasizing the way this sort of interplay of identity across difference can feed into the role of writing centers in fostering community formation, sets forth her alternative to Grimm's affirmation of difference as the means for breaking up the "culture of power" (quoted in Murphy 2006, 275) and suggests instead building on writing centers' social complexity through recognition of the mix of home and academic communities all of the players—black or white—bring to their interactions in writing centers. However, her alternative, like Grimm's, leaves unexplored the full scope of the messiness of the moment in which two complex persons—tutor and tutee—encounter together difficult social and academic issues, whether the tutor may be guided by Grimm's emphasis on the need for valuing difference within academia, by Murphy's emphasis on identification across complex cultural systems, by some mixture of these two perspectives (275), or by insights offered by another scholar's perspective on the writing center's potential for playing a transformative role in social change. Whatever framework one finds helpful to understanding the need for antiracism work, it must, as Frankie Condon (2007) suggests, combine "both inward or private reflection aimed at personal transformation and an outward, public turn that is at once both humble and determined and is aimed at productive engagement in collective and institutional transformation" (22). While theoretical frames can lay the groundwork for tutoring and help tutors see the need to move beyond enculturation, the messiness of actual encounters can still be daunting as the experiences of specific tutors and students in the BAS project, discussed below, suggest. The first-hand experience with agency in a conflicted field, which exposed sometimes hidden aspects of our structural leadership, and the first-hand experience of functional leadership, which helped us look inward rather than just outward during moments of disruption, were key benefits of our project, imperfect and onerous as it was, particularly for some of the tutors involved.

THE STRUCTURAL LEADERSHIP PLAN FOR THE PROJECT

My impetus for applying in fall 2006 for a 2007 diversity grant that ultimately funded the BAS 215 project originated mainly from my structural leadership role as writing center director. In the interest of obtaining more funding for our center's undergraduate tutors, and in response to the liberal arts dean's request that I submit a diversity grant proposal, I applied in summer 2006 for this internal grant in collaboration with a Hispanic instructor of a Latino history course. Subsequent to the rejection of this proposal, I was asked by the associate chancellor for diversity to reconfigure it for the BAS 215 classroom, which he saw as a better fit for the project. Although disquieted at the time with the implications of bringing mainly white tutors into a predominantly black classroom, once the project had begun, I came to agree with his advice, in part because of the confluence of the BAS 215 focus on issues of institutional racism with similar issues faced by the tutors themselves during their visits to the BAS classroom. Another reason for seeing value in this new context was that, unlike the students in the Latino history course, the overwhelming majority of BAS 215 students typically are black and in their first year at the university, and many are enrolled through the university's Center for Academic Success, a unit that provides an academic and social network for first-generation college students. And according to both the Latino history instructor and the associate chancellor, the BAS 215 students historically are more likely than the Latino history students, most of whom have already completed their first year, to face problems in making the transition to college-level writing. The associate chancellor, himself an African American, put it more bluntly: "BAS 215 students need socialization to the university classroom" (S. Bryson, pers comm.). I might well have faulted a white administrator for such blunt support of what might be termed enculturation. Yet without doubt some of my worst fears for the project's viability centered on my concerns that the freshmen BAS students might lack classroom socialization and that if I addressed this lack with any directness, I might appear racist. A further fear was that any resistance to the project that did materialize amongst the students could translate into lack of participation, which might in turn leave us as writing center representatives trying to prop up the skeleton of our structural leadership, with no context for a functional transformation.

The structural aim of this project, as stated in the BAS version of the grant proposal, was "to provide the BAS students with individualized, integrated research and writing support fine tuned to their course

assignments" with the hypothesis that this project would "help the students develop effective critical thinking, research, and writing skills and at the same time gain the confidence and agency they need to draw on their own resources and backgrounds in their pursuit of these skills." This goal was to be achieved through a sequence of five in-class workshops focusing on research and writing skills and small group discussions of student writing, to be facilitated by seven Research and Writing Peer (RWP) tutors, one for each of the seven student research groups in the class. Three of the tutors that volunteered for and ended up participating in the project were graduate students and four were undergraduates.

To prepare for the in-class sessions, the tutors were to receive considerable training, though organizing the training was a rushed enterprise because we received news of the project's funding only a month before it was to begin. Still, the configuration for readying the tutors, though not ideal, was substantial. In the opening week of the semester as the project was about to start, the tutors workshopped BAS 215 student essays from previous semesters selected by the participating BAS professor, who was born and raised in Ghana, and myself. In subsequent training sessions, the participating tutors discussed films and readings relevant to specific BAS writing assignments. The purpose of this training was not just to educate the tutors in the BAS 215 subject matter but also to have them reflect on their own role in institutional racism and thus on the implications of their structural leadership within the BAS context. Such training seemed especially warranted given not only the majority black student enrollment but also the focus of this core curriculum course, which was described on the department website as providing "an interdisciplinary analysis of ideological and practical problems of racism, integration, class, equity, [and] social institutions as they relate to the black American experience." I was joined in leading these sessions by two other BAS-trained participants central to the project, the two BAS-writing center liaisons: Derrick Williams, an African American speech communications PhD student, and Lilia Uili, a white undergraduate tutor in her senior year, who, with a major in English and minor in BAS, had taken BAS 215 from this same professor. Unlike the tutors, who attended class only during the center's five in-class workshops, the liaisons sat in on all the class meetings, mentored the students both in and outside class, and helped integrate the tutors into the class context during the classroom visits and during training in advance of these sessions.

Since Lilia had been a writing center tutor for two years and thus knew both the workings of the center's classroom-based tutoring program and the teaching style of this BAS professor far better than did Derrick, I asked her not only to serve, like Derrick, as a supporting link between the BAS 215 students and the center's tutors, but also to track class attendance on the dates of the center's class visits and to collect and distribute the students' papers to the tutors and each group's members in time to prepare for the joint classroom sessions. When giving her this assignment, I didn't register what a conflict-filled job it would likely be, standing as it did at the intersection between the writing center's gate-keeping role in the institution and the center's potential to support the goals and talents of the individual BAS students, who may have had negative experiences in what I took them to perceive as the white world of academia. Lilia's insights into these opposing duties, which I will share later in this piece, helped me see, more than anything I myself experienced, the sense in which tension between these competing roles was unavoidable if this initiative was to function productively, with both a sufficient number of student essay drafts submitted for the small groups to work on and sufficient credibility remaining for Lilia, as a functional leader, to support the students' interaction with the visiting tutors.

Other components of the project included the participation of an instructional librarian who, in collaboration with the tutors in a networked classroom, was to help the students with the research for their final group presentations and individual research papers due during the last weeks of the course. This support, offered only in the last two of the five classroom-based sessions, seemed particularly important since the BAS 215 final research assignment was challenging, requiring each group to analyze a specific example of racism in the United States and present an approach for eradicating it. As director of a three-location writing center, institutionally located within the English department, and as facilitator of a limited classroom-based tutoring project with the help of a 50 percent lecturer and a 50 percent graduate assistant serving as assistant directors, I had the role as the project's coordinator. This role entailed collaborating with the librarian, the tutors, the liaisons, and the BAS 215 instructor, as well as occasionally with the students; helping to plan and lead the training; and collaboratively creating the project's survey and interview assessment tools. I also sat in on the five in-class sessions facilitated by the tutors and liaisons and the students' group research presentations at the end of the course, as did both liaisons and the majority of the tutors.

To assess the BAS project, we asked the students to complete two surveys evaluating the extent to which the visiting participants—the liaisons, the tutors, and the librarian—had helped them with their research and writing for the course and for future writing assignments. The first survey was completed after the first two classroom-based tutoring sessions; the second, after the final three sessions. At the semester's end, eight BAS 215 students who had agreed on their surveys to further discuss their views of the project were interviewed by the two liaisons and the two minority (African American and Asian American) tutors. Five of the seven tutors, both liaisons, and the instructor also completed survey evaluations of the project. These assessment tools were to help us establish the extent to which the project was perceived by its participants as having reached its institutional goals—and as having achieved its more functional goals of helping to break down preconceived notions of the relationship between our two groups and thereby beginning a process that might foster greater openness to diversity in our center.

Broader, more functional goals were, of course, more difficult to achieve, because meeting them was more dependent on the participation of others. When a center's staff members are with few exceptions white, the message sent to prospective tutors of color is not necessarily welcoming. One of my functional goals, then, for the BAS 215 venture, was that it might help the BAS students connect with the writing center and become more willing to consider becoming a tutor. Perhaps even more difficult to achieve was my goal of finding a means for providing training that would help tutors explore diversity more than superficially. Although I was afraid the BAS 215 project seemed in danger of replicating the very "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz 1998, 1) it was meant to help eradicate, I decided to go ahead with it—not just despite but also in part because of the lack of control and predictability it seemed likely to force upon us. I hoped that given this lack of control, the project might provide an opportunity for participants on both sides—institutional writing center representatives and African American students alike—to break the silence and discover Butler's (1997) more performative kind of agency, agency activated through a break from the usual actions within the power structure and by virtue of that break "[revealing] discontinuities that were previously concealed" (15). This hope was founded on the sense that the BAS 215 classroom would provide a context in which the BAS students might function as experts on the course content within the territory of their own classroom and in

which the center's tutors, liaisons, and director, though still in structural leadership positions, might experience being the minority. This hope was based not just on their smaller numbers in comparison to the BAS students but also on their having to operate outside the more familiar cultural contexts of the writing center and the composition classroom, the location of most of our classroom-based tutoring. This sort of experience could perhaps provide the transformative training in diversity needed for our center's staff, including myself, to be more ready to risk involvement in bringing about larger change and in making our center more genuinely open to diversity.

Many of the hopes and fears concerning the project materialized. A significant number of the students failed to show up for the in-class tutor-facilitated discussion sessions; on average, eleven of the twenty-nine BAS students, or 38 percent, were absent during each class in which the center's tutors were involved. And a significant number of those who did attend did not turn in drafts ahead of time as required to allow both the students and tutors to prepare for the group discussions. As noted above, we assumed at the time that this opting out of the project was a sign of the students' resistance to white academic culture into which, according to the associate chancellor of diversity, they needed to be socialized. Yet, whatever caused this lack of compliance, the results of both the first and second survey—the first conducted after the first two writing center classroom-based sessions and the second after the last three of these sessions—seem to indicate a positive response to this project by the BAS students. Eighty-four percent of those taking both surveys testified that the sessions were either "helpful" or "very helpful" for "improving [their] writing generally." And 89 percent of the respondents said they found the sessions either "helpful" or "very helpful" for "learning what [they] need[ed] to work on and/or what [they had] done well for this assignment in particular." Perhaps even more telling for judging the students' perception of the project's benefits was their view of their increased ability to help their peers: 88 percent of the responding participants found the first two sessions "helpful" or "very helpful" for "improving [their] ability to respond to the writing and ideas of [their] peers," and 74 percent found the remaining three sessions "helpful" or "very helpful" in improving this ability. Plus, in response to the first survey, 63 percent of the students said the BAS-writing center project had made them more likely to visit the center; by the time of the second survey at the semester's end, 72 percent gave this response.

Also positive were the statistics and comments by the students on their view of the best features of the sessions. In response to this question on the first survey (assessing the first two in-class visits by the tutors), 53 percent cited "the tutor's one-to-one advice" as one of the best features, and, in response to the question about the worst feature, only 11 percent said there were "not enough suggestions from the tutor." The percentages were somewhat less favorable for these questions on the second survey (assessing the final three classroom visits by the tutors): 47 percent cited "the tutor's one-to-one advice" and 26 percent responded that there was "not enough one-to-one" by the tutors. Both sets of numbers are positive, though it should be added that the student respondents could select more than one of the choices for best and worst features and a couple of other choices received the same or higher percentages for being the best feature. For instance, on the second survey, "receiving advice from the liaisons (Lilia and Derrick)" was cited as one of the best features by 57 percent of the students, a statistic that confirms, not surprisingly, the advantages of being present for all the class meetings rather than just five, as was the case for the tutors. The comments made by students on the value of the project overall, a question on the second survey, were positive as well. Here is a sampling:

> "[The liaisons' and tutors' assistance was] helpful because they gave honest opinions and personal experience."

> "The whole experience of having the tutors helped me because they explained complex ideas."

> "If I was unsure of something [the tutors] helped. But I didn't really need it."

> "I didn't know where to go with my topic, and one of the tutors gave me advice."

> "I found the tutors to be very helpful with our individual [and] group papers. I received great feedback on my paper."

> "I found it very helpful and [it] should be used through all classes."

> "I liked the opportunity to work on library research as a group [with the tutors and members of the small group]. The meetings were helpful in creating ideas on papers and focusing ideas."

Still, despite these positive numbers and comments, the participating tutors and liaisons, in reflecting on the project after its completion,

continued to wrestle both with the high number of students not attending or turning in drafts on time and with difficulties in engaging the students in discussions of their papers or assigned readings. Indeed, in the tutors' and liaisons' survey evaluations, administered at the project's end, five out of the seven responding tutors and both liaisons cited problems related to the lack of student participation, though they also noted that these problems were less severe once the students were involved in their group research projects.

The tutors' frustration at these difficulties, but also their commitment to the project, is evident in many of the comments they made in their assessment survey. One tutor commented on the pros and cons of the project in this way: "I found it difficult nearly every time I went into the class because not everyone would complete what was required of them. The entire experience, on the same note, was also rewarding because I learned so much." Another tutor followed this same theme, though with more vehemence: "When my sessions were least productive, it was typically because no one had a completed draft . . . and when students did have drafts, they rarely had copies for their classmates. This forced me to continually rearrange any strategies I had previously worked on and completely changed the dynamic of the session." This same tutor, when asked if he had learned anything and if he would be interested in participating in another such project, went on to say: "This experience definitely improved my ability to work with students as a group and get more out of more unenthusiastic students. . . . I also learned to be more forceful in sessions, when needed, and to not be afraid to have expectations and hold to them. . . . I would definitely be interested in working on this type of outreach in the future. I enjoyed the experience and learned a lot from it." I add here several more summary comments by two different participants that make clear the great enthusiasm felt for the project despite the burdens it imposed. One commented, "This was a joyous and mind-expansive project." Another concluded, "The project was time-consuming, exciting, frustrating, gratifying, and well worth it all." As is to some extent suggested in these comments and in the reflections by tutors considered at greater length in later sections of this chapter, conflicts related to their institutional roles within the BAS 215 context not only caused them disorientation and discomfort but also provided for them the chance, in Butler's terms (1997, 17), to arrive at some insights into how to achieve an agency whose purpose exceeds the power that enables it.

PRACTICE: AGENCY WITHIN A CONFLICTED FIELD

To suggest the potential of this project to disrupt student, tutor, and administrator expectations for the roles each was to play within the institutional hierarchy, I will recount several situations that confronted me, as the program's coordinator, with opposing forces and that, in Butler's sense, demanded of me agency and trust in the situation, accepting that, beyond the initial design of the project, the unfolding of events was, to a more than usual extent, far from being under my or any other one person's control. The first situation that disrupted my tacit expectations for control involved a conflict in my collaboration with the BAS professor—a conflict between my belief in both the students' and the tutors' need for explicit written criteria for the essay assignments and the professor's belief in the necessity of giving his students only brief oral descriptions for their assignments. When similar conflicts have arisen with professors in other noncomposition classroom-based tutoring sessions, I have felt confident in negotiating with the professor toward a revised version seen as reasonable from both sides.

What gave me greater pause in this instance was the link cited by the BAS professor between the open-endedness of his assignment and his desire to foster in his students a grassroots exploration of the black American experience, meant to replicate the grass roots origins of the Black American Studies movement. Since a clear understanding of the assignment shared by tutors and students seemed, at least in practical terms, crucial to the project's functional goals, I ended up lobbying the professor for assignment sheets with criteria. However, I succeeded to a degree only when I explained the need for a common document for tutors and students to refer to during their discussions, and when I agreed, at his request, to collaborate with him on still quite general written versions of the assignments that could provide guidelines without eliminating the opportunity for exploration. In later reflection on the project, having gained an awareness that course content, not students' drafts, had dominated discussion during the tutors' classroom visits, I began to ask myself to what extent my lobbying for clear criteria had stemmed from a desire for a shared foundation that would foster power sharing and two-way learning and to what extent it stemmed from a desire to protect the tutors by keeping discussions more safely focused on formal issues and thus, in a sense, to use Margaret Weaver's (2006, 82) term, to "manage diversity." The most accurate answer to

the question of my own motives is likely "both of the above." But what became clearer within these divergent desires and needs was that, to a more than usual extent, the main priority of the project was not and probably could not really be a focus on academic writing, warranted though such a focus was given the difficulty of the assignments and the number of BAS 215 students who were in their first semester of making the transition from high-school to college writing. The highest priority was necessarily on communicating across and between different audiences: among the students, tutors, liaisons, the professor, and myself, and among all the varied perspectives each of us brought to the table.

Another conflict I faced on both the structural and functional leadership level arose when at the outset of the project, Derrick Williams, the African American graduate assistant serving as one of the project liaisons, inadvertently overturned my carefully sequenced agenda for a BAS 215 tutor training workshop aimed at making clear to the participating white tutors the institutional foundations of racism, as set forth in the BAS 215 course reading, George Lipsitz's (1998) *Possessive Investment in Whiteness.* The shift from my planned sequence occurred when another PhD student from speech communications was unable to participate in the workshop as planned and Derrick at the last minute invited two BAS 215 students to testify during the workshop on their personal experiences with racism. While the breaking of silence by the two African American undergraduates overwhelmed my plan to begin the session with a discussion of institutional racism as presented by Lipsitz, the students' testimonies—and the at-times halting discussion that followed—demonstrated the point, more powerfully than any discussion led by me could have, that agency in such a project must not reside solely in persons with structural leadership roles but must be shared and exchanged, with power passing from one place or individual to another.

The session also demonstrated that the results of such sharing may not always be perceived as fully positive by every individual involved, and it provided an example of the truth of Levinas's (1998) statement that "we are responsible beyond our intentions" (3), as it applied to my own role. After attending this meeting, a nontraditional male graduate tutor who had volunteered for this project passed me a note stating that he no longer felt he would be able to participate. When I talked with him about his decision, he said he had felt forced by the agenda of the training session into a stance that was not his own. I told him I appreciated

his honesty, and I did, particularly since this incident made me aware that there might indeed have been a benefit for this tutor—and perhaps for other tutors who remained silent—had they been introduced to institutional racism more gradually. Such an introduction might have begun by discussing the Lipsitz (1998) chapter all attending had read or by using exercises such as those offered by Helen Fox (2001, 109–140) in *"When Race Breaks Out": Conversations about Race and Racism in College Classrooms* and Peggy McIntosh (1990) in "White Privilege." As it turned out, at least to the extent I could determine, responses to the session by the other tutors were positive. Even so, my decision not to shift back to the initial agenda or slow the pace of the meeting was not without its unintended consequences.

This incident of the tutor withdrawing gave me my first direct indication that the struggles faced by the tutors and liaisons would prove more difficult for me to handle than disruption to my own expectations for control. It was more difficult for me to find positives in their problems not only because had I been the one to initiate the project, but also because they were indeed, as I had suspected before the project's outset, the ones who necessarily took the brunt of the unpredictability and risks in events as they unfolded. The seven tutors and two liaisons had volunteered for this project in response to an e-mail from me and to a meeting at which I presented the plan, the inevitably exploratory nature of the project, and the unknowns concerning the students' response to our presence in their classroom. As mentioned above, as it turned out, lack of participation by the BAS 215 students was a significant problem, particularly in the first two of the five classroom visits by the tutors. Besides the number of absences and papers not turned in on time, some students had not read the assigned reading—or if they had, some had not fully understood it. Indeed, a few course texts, such as Lipsitz's (1998) book, were demanding enough that the tutors themselves had to struggle somewhat in reading the text for our training session. The professor for the BAS class registered the problem caused by the students' lack of involvement with the project, along with some of its strengths, in e-mail comments he sent me at the project's end:

> Concerning the project, I can write that there were overwhelmingly more strengths than weaknesses. The most obvious weakness for me was there was initially limited time to plan a detailed approach. This can be easily corrected as there is now more time to plan for the next fall semester. Another weakness

was the initial unenthusiastic response from the students. Student enthusiasm could be generated sooner if students are abundantly made aware of the benefits of the project. The ultimate strength of the project was I noticed a marked improvement in the quality of student writing. Another strength was that the project helped students engage in peer learning and critique.

What the professor called "the initial unenthusiastic response from the students"—lack of attendance on the days of the tutors' visits and the students' failure to turn in their papers prior to or even during these sessions—accentuated for some of the tutors the sense that they were outsiders, being used by the attending BAS 215 students for their academic knowledge of both writing and the course readings but not otherwise accepted by the students. One white graduate tutor, Ashley Green, who had participated in many of our center's other classroom-based tutoring projects, described the barrier she confronted in the first BAS 215 session in this way:

> [With me present,] the students didn't feel as though they had enough agency to discuss institutional racism as portrayed in Lipsitz; their role was altered into that of a student listening to a lecture. Interestingly, however, during the first session I had a break through. . . . One of the students in my group was a young man that had a white mother and a black father. He was light enough that most of the group, including myself, was shocked at his confession. He was also from a privileged community, which amplified for him the severe mismanagement and allocation of state resources based on economic and cultural priorities. He acted as a liaison between me and the students. Much more quickly than the others, he wanted to discuss his experiences and observations [of institutional racism], which, in turn, took the focus off of me and redirected it towards the group members. Once he had shared several anecdotes, others contributed their own experiences and asked questions. I was greatly relieved by this young man's assistance, because, before that point, there had been a thick barrier between the issues I was discussing and wanted them to discuss and my misinterpreted role as an authority figure and their passive role as students.

The bridge between the world of blacks and whites created by this biracial student, at least for that moment, helped the group move beyond the confines of Ashley's structural leadership to achieve a more spontaneous form of collaboration and helped Ashley experience the agency of a more functional form of leadership. In her next session, however, she once again had to struggle to jump-start the conversation as an outsider, a purely structural leader. However, these difficulties may have been caused

as much by this tutor's role as an authority on writing and academia as by the color of her skin and lack of credibility concerning issues of race since similar difficulties were, at least to a degree, shared by Trista Powell, the project's only African American tutor. Like Ashley and unlike Derrick, the African American project liaison, Trista, an MA student in English with a rhetoric and composition focus, attended class only during the tutors' five classroom visits. In these sessions, particularly during the first few, she found herself wrestling with what she perceived as an outsider's role as tutor, despite her insider connection to the culture of the students enrolled. Through inhabiting at once the roles of insider and outsider in the world of this classroom, she became more fully aware not only of the way in which her (structural) role as tutor hindered her role as mentor (or functional leader) but also of the need to keep both roles and their at-odds-ness in play in order to, in turn, help these students find their own way to act within these two worlds—the academy and the home culture. Here is a passage from Trista's portion of a 2008 conference presentation by Trista, Lilia, and me, which makes clear the sort of awareness that grew out of her experience of this struggle:

> In the Black American Studies (BAS) 215 project . . . I was an outsider, a tutor with the expected role of bringing to the classroom knowledge of academic writing standards, but I was also potentially an insider; since as an African American myself, I could also identify with the students in the class culturally and linguistically. This positioning caused me to be very careful in how I situated myself in class and in the Writing Center. My objective was to help the students negotiate between the academy and also their cultural and linguistic roles. This negotiation at the time seemed, at best, a little ambitious considering the short amount of time I spent with the students and, also, because I was trying to accomplish the same feat on a personal level. . . . The position as an insider/outsider was at times a little unnerving because I didn't know what I was, so I could only imagine who the students thought I was. In this project, I had to find my position throughout. There was no defined position; I was a tutor helping where I was needed. I didn't come into the project with any preconceived notions; I wanted to help the students. I came out of this experience having learned a lot about my own strengths as a tutor and my own position in this world. (Powell 2008)

Perhaps most impressive in Trista's description of her attempts to gain footing as an insider in the BAS 215 context, and thus be more fully able to assist the BAS students, is her willingness to live with the risks of the two roles, having "to find [her] position throughout," in the interest of

"helping where [she] was needed." In recognizing her complex relationship to the students and to her own set of identities, she accepted the necessity—despite the difficulty—of inhabiting both worlds in order to assist her students with their own struggle to do the same.

Accepting her structural role in academia, which gave her an outsider status among the BAS 215 students, and aspiring to serve as a functional leader and involve the BAS students in their own "negotiation between the academy" and "their cultural and linguistic roles," she had to continually negotiate the sort of support each of her own roles was able to offer the students. The difficulty of her challenge despite her credentials as an African American was confirmed in comments by one of the BAS 215 students who volunteered for a follow-up interview: "You guys [the tutors coming into class only five times during the semester] were outsiders and Derrick and Lilia [the liaisons who attended every day, one black, the other white] were insiders; they knew what was going on." This comment seems to indicate that at least for some of the BAS students, the project's value was understandably judged, at least in part, in terms of the non-BAS 215 participants' familiarity with the everyday activities within the classroom and not simply in terms of racial identity or proven authority in teaching writing. However, this same student indicated a different sense of allegiance and trust, based on the ability to identify with someone else who looks like her. When asked in her interview whether she would prefer to work with "tutors who look like you" when visiting the center, she assented, adding in explanation that, unlike the other tutors, Trista "[listens] and . . . [doesn't] judge me." I should add, though, that four of the seven interviewees responded differently; they did not believe the racial identity of their tutors would matter. With evidence of such complex perspectives held by individual participants, on both their own and each other's roles, with the same person perceived at once as an outsider and an insider, depending on the context, it is not difficult to grasp why moving toward a writing center more able to work productively with students of color can be a sometimes painfully uncertain process. Nor is it hard to understand why tutors—black or white—aiming to serve as functional as well as structural leaders can gain agency in such a situation only through being willing to experience the ambiguousness of their power as it unfolds. Without such a commitment, any tutor's training in diversity would be limited in what it could offer, and the participation of others necessary to functional leadership would be difficult to achieve.

Reflecting on this very struggle between structural and functional roles, Lilia, the white liaison I had asked to take attendance and distribute student papers in preparation for the tutors' visits, found that the only way to make either of her roles—"institutional enforcer" or "institutional disrupter," in Lilia's terms—productive was to accept them both. Here is a passage from her 2008 conference presentation, as part of Trista's, Lilia's and my panel on this project, in which she discusses the process through which she was able to arrive at this acceptance:

> When I agreed to be a liaison in the Writing Center/BAS project, I envisioned my leadership role as being solely functional. I accepted the position because I felt that the Writing Center *needed* to be involved in an interdisciplinary project that had a goal of dismantling structural inequalities, and I wanted to help achieve that goal. I never considered the reality of the institutional power ascribed to my structural position as liaison and how that would conflict with my desire to be a functional leader advocating diversity, acceptance, and community formation. . . . After overwhelming feelings of insecurity and anxiety concerning my leadership position, I realized that I could not carry out a functional leadership position without accepting my feelings of anxiety and insecurity and operating within the reality of my structural leadership. The paradoxical nature of my structural and functional leadership roles led to the need to make myself purposefully uncomfortable for the functioning of our project and our attempt at community formation. (Uili 2008)

Lilia goes on to comment that it was the entrance of the tutors into the classroom that allowed her to be able to fulfill the more functional role she desired, that of using her knowledge of BAS to help the students explore and gain confidence in their ideas. Through her greater knowledge of BAS, another identity besides her enforcer role became apparent to the students, particularly as they were faced with the challenge to articulate their ideas to the tutors, relative outsiders. In this success, to use Butler's (1997, 17) terms, she did not escape her power, but "exceeded" it through providing the students with the support they needed to express their own views. Recognizing the continued ambiguity of her power, even as she successfully exceeded it, she was the one—not me—to point out that "despite the initial conception or hope for the project [that those of us from the writing center could experience being the minority] . . . the institutional and structural power positions were still on our side" (Uili 2008).

While she was correct that as tutors we did not in any real sense experience being the minority, all of us from the writing center who participated in this project—the tutors, the liaisons, and myself—gained a

sharper awareness of our multiple selves brought into play in this context and of our dependence on others for the degree to which we were able to make our leadership roles productive for the other participants involved. However, despite the considerable feedback we gleaned from the BAS 215 student survey evaluations and follow-up interviews with eight of the students, we remained unsure of the impact or value of this project for the students. Did *they* gain any greater sense of their own agency within academia from this messy, disruptive entrance of outsiders into their classroom? Did their absences and failure to turn in papers indicate resistance to white academic culture as we initially posited and belie the positive results, noted earlier, in their survey evaluations of the project? Again, it is difficult to answer these questions with any certainty.

However, despite the lack of certainty concerning the effects of the project on the students, the follow-up interviews with the eight BAS 215 students helped us understand additional potential reasons for some of the negatives of the project, such as the high absentee rate. Before the interviews, the assumption, noted earlier, was that the absences indicated quite simply resentment at the writing center's invasion of the BAS classroom or at least apathy concerning the opportunity this project might afford them. While those reasons very likely hold some validity, the interview with one student, Faith, showed any blanket characterizations to be too simple. She noted during her interview that her absence from the first session stemmed from fear of having "others reading [her] work": "In one session, fear freaked me out—fear of the [small peer] group, not of the tutors. I'm more of a one-to-one person." This comment gave us insight into a more complex reason for her absence, a reason that may also have played a role in the absences of other BAS 215 students. Our presumption was that if an absence were to have stemmed from fear rather than resentment or apathy, the source of the fear would likely have been the tutors, not the student's peers, particularly since, as outsiders, we tended to see the class as a more or less seamless community. She implies in her interview that she was able to overcome this fear in part through meeting one-to-one with Derrick in his role as liaison. Meeting with him, an individual she had come to trust, she indicated, helped her gain the confidence she needed to share her work with her peers in class. She asserted as well that if she had had the chance to meet with the other tutors in advance of the sessions, that added familiarity might also have helped. Having found a way to accept the risk of exposure, she was able to develop a degree of trust in the situation.

If the project was indeed to prepare the tutors and myself for "a real world [we] sensed was there yet [were] afraid to acknowledge" (Landsman 2006, 21), then we, too, needed to find ways to trust being out of control and, indeed, vulnerable. As Butler (1997) asserts, "To persist in one's being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one's own" (197). Students of color unfortunately are likely more used to having to deal with social terms that are "never fully [their] own" and to having to find ways of persisting "in [their] being" within that type of alien context. Yet if we as tutors and writing center directors take on such a challenge ourselves, we will be more likely to find a way to a purpose for our agency beyond the purposes of our power, recognizing the dependence of our agency upon the students' participation.

The two-way aspects of this project came to fruition when, during the last two weeks of the semester, the tutors and liaisons attended the BAS students' group research presentations, each focused on a problem with institutional racism and ways to eradicate it. The topics covered were varied; they included the internalization of racism as evidenced in the color complex, racism reflected in the funding of public schools, racism reflected in the handling of Hurricane Katrina, and the treatment of women in hip hop culture. At the end of each presentation, the group fielded questions from their peers and professor and from the attending writing center tutors, liaisons, and me. While not all the presentations were polished and fully developed, all of them showed a confidence and involvement in the topic that grounded it in a mix of personal and academically based support. Also clear during these presentations, which marked the students' own functional leadership, was the value of the professor's initial emphasis on the students needing to discover firsthand in their projects the grassroots origins of the Black American Studies movement, a goal I had initially thought to be unrealistic. While greater specificity in the assignments would have helped the tutors and liaisons work more constructively with the students on their papers (confirmed by at least one student's comment on the second survey, that the "tutors . . . had little knowledge on the assignment"), the students' immersion in the course and research material as they struggled with the tutors and liaisons to narrow their topics clearly had its benefits.

Another, even more two-way moment came when three of the BAS 215 students, successful in the course, were individually interviewed by Lilia, Derrick, and me as part of their application for the new position of BAS

215 mentor, which we had added to the project's configuration should the initiative be funded again for fall 2007. Although Illinois's budget woes, and perhaps other priorities held by the associate chancellor for diversity, blocked the hoped-for renewal of funding, the ideas these students had for reconfiguring our project and the tutors' roles reflected the degree to which they had become invested in understanding the dynamics of the project and approaches for allowing more students to reach that level of investment. Without ongoing funding, building on the momentum created by this project has proved difficult, yet I continue to correspond sporadically with one of the three BAS 215 applicants interviewed for the BAS 215 mentor position, such as giving her advice on her proposal for an issues-oriented talk show on our university's student radio station. I also continue to work with Derrick Williams, the African American PhD project liaison, who completed his PhD and now runs a program fostering creative masculinities, particularly among minority youth, and serves as a lecturer in BAS. In fall 2007 and fall 2009, he led hands-on tutor training workshops on issues related to dialect speakers, and recently an African American student of his signed up for our center's practicum course along with several other minority students. Change, though incremental, seems more possible.

Despite the conflicts confronting the project's players and the diverse perspectives involved in negotiating them, such a project in a classroom of underrepresented students, if configured to affirm multiple nodes of power that allow potentially polarized parties to be disrupted in their habitual uses of their own power, can, in a sense, be more suited to the task of re-visioning writing center practice than can one-to-one writing center work alone. Having white—and even, in some senses, black—tutors enter a classroom where students of color are the majority can help disrupt the lines of institutional power and provide a way for the students, the tutors, and their trainers to not only respect difference but also find their way past silence to express their respect. The power of the institution, as Lilia suggests, remains on the writing center's side, even upon entering such a classroom as an outsider. Still, the conflicted field of the writing center within a majority black classroom culture allowed for small breakthroughs on both sides and the valuable experience of entering a world in which one has to push to gain one's bearings in relation to others, regardless of one's institutional position, and to gain the hard-to-come-by realization that "ultimately, we're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something" (Butler 2004, 23).

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FOUR

Stories of Lived Experience

12

"THE QUALITY OF LIGHT"
Using Narrative in a Peer Tutoring Class

Ann E. Green

> *The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.*
> Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury"[1]

I brought Audre Lorde's (1996) quote above into my Writing Fellows: Theory and Practice of Peer Tutoring class in the middle of the semester in order to diffuse what was an increasingly tense classroom atmosphere. We had been talking about race/racism, gender/sexism, and sexuality, and a certain portion of the class felt alienated by the discussion. In fact, alienated is not quite the right word: part of the class was angry that we were talking about "controversial" issues, and part of the class felt that the conversations were important and were angry at the part of the class who felt alienated. The atmosphere was volatile, so in an attempt to mitigate the anger, to get students talking about what was going on, I brought in the Lorde quote and we wrote about the quality of light that was present in our classroom and how it might differ from the quality of light in other classrooms in the university. Not surprisingly, what I found out from that conversation was that many of the white students were uncomfortable or angry because we talked about race. Several felt guilty for being white.

The quality of light in that classroom sometimes felt like a surgical lamp rather than a sunrise. There was no hiding in that room from one's own inscription in the common cultural narratives of race, class, sexuality, and gender, but race, as is true in many situations, was the

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1. Thank you to Amy Winans, Susquehanna University, for drawing my attention to this quote, which has been a cornerstone for much of my thinking in this chapter.

light that brought heat with it. It was the light that burned like a laser as well as illuminated.

When I teach the peer tutoring course, I incorporate readings about race and racism with more traditional readings on the tutoring of writing, and I have found as Geller et al. (2007, 87) have written that discussions of race are some of the most "puzzling and provocative" that we have in the writing center course. However, they are also difficult, and each time we talk about race and racism in the writing center, I find myself thinking about new strategies and new approaches to the conversation. Over the years, my approach has changed from "factual" presentation of the information on language and diversity, race and racism, to stories. For a white audience who can, as Tim Wise articulates, so easily dismiss facts, stories work as a better vehicle for dismantling racism and countering white denial.[2]

While I have always incorporated issues of "diversity" into the tutor training course, when I began this work, my approach was straightforward: racism exists, here are the facts. I taught June Jordan's (2004) "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," and we talked about the murder of Reggie Jordan, the brother of Willie Jordan in the title, and how Black English relates to identity. We read Gloria Anzaldúa's (2004) "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" and bell hooks and Peggy McIntosh. When I mentioned to a colleague that we had read Students' Right to Their Own Language (Conference 1974), he expressed surprise that we were "still" discussing race and language. His comment pointed out for me how race couldn't remain only a part of the writing fellows course—only one unit among many. While I had a unit—a large unit—on race and language, it was not infused into the course as a whole, and this seemed to be the next logical step.

As I read more deeply in critical race theory, I began to work toward an infusion approach, to think about ways to talk about race and racism and language that would appear throughout the semester. Stories were one way to do this. I also realized that because of the high level of discomfort with any talk about race, my approach in this context might be more effective if it were less direct. If race were woven into the conversations and became, in fact, a familiar presence and not an isolated unit, if race were acknowledged, then perhaps we could continue to have conversations about race and could "engage in counter hegemonic 'race

2.   See <http://www.timwise.org/> for more on this.

talk' that is fiercely and passionately calling for change" (hooks 1994, 5). When I brought the Audre Lorde (1996) quote into class and had students write about it, we were well into the infusion approach, which was still proving volatile. However, we were, at least some of us, engaged in "race talk" that was "passionately calling for change."

Nancy Barron and Nancy Grimm (2002, 55) argue, in "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center: Stories and Lessons from Two Beginners," that by writing in their two voices they can begin "interfering with modernist expectations of coherence" in order to expose how personal and professional lives are interconnected. Similarly, I began to wonder how stories about race and racism in the writing center could create that multivoiced discourse that works against the idea of "coherence" that is so often associated with "racelessness." If talking about race and racism is never a process that ends, I wanted to find strategies in the classroom that would keep students talking and writing and thinking about race and racism beyond the scope of the writing fellows course.

Since most of my students are white, I hoped to engage white students with ways to think about white racial identity development that allowed for multiple stories. I want to illustrate how multiple stories and multiple ways of telling stories in the writing center can create spaces where, to paraphrase Barron and Grimm (2002), the seams show. I envision a writing center as a location for shared stories, overlapping narratives, and contradictory explorations of language and identity that can lead to antiracist work. I wanted to complicate identity through multiple stories and consider how multiple stories can be shared and unpacked in writing center work; I am particularly interested in how stories work to prepare students for work in our writing center.[3]

STORIES ABOUT RACE, STORIES IN THE WRITING CENTER

There are two primary theoretical traditions that come together when we tell stories about race and the writing center. The first comes from the theoretical trend of writing center people themselves. Writing

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3.   Other works with relevance for narrative research include writing by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2003), bell hooks (1994), and Hephzibah Roskelly (1993). In *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding,* Ladson-Billings (2003, vii) writes about the importance of narrative, of storytelling, in understanding the complexity of race. Ladson-Billings's (1994) own work in *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Students* incorporates her personal narratives of successful teachers with her qualitative data on effective teachers. Roskelly (1993) and hooks (1994) both argue that narrative is a more effective teaching tool for working-class women and people from marginalized groups.

center people use stories in our own research, work, and daily exchanges. From meetings over the department coffee machine where a writing center director catches up with a teacher whose student has been to the center with a troubling paper, to collections like *Stories from the Center*, stories infuse our work. In Lynn Briggs and Meg Woolbright's (2000) *Stories from the Center*, for example, "Narrative provides a way to speak things otherwise unspeakable, to give voice to that which would otherwise go unheard" (xi). We tell stories about tutoring to new tutors; we expect experienced tutors to pass along their "lore"; we hear students' stories about their teachers, their papers, and their lives inside the university and out. In her key text about cultural difference in the writing center, Anne DiPardo (2004) refers to her case study of a basic writer and her tutor as a "story," and "stories" permeate much writing center scholarship.

In addition, much literacy research currently incorporates critical race theory and stories. In Stuart Greene and Dawn Abt-Perkins's (2003) collection, *Making Race Visible*, they argue that by connecting critical race theory and literacy research through "story," researchers contextualize and reflect on their own inscription of the research they do. This self-reflection, Greene and Abt-Perkins argue, creates an opportunity for a different worldview, for a shift in consciousness that will eventually allow us to undo systemic racism. In the field of education more broadly, stories are being used by social scientists in order to "engage the reader in multiple readings of a text dealing with oppression, race, gender, and sexual orientation" (Tierney 1997, 110).

Critical race theory is built on extensive use of stories. As Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2007) describe it, "Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race" (38). Stories act against the dominant "race neutral" and "objective" narrative in U.S. culture that makes mention of race or racism impolite or invisible. Further, "Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity" (43). The pioneers of critical race theory use story to "describe . . . the reality of black and brown lives" in order to "help readers bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others. Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (41). In

the Delgado and Stefancic examples, the tellers are people of color and the implied listeners are white people, and this raises interesting questions both about who can tell a story and how that story can get heard.

In "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative," Richard Delgado (1989) argues that the "counterstory," the story written in opposition to the dominant cultural narratives, "challenge[s] received wisdom" (2414). For example, a counterstory could work against the argument that racism ended when civil rights laws were passed. In addition to working against the dominant narrative, counterstories, according to Delgado, can bring members of "outgroups" together with a shared purpose. Controlling the dominant narrative is a way of maintaining power; therefore, telling a counterstory not only helps members of outgroups form communities, but also shines a very bright light on the power and privilege that comes with the dominant story. "Counterstories," Delgado writes, "can attack . . . complacency" (2438).

I see two dangers with using stories uncritically. The first is that insiders don't necessarily "hear" the stories of those from outgroups. Delgado (2004, 2439) points out that members of ingroups should "listen to stories" from members of outgroups, and while he provides a strong justification for why, he doesn't explore *how* this could or should happen. Indeed, in his imagined example of stories and counterstories, the counterstory of the African American man discriminated against in law school hiring practices *is not* heard by the courts, although it does have implications for the school and its focus. In her article "Multicultural Public Spheres and the Rhetorics of Democracy," Phyllis Mentzell Ryder (2007) articulates how the dominant conventions of the public sphere work according to "ideologies of individualism, autonomy, efficiency, abstract reason, and naïve multicultural pluralism, ideologies that privilege whiteness" (516). In other words, when people of color tell their stories and they fall outside of these domains, they may not be heard.

The second problem with stories is who, exactly, constitutes an outgroup. In "Border Guards: Ethnographic Fiction and Social Science," William Tierney (1997) uses the form of a story to point up the ways that discussions of "multiculturalism" or diversity often gloss over issues of sexual orientation. In Tierney's work, it seems clear that even members of one outgroup cannot necessarily hear the words of someone from another outgroup. One character's plea to "figure out a plan for how we will cross our own borders, rather than . . . speaking about what

borders students need to cross" (115) is erased as the story continues. Thus, who gets to tell stories and who gets heard become important factors in this work.

The words *stories* and *narratives* are often used interchangeably in writing center scholarship and critical race theory. What interests me most in this work is the way that "stories" ground our work in praxis, in the meeting point between the everyday and the theoretical. Since each story is partial and incomplete, Elizabeth Ellsworth's (1994, 312) caveat that all stories are told in voices that are "contradictory and partial" is important to keep in mind. "Narratives," however, seem to have a slightly different connotation as more highly theorized than stories. Narratives can also express the fluidity of identity itself and the complexity of subjectivity and what critical race theorists call "intersectionality," the overlapping effects of race, class, gender, national origin, dis/ability status, and so on, and how they convey information about the self. By bringing stories about race and stories about the writing center together, we have a powerful opportunity to complicate our notions about race and writing.

ALL STORIES ARE PARTIAL

In what follows, I will describe two assignments in which I ask students to look at how stories are told and tell their own stories. The first assignment asks students to consider the "prior texts" a writer uses when making an argument about race, class, gender, or sexuality; the second assignment asks students to engage in storytelling by describing three "moments" of dissonance around issues of race, class, gender, learning, and sexuality. Both assignments ask students to look differently at the familiar, to bring a different kind of light to our thinking. Both assignments also treat texts as sites for multiple meanings and interpretations. Rather than looking for one story, we are pursuing multiple stories that overlap and conflict, that mesh and disconnect, in order to undo the idea of totalizing essentialist narrative. This two-pronged approach—analyzing how articles work for the stories they tell and telling our own stories—leads us to create a writing center "for honoring our students' attempts at making their worlds more understandable, for creating ways of responding to these worlds, of being seen and heard when they are daily told in myriad, subtle, and not-so-subtle ways that they won't be" (Blitz and Hurlbert 2000, 88). We hope to create a writing center filled with light.

Additionally, while the assignments ask students to think about multiplicity, both assignments ask students to think about race indirectly in an attempt to weave race into the conversation so it becomes familiar and "everyday." While I agree with the writers of *The Everyday Writing Center* that "racism is the place to start" because "until we are willing and equipped to address it, we will be unable to resist other forms of oppression that intersect with and are informed by it" (Geller et al. 2007, 92), the assignments I designed were not exclusively about race, in part because these assignments came out of a class where students—regardless of similarities of age, social class, and religion—were at wildly different stages of identity development. Therefore, while these assignments were effective, I would revise them to address changes in the context of the course and the makeup of the course.

What I continue to struggle with in doing antiracism work is white anger—my own and the students'. My own anger sometimes, in the moment, prevents me from listening sympathetically to an anti-affirmative-action argument. Like Tim Wise, I am frustrated by a disregard of the facts in favor of an isolated in-group story that claims "reverse discrimination." Additionally, an aspect of my whiteness I continue to struggle with is my surprise at both covert and overt racism at the predominantly white university where I work. While students, administrators, and fellow faculty will often talk about the "Saint Joseph's family," as a feminist and an antiracist faculty member, I am troubled by this simplistic equation of "family" with "the good," and in the ways that this rhetoric of "family" creates space for racism, sexism, and homophobia to thrive. What I mean by this is that often when a racist event happens or a student of color expresses her discomfort with the campus atmosphere to an administrator, the student is told by the white administrator that he (most often he) "doesn't understand" because the "other" (read: white) students are "happy" or "comfortable" or "excited about Saint Joe's." This willful (but often well intended) misreading of the pain of racism continues to surprise me. While becoming more and more aware of the regular, everyday racism that students encounter on my campus, and while working to address it in our writing center, I am still surprised by white resistance to work for change and angered when I encounter this resistance.

Students' anger, while it is a regular part of white racial identity development, is also challenging. While I can speak with students about patterns of racial identity development, make them aware that anger and

guilt are aspects of white racial identity development, and encourage them to reflect on their own stages of identity development (Carter 1997), as a teacher, I can't always be sure what will trigger a student's anger or guilt. In fact, in interviewing students one or two years after their graduation about the impact service-learning courses I teach have on them (Writing Fellows is a service-learning course), I have found that former students feel that experiencing anger is a necessary part of the process of growth—not a stage that can be skipped over or avoided through pedagogical means. Thus, each time I teach a course, a certain amount of the pedagogy comes from the students in the room and the way anger and guilt surface. I offer these assignments then not as recommendations on how to approach discussions of race (because they might not work in the context where you live and teach) but as heuristics for the development of your own assignments which, too, must be contingent and evolving.

COMMUNITY

> *Creating community, in other words, involves this most difficult work of negotiating real divisions, of considering boundaries before we go crashing through, and of pondering our differences before we can ever agree on the terms of our sameness.*
>
> Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*

Ideally, in any course I teach, I strive to achieve a "climate of openness and intellectual rigor, . . . a feeling of community" that "creates a sense that there is shared commitment and common good that binds us" (hooks 1994, 40). However, as Williams (1997) articulates, a real sense of community is often hard to achieve without glossing over "real divisions" and differences. In addition, often there are real differences in what various members of the classroom consider to be the "common good." In the fall of 2003, the peer tutoring course came together as usual with a diverse mix of students of various backgrounds. In order to achieve a higher level of broadly defined diversity in the course, I regularly recruit students on the recommendation of the Office of Multicultural Life, faculty who teach "diversity" courses, and tutors affiliated with the International Student Association, the Black Student Union, and other student groups on campus. The class was slightly more racially diverse than is typical at our university, with three people of color in a class of sixteen. As was typical of our peer tutoring program, the class was predominantly female at a ratio of thirteen women to three men. One

woman in the class was an out lesbian, a rarity on our predominantly Catholic/Jesuit campus. Others had attended racially diverse high schools in Philadelphia. It was an unusually extroverted class, and class discussions bounced from one idea to another rapidly.

In order to gauge how things were going for everyone in the class, I used Stephen Brookfield's (2004) Critical Incident Questionnaires each week. The anonymous questionnaires asked students to reflect on their previous week of learning. I grouped responses from the questionnaires and brought a summary back to the next class to discuss. Through this feedback, it became apparent that the class was breaking down along beliefs around race and gender. The more conservative students found discussions of race disturbing, and several people expressed growing anger with the polarizing nature of some class discussions.

These tensions prevented some students from engaging in the kind of close reading of the course materials necessary for understanding. For example, in reading DiPardo's (2004) foundational article, "'Whispers of Coming and Going': Lessons from Fannie," an article that discusses racial and cultural difference in the writing center, several of the tutors wanted to blame the tutor, Morgan, for the failures of the tutee, Fanny. Without considering the complex issues that DiPardo raises—Morgan's lack of training and support, Fanny's cultural background, the lack of resources at the university for Native American students—many of the tutors wanted to individualize the situation and write Morgan off as a "bad tutor." As the course continued, I tried to find ways to get students to "see" differently and read differently. The prior text assignment evolved out of this frustration.

THE PRIOR TEXTS ASSIGNMENT

While discussing "Coming and Going," I recognized that students were both inexperienced readers of composition theory as well as inexperienced readers and thinkers on issues of race, gender, and sexuality. As Williams (1997) writes, discussions of race are seen like discussions of sexuality—they are "rude and transgressive . . . in mixed company" (8), and students needed a familiar assignment to assist in their analysis. By creating an assignment for students to research prior texts, the articles and other sources cited within a specific article, I hoped to familiarize students with the wider conversation(s) taking place around race, class, gender, and sexuality in academia. By having the students do this work in small groups, I hoped they would use the space to discuss what was

difficult, as well as to step back and analyze the arguments made by compositionists and theorists of race, class, sexuality, and gender. If tutors could see how the stories told in articles take place in the larger field of composition studies and draw from previous research, I thought that this could provide a new way of "seeing."

The prior texts assignment asked students to work in groups to analyze how an article made its argument, and then to look at the sources the article cited to further analyze how the argument worked. The group then wrote a collaborative rhetorical analysis articulating how the prior texts were incorporated. Students were instructed not to begin by critiquing the article, but to first consider what stories it told, and then unpack those stories. In the final stage, students could juxtapose their own stories with the stories highlighted in the article. Tutors presented their research to the class and revealed how the author had constructed his or her story about race, class, gender, sexuality, and peer tutoring.

Students selected their articles for analysis from the course pack, and they chose a variety of articles, including Dipardo's (2004) "Coming and Going," Gloria Anzaldúa's (2004) "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," and Michelle Gibson, Martha Marinara, and Deborah Meem's (2000) "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender and Sexuality."

The group that selected "Bar Dyke" included one person who identified as lesbian, one who identified as questioning, and two who identified as straight and feminist. In analyzing "Bar Dyke," the four tutors read selections from Judith Butler and other writers on sexuality. In presenting their work, in keeping with Gibson, Marinara, and Meem's (2000) three different theorized narratives, each woman presented her own narrative about class and sexuality and what it means to perform her identity. For example, one woman, Sue, identified as working class and wrote, "In the classroom I notice the discordance between my identities whenever class is discussed, at a university where most of the student body comes from upper-middle class to upper-class families, and the families for whom college is the rule that than the exception." Sue unpacked how her father's job as a construction worker affected how she viewed discussions in various courses where "professional" work was privileged. She critiqued the upwardly mobile orientation of many of her classmates.

In presenting their narratives, each of the four women read out loud a different person's writing. As Gibson, Marinara, and Meem (2000) do not explicitly identify each narrative within their article with a particular

writer, the group decided that in order to express the fragmented nature of postmodern identity, they would each read another group member's narrative. When they read, they did not explain their goals. Thus, as each woman read an "I" narrative, the class experienced a moment of dissonance in which the voice of the speaker did not necessarily mesh with the persona we knew from class. When Jill, the student who identified as lesbian, read Sue's narrative about being working class, the class's expectations were troubled, and the idea of a stable and fixed identity was complicated. By having each writer read another writer's narrative, the "Bar Dyke" group hoped to thwart the class's expectations and highlight the fluidity and play characterized in their article.

In addition to highlighting how writers use sources, this assignment enabled tutors who had previously been marginalized to "come out" with their stories—particularly, for the "Bar Dyke" group, their stories of sexuality and social class. Each group's presentation created similar opportunities to place the articles in a larger context and to engage with prior texts by analyzing the peer tutoring situation. The "Bar Dyke" presentation was particularly successful, however, because they incorporated something from the theorized narrative form of Gibson, Marinara, and Meem (2000) into their presentation and wrote their own stories that "spoke back" to the marginalization they had experienced—in different ways—on our campus.

While at first "Bar Dyke" seems to have little to do with race and racism, in the context that these students selected the article, they were absolutely invested in exploring how the idea of "whiteness" played out in a piece of queer theory. In fact, I believe their comfort with their own stage of racial identity development—and their willingness to discuss race and racism—enabled them to work with the "Bar Dyke" article in sophisticated ways. This willingness has become more apparent to me as these students have kept in contact with me over the last five years, sending me e-mails about Tim Wise articles, recommending books on white racial identity development and race, and recommending that I complicate my own thinking about race. For these students, working with "Bar Dyke" affirmed that conversations about whiteness as well as sexuality were possible.

In contrast, the group that worked with the DiPardo (2004) article struggled with analysis and instead opted for critique of Morgan, the African American tutor, for her failings with Fanny, the Native American student, rather than looking at the more systemic issues that DiPardo raises. While DiPardo's piece, as I told them, was published in the *Writing*

Center Journal and then republished in a number of scholarly anthologies, the students in this group wanted to make an argument that DiPardo's primary rhetorical appeal was pathos. Although they had extensive feedback on a draft of their project, they were not able to move to an analysis of how the piece made its argument and *then* consider how their stories did or did not connect with DiPardo's argument. Instead they remained mired in their own first thoughts—that DiPardo's article named Morgan as a "bad tutor," and they agreed with this assessment.

While analysis requires a high level of critical thinking, I think it's important to not dismiss the failure of the DiPardo group simply as a failure to grasp content. The group struggled with their own recognition of whiteness as a racial construct. During the semester, they moved from a "color blind" state of racial identity development into what Robert Carter (1997) calls "disintegration," the stage of white racial identity development where race "does matter . . . racism does exist and . . . they are white" (202). However, while the students were entering a stage of disintegration, they longed to return to their previous state of "color blindness" and had difficulty reflecting on their own inscription in systemic and cultural racism. In fact, one of the group members wrote to me in a midsemester evaluation that he "ignores race" when it comes up. While this member of the class worked very hard to "ignore race," in selecting "Coming and Going" as a piece to analyze, the group specifically targeted one of the few pieces of writing center scholarship where the participants are "raced." This choice points up the conflicted place the group was in—on some level they wished to think about race, but as they moved back and forth between "color blindness" and "disintegration," they found it difficult to negotiate the contradictions that their stage of racial identity development raised.

The articles students selected provided another important component of this assignment. While the students could have selected any piece from the tutoring manual or the handouts that we had read during the semester (including many of the standards of writing center scholarship), each group selected a piece that dealt in some way with race or pointed out the way that "racelessness" equals "whiteness." While all the texts, with the exception of "Bar Dyke," were required readings for the course, no one selected, for example, anything from Ben Rafoth's (2005) *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. In other words, even though it was a struggle, students *chose* to return to discussions of race, despite their difficulty.

THE TUTOR TALES ASSIGNMENT

> *I do not believe students are well served by a writing center that neutralizes differences. I believe that writing centers can work more effectively with students if that work is situated within the contrasting democratic desire to understand and negotiate difference rather than the institutional need to manage or eliminate it.*
>
> <div align="right">Nancy Grimm, Good Intentions</div>

The tutor tales assignment attempted to highlight difference. While the prior texts assignment asked students to analyze texts for how they told stories about difference, the tutor tales assignment asked students to write about their own experiences using thick description and detail, to "show" the reader a scene, but not tell it. This assignment developed from a presentation by Michigan Tech tutors and writing center staff at the International Writing Centers Association Conference/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in October 2003, where the staff of the Michigan Tech Writing Center discussed using stories as a way to create a peer tutoring "handbook." Rather than providing students with a "recipe" for how to tutor, the Michigan Tech Writing Center staff developed a peer tutoring handbook based on tutors' stories. As I developed the assignment, I wanted to focus on a multiplicity of stories in order to engage each tutor in seeing differently and writing in a way that incorporated enough details to "show" stories about race, class, sexuality, and gender. Each tutor was asked to describe three moments, each a tutor tale. The first tale was to engage in race, class, gender, sexuality, or other "social factors" the tutor had written about during a midsemester reflection; the second asked tutors to revisit their Critical Incident Questionnaires or their service-learning notes and to write either about a tutorial in the writing center or a tutorial that interested them at the service site; the third tutor tale asked each tutor to think about a moment when they had learned something (inside or outside of school) and to write about that with as much detail as possible.

Tutor tales asked students to use the techniques of creative nonfiction writing to describe specific moments or events where they felt conflict. They were instructed not to have a moral or a point, but to explore the issues we had discussed by using description. Although the class was made up of members of both ingroups and outgroups, I hoped to generate counternarratives that would disrupt the flow of easy "commonplace" stories about language and race and power that embed discourse.

Ellsworth (1994) writes that in order to tell one story, one must rely on the "absence and marginalization of all alternative voices" (312). Since all voices and all stories are partial and inherently contradictory, asking tutors to tell more than one story creates spaces for multiplicity. Since each of the assignments could begin in a piece of writing the student had written before, each student then had multiple ways to approach the assignment and multiple perspectives from which to tell many stories. When I asked students to write their three tutor tales, I also specified that the tutors tell one tale in the third person. By asking tutors, in one instance, to narrate an event from a perspective that contrasts with the individual "I" narrator, I again asked them to look at their experience(s) through a different kind of light. Gibson, Marinara, and Meem (2000) describe the importance of multiple stories as a way to combat essentialism and identity politics in "Bar Dyke." They argue that multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities can be narrated "to complicate the notion that identities can be performed in clean, organized, distinct, ways by examining and theorizing our own experiences of class, gender, and sexual identity performance" (70). I was curious about how women, people of color, lesbians, working-class people, and so on might use this assignment to speak back to some of the traditional academic discourse we had read and if this speaking back would change the kinds of stories we told. In what follows, I tell some of the tutors' tales as I think about what stories reveal and what they leave out, exploring the possibility for multiple stories in the center.

Texas

Melanie is from Texas, a geographic oddity at our regional university in a northeastern city. When she got off the plane in Philadelphia, her first question was, "Where are the Latinos?" She was initially uncomfortable at Saint Joseph's because, while she is white, she grew up with more racial and economic diversity than is visible at our university. While many white students at our university describe Saint Joseph's as "the most diverse place" they've ever been (our population of students of color hovers at approximately 10%), for Melanie, this was a different environment, a predominantly white university surrounded by a largely African American city, where the color line was rarely crossed. Her best friend from home was African American. She eagerly signs up to perform service learning at a site for English as a Second Language learners. This site is attended by adult immigrants who are learning English

for the first time. She goes to service with Lucy who is African American. Lucy and Melanie are told only to speak English. One night on the way to service, Melanie brings up her best friend from home and mentions that she is black. Lucy says, "That's great, you have a multicultural buddy. Good for you." Melanie talks with her friend from home about the encounter. She writes that now she understands that white people sometimes tell black people about their "other" black friends in order to appear more diverse.

Color

During a discussion of Black English, Lucy asks the other students in the peer tutoring course about race. She says, "Do you see color? You say you don't, but you know you do." Melanie describes this as the single most frustrating moment in the course. She wanted to talk about the question, how can one acknowledge race and not be racist? but Lucy answered her own question. I don't remember how the discussion ended. As the course continued, we continue to talk about race, class, language, and tutoring. We read Jordan (2004) on Black English and Gloria Anzaldúa (2004) on language, and Lucy falls in love with those arguments. She particularly loves what Anzaldúa writes about the connection between home languages and family and identity. Other students are troubled by the readings, particularly by an essay on the connection between language use, free writing, and sexuality. Some thrive on these discussions, some feel silenced.

Racism at Home

Colleen, a white first-generation college student, initially writes that race was not discussed in her home. She often appears uncomfortable in class. In her midterm self-evaluation, she describes expressing an interest in an African American boy who played football where she was a cheerleader, and her mother took her aside and told her not to talk to a black person. When the family car was stolen and then recovered, her mother had a license plate made that was an acronym for a racial slur. (She didn't tell Colleen what the acronym signified, but Colleen overheard it during a phone conversation.) When Colleen describes these events, she also indicates that she was told not to talk to Jews as well as blacks. She expresses her confusion at her parents' messages, which contrast both with their overt commitment to Roman Catholicism and what she thinks about during the peer tutoring class.

In thinking about the students in this course, I reflect on how different personal histories affect the kinds of stories we tell, along with the importance of race, place, and sexuality in how those factors appear in different kinds of stories. Colleen and Melanie, both white, have had much different exposure to issues of race and class and were in very different places during class discussions of these issues. Lucy, as an African American in a predominantly white institution, sees race differently in the stories she tells and is willing to face race directly. When I brought in the Audre Lorde (1996) quote that begins this chapter to discuss with the class, I asked students to write about what kinds of light guided our course. I asked them to describe the light. The discussion involved seeing things differently, that the readings changed the kind of light with which we view our lives. We discussed the idea of light as "truth" and the idea that truth may not be universal. Students discussed how they are responsible for projecting their own light. Someone observed that light is often filtered and that when the filter changes, one notices the light is not simply background lighting—one recognizes the light.

In her book *A White Teacher Talks about Race*, Julie Landsman (2001) writes,

> Race and racism are complicated subjects. They are multifaceted: a prism turned perpetually in different directions, light breaking at a multitude of angles, revelations. Poverty, culture, and ethnicity are all part of this prism, this complexity of light. . . .
>
> Yet not to write or speak openly about race is evasion. To decide, as I have been tempted to do, that "everyone is an individual and so we cannot even talk of the effects of race" is a cop-out. It is the trick that whites in the United States have used for decades: the rugged individual, the Horatio Alger myth, the escape clause in our contract with humanity. (xiv)

In thinking about how stories can shed different kinds of light on the work we do in the writing center, I am thinking about how prisms work, about how stories can create multiple kinds of colored light, refracting off unexpected surfaces and revealing what's hidden or ignored. By framing the tutor training course in an analysis of storytelling—what stories we tell about race, class, sexuality, gender, and writing, and what stories we hear—what I strive to achieve is what Beth Boquet (2002) calls a "higher risk/higher yield" model for peer tutor training. I ask tutors to view the stories they tell through different light, to see differently, to "operate on the edge of his or her expertise" and to ask difficult and

challenging questions about the role that the writing center, and that tutoring, plays in the university (81). This risky tutor training ideally allows students to see "intellectual struggles, challenges, and successes" (81). It hopefully leads to what feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye (1983) calls "acts of radical imagination," ways of promoting change by listening to different stories. Williams writes:

> I do think that to a very great extent we dream our worlds into being. For better or worse, our customs and laws, our culture and society are sustained by the myths we embrace, the stories we recirculate to explain what we behold. I believe that racism's hardy persistence and immense adaptability are sustained by a habit of human imagination, deflective rhetoric, and hidden license. I believe no less that an optimistic course might be charted, if only we could imagine it. (quoted in Grimm 119)

By finding ways of telling different kinds of stories, I hope we learn to see the writing center differently and to find ways of imagining writing center work that work against the "isms" that pervade our culture. I hope narratives can shed a new light on our work, and I hope we're brave enough to see what it reveals.[4]

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4.   Thank you to all the peer tutors who I taught between 1998 and 2003, and particular thanks to the peer tutoring class of 2003, who helped me think further about issues of language, identity, and storytelling.

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13

CAUGHT IN A FIRESTORM
A Harsh Lesson Learned Teaching AAVE

Barbara Gordon

Note found under my office door November 21, 2002:

> If you would like to know what or better yet, how a black person writes, then maybe you should focus your time and efforts into something a little more worthwhile than a guide or checklist to critique them on.
>
> Who are you to tell a certain people what is acceptable for them to write, think, or express themselves as? You are merely a tutor. Nothing more, nothing less. Just a little fragmentation fo yo ass.
>
> Obviously, it is not okay for anyone to use double negatives, cut off words, or phrases that don't match a sentence. If you think it is okay then you use them, or teach your kids to. Our professors don't agree that it is all right, because we get marked down for mistakes like that, and yes they are mistakes.
>
> Don't teach racism, or demeaning attitudes to people that come to help others. How dare you try to set blacks back in such a way? Is it okay for poor white trash, such as yourself, to use those phrases? Is it all right for the leading dependents of governmental welfare (white women) to use certain phrases?
>
> You are obviously unaware of the hundreds of black universities and colleges that you could utilize if you would like to further your knowledge of what is acceptable FOR A BLACK PERSON.

I was slack-jawed and incredulous. With a thumping heart, a dry mouth, and that odd sensation of parting with mundane reality, I read this note repeatedly before admitting to myself what it was—hate mail. When I got my bearings, I wanted to meet the author. I wanted this person to come forward to talk with me and in so doing realize that I was not an ogre, that I was attempting to stop, not promote, prejudice, specifically linguistic prejudice. I thought the pointed sentiments in the note hit the wrong mark. I suspected the negative energy discharging through these words was the result of a string of affronts, perhaps on my own campus and surely in the larger society. This bolt of anger could have struck a number of places, but here it was sizzling in my hand.

I doubted the author was a student since she or he did not realize that I was the director of the writing center. I suspected a university employee or someone in the surrounding community had written the note. Whoever it was had heard something about what happened the week before in the writing center class, a class I was teaching for secondary-education English majors and others who were interested in being consultants in the university's writing center.

As I put the note away, I contemplated how widespread and out of hand things were becoming. I feared the writing center's reputation was being compromised. I feared I could lose some students' respect, and I felt a tinge of concern for my personal wellbeing. This writer's outrage was palpable. In addition to being a little frightened, I was moved and saddened by this author's sense of victimization. I was beginning to feel victimized too.

Excerpts from the Handout I Passed Out in the Writing Center Class, November 14, 2002

> Students from black American Communities:
> There is no single dialect spoken by black Americans.
> Students living in a community in which a variant American dialect is spoken have often been exposed to a large range of dialects.
> Some black speakers use a variety of dialects that have many features in common.
> Areas of greatest difference between Black English dialects and dominant English dialects include: (Seven examples follow starting with: 1. *It* will often be used for *there* in situations like "It's a book on the table" for "There's a book on the table." 2. The verb "to be" will tend to be absent in situations where a contraction may be placed in standard written English. This is especially true of the present tense, e.g., "I here" and "we going.")

This handout dates back to when linguists, particularly William Labov, first described Black English Vernacular in detail. Though I have conducted searches over the years for other descriptions of dialect and language transference, this handout remained the most direct and clear. It succinctly describes sentence-level characteristics that writing center consultants and future teachers can use in working with students from divergent language backgrounds. The handout, titled "Language and Reading Instruction, California State Board of Education 1973," contains three subheadings, each followed by about two pages of commentary and examples of language transference. The first subheading

is titled "Students from Asian Language Communities." The third sub-heading is titled "Students from Spanish Language Communities," and the middle section, excerpted above, is what ignited the firestorm.

Excerpt from the Reading Assignment for the Writing Center Class, November 14, 2002

> Tutorial sessions are especially useful for helping writers refine their general rules, because you can use your understanding of "interlanguage" to help writers identify their reasons for using a particular rule—or hypothesis—in a particular situation and can then either reinforce the rule or explain its restrictions. Even though writers might not always use hypercorrections systematically, their systematic basis enables you to address them theoretically instead of simply correcting individual manifestations. (Meyer and Smith 2002, 218)

The type of language transference I have alluded to is more accurately referred to as interlanguage. Briefly stated, interlanguage occurs when people predictably transfer linguistic patterns from their familiar language or dialect onto a language or dialect they are attempting to learn. Before the class period when we discuss second language and dialect interlangauge, I have students read relevant theoretical material, such as the piece above. In class, I point out that everyone has a dialect, explain a bit about why dialects exist, and use metaphors to help students realize that, from a linguistic standpoint, no language or dialect is inherently superior to another. Students offer examples of their own dialects and instances of when they vary their language depending upon the rhetorical situations they find themselves in.

We talk about the benefits of being able to suit one's language to the occasion and discuss why it can sometimes be difficult to do so. One difficulty can be seen when people write in interlanguage. I encourage students to point out to writers who display interlanguage which rules the writers are overgeneralizing so they can avoid creating what readers may label "error." At this point, I turn students' attention to the handout.

On November 14, 2002, when the class turned to the pages with examples of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the only African American student in the class—let me call her Carla—angrily spoke out. Filled with indignation, she stated that AAVE is not spoken at our university and is not a recognizable dialect. Many students swiftly refuted her claim citing their experiences as writing consultants. In looking for ways to support Carla, I reiterated that no dialect is linguistically superior to

any other, that people's dialects are not determined by skin color, and that no one dialect is used by African Americans. With little time remaining, I moved the discussion along to the last section of the handout on Spanish interlanguage. Class soon ended.

In retrospect, perhaps I should have gotten in touch with Carla immediately to see how she was feeling. I intended to do so before our next class, but even waiting an hour, it turned out, was too long to avert what was to come. I learned that directly following class Carla made copies of the examples of AAVE on the handout and distributed these to members of her African American sorority. Apparently, she shared her outrage about my having given out these examples in class, though I never learned specifically what she said. What I do know is that her anger ignited her sorority sisters. Within a few hours, a meeting of the Black Cultural Society took place, where these pages became the focus of discussion. Those present caught on fire, too.

Word traveled fast. The next day the student who was the head consultant for the writing center politely asked me if I was aware that the last writing center class created a disturbance. I had no idea what was happening. She went on to say that a number of writing center consultants were talking about the Black Cultural Society's meeting last night, and she mentioned that another meeting of the Society was scheduled that evening to continue the discussion. She also had heard that African American alumni were writing letters of concern and protest about my teaching to the president of the university. After thanking her, I immediately called the head of the university's multicultural program, who was not receptive to meeting with me. Next, I made appointments with the dean and my chair.

One of a Number of Student E-mails Sent to Me Following the Meeting of the Black Cultural Society, November 17, 2002 at 9:25 pm

Dr. Gordon,

I had an opportunity to take a closer look at the black dialect worksheet and discuss it with other students. I would like for us to have a follow up meeting in regards to what we discussed on Saturday. You mentioned you were available on Tuesday from 2:15pm-4pm, however, that is not the best time for me. I am available on Monday November 18th, between 11 PM and 1PM. On Tuesday November 19th I am available any time after 4pm. Please let me know which times are best for you.

Thank you; I look forward to speaking with you.

Quickly my weekday and weekend hours outside class were filled with appointments. Most were with African American students who represented campus organizations. One or two were with African American students who simply wanted to express their personal displeasure with my teaching practices. I was apprehensive before each meeting, but glad I could speak directly with those who were angry. Mostly students complained that I was promoting Ebonics. I explained how that was a misunderstanding. I expressed my regret and sadness that they and others had been offended. I stated my intent to quell linguistic prejudice. My explanations and exhortations soothed the waves, but failed to plumb the depths of the turbulence.

E-mail from the Multicultural Affairs Office after Repeated Requests to Meet with Someone of Authority in That Office

Date: Thursday, November 21, 2002 8:13am
Subject: Hand Out
From: The Multicultural Affairs Office

Barbara,

In regards to our telephone conversation yesterday, I wanted to make you aware that several alumni and the larger community outside of the university have expressed concerns regarding the distribution of the hand out "Black English". Furthermore, students in the African-American community have been offended and are extremely upset. Therefore, since this hand out was originally distributed in the classroom, I am going to recommend that this matter be handled within the faculty and administration community and treated as a "student" issue. I will email under separate cover messages that have been forwarded to me regarding this issue. My hope is that individuals in the faculty and senior administration community will give this matter immediate attention.

This struck me as a curious memo, not one intended to invite conversation. The news from the dean was also off-putting. When we met at my request, I was told that a campus-wide forum was to take place, and that the person who would preside over the forum was in charge of student, rather than academic, affairs. I was taken aback that I had not been consulted about the timing of the forum. It was scheduled when I was to pass out airplane tickets and provide final instructions to thirty students who were studying abroad with me in January. This class meeting had been arranged and announced the previous semester to be outside of normal hours to assure that all thirty students could attend. My co-teacher was new to the course and could not substitute for me, nor

was it feasible to reschedule. For these students' sake, I needed to keep this commitment. As I told the dean that I would not be able to attend the forum, I felt I was falling out of his and other administrators' good graces. Sitting there I felt trapped, powerless, apart from the action, but paradoxically at the center of it.

In Order to Have a Voice at the Forum, I Wrote the Following Letter

November 22, 2002

Dear Concerned Students, Parents, Alumni, and Colleagues:

It has come to my attention that during the last two weeks conversations have taken place about a particular page of a handout I use when teaching English 319, The Writing Center Workshop. To my great dismay these conversations have created divisiveness, and are damaging the Writing Center's and my relationship with a number of people in the Elon community. I cannot take part in today's conversation since it was scheduled at a time I am teaching. For this reason I have written you this letter, and I have asked that this be read and distributed in my absence.

I want to illuminate my educational objectives when I teach writing center tutors about working with writers who display language or dialect interference. Linguists have noted that when people intimately know one language or dialect sometimes when they write in another dialect or language with which they are less familiar, certain patterns may be present. When I talk with tutors about this I have two objectives.

1) My first objective is to raise students' awareness about patterns of language and dialect interference that some writers display. In doing so my aim is to assure, as best I can, that tutors respect those who display any of these patterns. As numerous linguists have pointed out, these patterns are logical differences. Writers with language or dialect interference are using a different set of rules, not an inferior or unintelligent system.

2) My second objective is to provide a handout to enable consultants to raise the awareness of students who write with these patterns. Once writers are aware of the patterns they can spot the language or dialect difference in their writing and writers can adjust their language use to that which is common to higher education.

The handout I distribute gives examples of the patterns of language and dialect interference seen in some writers who frequent our writing center. For example, the handout offers examples of how students with a Japanese language background may leave out articles such as "a" and "the," or use them in unconventional ways. These students do so because the Japanese language does not contain articles. A page of the same handout offers examples of language differences for students who write in what linguists refer to as "Black English Vernacular" —a term Dr. William Labov and J. L. Dillard used

in their pioneering research on dialect. Their studies are referenced on the bottom of that page of the handout.

I repeatedly emphasize to tutors not to assume that writers who look Japanese will display Japanese language patterns in writing, and not to assume that writers who look African American will display the dialect patterns of Black English Vernacular. I expose tutors to the grammatical rules of dialect and language so that tutors can understand that those who display these patterns do so as the result of knowing other linguistic rules, not because of a lack of intelligence.

To further stress this point I use the analogy of language being like currency. The Euro bill is not inferior to an American dollar bill. Each currency works effectively to get people what they need. Language and dialect are similar to currency. Like currency, each language and dialect is effective, depending upon where you are. The more kinds of currency (language or dialects) you possess, the more cultures you can enter. But, you need to know which currency works where.

I have taught these lessons in the writing center course for many years to diverse students. These lessons are commonly a part of the curriculum of writing center courses nationwide. Until this semester, no student has raised an objection. I was distressed that this semester what I was doing offended a student in my class, and troubled that this has evolved into many others being distressed as well. Upset students have come to speak with me, and I have found hate mail under my door.

It is of utmost concern to me that I cause no harm to others. It is my hope that this statement addresses people's concerns and begins to repair damage. I want to do what is necessary to assure that students will continue to become writing center consultants, that they will continue to bring their papers to the center, and that they will continue to learn from and respect me as their professor.

Sincerely,

Barbara Lynn Gordon

Associate Professor of English

Writing Center Director

Rather than write this letter, I wished I could have attended the forum in person to offer explanations and address concerns. A few colleagues, though, later told me it was best I was not there. They said it was a highly charged event with some students bordering on, in one person's words, "hysteria;" people cried, including one administrator. The provost, associate provost, dean of student affairs, and my chair were among those present. Knowing how serious the matter had become, I was comforted by the thought that I had tenure and in my then-fifteen years at the institution, I had established a favorable reputation. I could

not help but think, though, what if this lightning had struck when I was a new, untenured professor?

My colleagues also mentioned that a number of African American students defended me at the forum, and I wondered what specifically I was defended against but did not ask. They told me too that the head consultant for the center circulated copies of my letter and read it aloud. She did so on her own initiative after learning that other administrators were reluctant to distribute what I had written. Her courage and her caring for the center's and my reputation overwhelmed me then and still. I was less brave in another matter. Though the forum was videotaped, I have never attempted to view it.

Excerpts from the Memo Written by the University's Educational Integrity Committee of the Black Cultural Society

Date: November 26, 2002

To: Provost ___, Associate Provost ___, Dean of Student Affairs ___, Distinguished Senior Faculty, Elon University English Department and Concerned Faculty and Staff

From: Educational Integrity Committee of the Black Cultural Society

Subject: The Issue of "Black English"

"A Resolution Concerning the Issue of Black English, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), Ebonics, and the Use of Linguistic Theory as Part of the University's Writing Program and General English Curriculum."

Whereas: It has come to the attention of concerned students that the aforementioned class uses an outdated standard that has been deemed questionable for its inclusion of the modification known as Black English as well as any other documents containing vernaculars specifying other minority, ethnic or cultural groups and communities; and,

Whereas: These documents are considered by several parties to be offensive, racist, in violation of the aims and standards of basic collegiate writing and grammar skills promoted by higher education, and weakens the academic integrity of the university and the effectiveness of the English Department and the Writing Program; and,

Whereas: Currently, the university has not clarified whether or not Ebonics, Black English, or AAVE, will be promoted by the institution as an aspect that is part of standard English and grammar or as an academic theory confined to the study of linguistics;

Therefore let it be resolved that:

All documents referring to Black English or other "ethnic dialects" be discontinued as references for the writing center.

The writing center from now on will only apply collegiate grammatical standards when tutoring someone in the writing center halting the use of linguistic theory in the center.

The university establishes with the English department a review system addressing how linguistics and standard English will be taught at Elon (i.e., Will Black English, AAVE or Ebonics be taught as an aspect of standard English and grammar or as an academic theory confined to the study of linguistics?).

A statement outlining the University's current position in regards to the phenomenon known as Ebonics be issued to the Black Cultural Society and all interested parties for review and discussion before being adopted by the institution.

This resolution was in many mailboxes across campus preceding Thanksgiving break, including everyone's in the English department. Most of my colleagues had not been aware of what had instigated the memo and were bewildered by it. I had just taken my copy out of the mailbox when I ran into my chair out in the hallway. She was flabbergasted and anxious, particularly because she teaches linguistics. Standing next to her was an African American colleague who questioned aloud whether or not she should remove *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from her spring literature course since it is written largely in African American dialect.

I wondered what other colleagues would think when they read this resolution since, eventually, those who cared to know would learn what spurred it. I unrealistically hoped that they would form a protective cocoon to shield me against unfounded accusations; or barring that, I hoped they would offer advice, empathy, or encouragement. I received one supportive e-mail from a philosophy professor, but outside of a few close friends, the collective response was silence. Very likely people were too busy to know or care about these goings-on. This turmoil was a pressing issue in my life, not theirs. I wondered, too, though, if some were a bit scared to state a view. I could surely understand that.

Excerpts from the University's Ad Hoc Committee Report, "Use and Study of Non-Standard English," May 2003

The committee agrees on the following points:

Any handouts that contain examples of non-standard forms of English should be presented with considerable context and sensitivity.

The professor should caution tutors not to assume students of a particular ethnic or cultural background will speak or write in a particular, non-standard version of English (a particular dialect.)

The African American Vernacular dialect should be presented as one of many variants of non-standard English and other variants should also be present (i.e. Appalachian, Hispanic-American, etc.)

The collaborative effort of faculty and students to address sensitive and complex issues together is a testament to the spirit of good will and community the institution enjoys.

Following the forum, the university quickly formed a committee that met periodically in the spring semester and that consisted of Carla, the associate provost, the English chair, and a few African American students and faculty who were campus leaders. One member of the committee told me that getting the students to attend was sometimes difficult but that the discussions were productive. I wondered what was the cause of students' poor attendance. Had the pent-up anger dissipated so that other activities were taking priority in their busy schedules? Did they feel the issue was resolved, or maybe that other issues were at the heart of the matter, not what had happened in the writing center class? Did they see the committee as spurious or ineffective?

The next year, in an offhand way, I learned that the committee had produced a report titled "Use and Study of Non-Standard English." It came as a bit of a shock. As far as I know, this report was given to few people, if anyone, outside the committee members. It was not distributed to the English department. When the copy I requested appeared in my campus box, I pored over each point, eager to see what conclusions the committee had drawn. As I read, I felt confident I had upheld each point, though the very existence of the report implied I had not.

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"Community-College Instructor Says He Was Fired for Disrespecting Adam and Eve"

An instructor who taught Western civilization at Southwestern Community College, in Iowa, says he was fired for teaching the biblical story of Adam and Eve as a myth, rather than as a story that should be taken literally. The instructor, Steve Bitterman, says the college took the side of students who threatened to sue the institution over his teaching. (Wheeler 2007)

"College Settles with Instructor Fired for Teaching Adam and Eve as Myth"

Blog Entry 8: Doesn't it matter to the others posting on this site that every time an instructor is punished for teaching a legitimate scholarly viewpoint that happens to be unpopular with some students, it undermines all academic

freedom? How many instructors at Southwestern Community College—and elsewhere—will practice self-censorship in the classroom for fear of suffering the same fate as Mr. Bitterman? Even though he won (and not everyone has the resources or the determination to file a lawsuit for wrongful termination), this diminishes the liberal arts as a whole with its chilling effect on scholarly inquiry. We're getting ever closer to the day when we all teach the "approved" material or face termination. (Mytelka 2008)

⁂

In the aftermath of the firestorm, I was not told by anyone at my institution that I should change what I teach. However, I was forced to consider the likely troublesome fallout if I did not change this lesson and grappled with the ethical ramifications of self-censorship. I taught the writing center course three more times before I rotated out of the center directorship, each semester dreading any mention of writers who display second-language and dialect interlanguage. Those last times, in advance of teaching the lesson I talked privately with African American students who were in the course, filling them in on what I planned to cover for that class, trying not to make them feel singled out by doing this, trying to learn how I could present this lesson more sensitively, and trying not to ask for their permission to talk about dialect.

I was horribly conflicted about whether or not to use the handout and/or to offer verbal examples of AAVE interlanguage. The consequences of providing examples of AAVE interlanguage could be highly problematic for the writing center, for the institution, and for me. I believed the students who lead the effort resulting in the Black Cultural Society's resolution, along with a number of other students, would consider my providing examples an insult, no matter how sensitively AAVE was contextualized. The previous semester's firestorm was such an extraordinarily hurtful, alienating experience that I did not want to reignite the turmoil except for the noblest of reasons. Then again, I did not want to give in to my fear and let students' misunderstandings and subsequent anger keep me from teaching a worthwhile lesson. Not only writing consultants but also future teachers could benefit from the examples on the handout.

Was providing examples of AAVE interlanguage important enough that I should take a stand and uphold academic freedom, especially considering that institutional and collegial support for doing so were not likely forthcoming? Was this lesson worth the potential damage to the writing center and the university within the academic and local

community? What about the damage to African American students' relationships to each of these? I did not want to further disenfranchise those who already were feeling alienated. For a number of African American students, the handout had become a symbol of disempowerment, an offensive affront. I came to the conclusions that, at this time, African American students needed to feel heard, more than this lesson needed to be heard.

In the end, I introduced the lesson the same way I always had. I went over a few Asian and Spanish interlanguage examples on the board, remarking that interlanguage could occur as well for speakers of AAVE. Unsure of what road to take, I carved a middle path. I never distributed the handout again nor gave AAVE examples, but at the end of the lesson I always mentioned to students that I could provide them with more complete descriptions of second-language and AAVE interlanguage that could be useful to them when working with some writers. One or two students asked me for the handout after class. There was never another incident. Was I self-censoring? Yes. Were there good reasons for self-censoring? I think so. Still, I am not fully sure whether I was being cowardly, or whether I had made a wise revision in instruction.

Excerpts from "Ebonics! Weird Names! $500 Shoes! Shrill Bill Cosby and the Speech that Shocked Black America"

> Last week . . . Cosby ventured down to Washington and ripped into the have-nots among us. The occasion was the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Ed, and the Coz had been invited to Chocolate City by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the NAACP proper, and Howard University. The triumvirate had decided to honor Cosby for having "advanced the promise of Brown." Cosby decided to do some advancing of his own. . . .
>
> The comedian launched into a relentless attack on poor and working-class African Americans, criticizing them for everything from what they name their kids to how they speak. . . .
>
> Broken English is an obsession of Cosby's. In 1997, he wrote a mocking editorial for *The Wall Street Journal* denouncing the Oakland School Board for teaching Ebonics. "In London, I guess Cockney would be the equivalent of Ebonics," wrote Cosby. "And though they may study Cockney at Oxford as part of literature, I doubt they teach it." The fact was, the Oakland School Board never planned to "teach" Ebonics. They actually planned to teach proper English to young kids using Ebonics. But facts were irrelevant to Cosby because whenever he walked into a cocktail party and a stuffed shirt made a joke about Ebonics, his self-image crumpled from the hit. (Coates 2004)

"African-American Vernacular English: Ethics, Ideology, and Pedagogy in the Conflict between Identity and Power"

> An awareness of the sociolinguistic pressures facing African American students is difficult for most outsiders, even sympathetic ones, to grasp without careful attention to the lived experiences of black people.
>
> Sadly, the enduring reality of segregation in this country, sometimes by choice, but more often by economic inequities, ensures that standard English-speaking white America will remain largely ignorant of what is at stake for the vernacular-speaking black culture. Educators of all races, who are sympathetic to the predicament of students . . . often find themselves in their own pedagogical dilemma. (Filmer 2003, 265)

"'A Fly in the Buttermilk': Descriptions of University Life by Successful Black Undergraduate Students at a Predominately White Southeastern University"

> Participants in survey studies completed by Smith (1980) and Allen, Nunley, & Scott-Warner (1988) reported that 55–78% of students, staff, and faculty described their institutions as hostile and unwelcoming to black students. . . . A study by Fisher and Shaw (1999) found more than 50% of their participants reported feeling unfairly treated by faculty, and a large proportion noted racist treatment and subsequent feelings of anger. (Davis et al. 2004, 437)

A number of times, I have contemplated what may have triggered Carla's outrage. Carla was not doing as well in the class as she wanted and had indicated her displeasure to me about this more than once. In addition, near the time of the dialect lesson, she had come to class late and, upon entering the room, interrupted the current activity by announcing that her car had broken down and continued on with a detailed description. I stopped her, saying I would be glad to hear what caused her delay as soon as class was over, and she sat down visibly disgruntled. On another occasion not long after, she attempted to turn in work that she had done during class that was assigned to be completed by class time. She was mad when I informed her after class of the reasons I was not accepting her assignment. I will never know with certainty, but in addition to her having been upset with the content of the dialect lesson and her misinterpreting the lesson's objectives, I believe her anger at the course and at me played a significant role in what she chose to do with the handout.

I suspect, too, that the handout may have been a culminating moment in a series of inequities and affronts. She obviously knew about Ebonics from the media, which sometimes inaccurately led people to

believe that teaching about AAVE was the equivalent to endorsing its use in school settings. It was apparent, too, that she was embarrassed by AAVE, wanting to distance herself from it as much as possible. For all I know, her personal history may have led her to have an unusually strong aversion to AAVE, or perhaps her feelings were not unique in comparison to other African American students I had taught; perhaps she was just braver in voicing her anger.

African American students on my campus and on campuses across the country have much justifiable rage over ongoing forms of racial prejudice. Like Carla, the students at my institution were probably moved to act on what had happened in the writing center class for a host of reasons, not the least of which being that language and dialect can be highly charged issues, especially for students of color at a predominantly white university. What we say and the way we speak are intrinsic to who we are. More than our physical appearance, language reveals our background and status, and cannot be easily disguised or changed. If we use or are assumed to use a language or dialect held in low regard, even derided, we are in a vulnerable and undesirable position. This could not be more apparent than in an academic setting where writing in academic discourse is a key to success. Everyone in higher education is entangled to varying degrees with this issue, particularly those who are stewards of writing instruction. In such a charged atmosphere, a classroom spark can easily lead to the kind conflagration I have described.

"Dissolving the Divide: Cross-Racial Communication in the Restorative Justice Process"

> Restorative justice encounters often bring together participants of differing races. . . . Through storytelling, a participant voices her truth to the other participants, which may have a cathartic effect on the speaker, and an educational effect on the listener. . . . obstacles to effective cross-racial communication are considered, including the vulnerability of truth-telling, prejudice against certain linguistic styles, and manipulative manners of listening. . . . Though this paper is not intended to suggest that restorative justice is a panacea to racial conflict, the author argues that an appropriately facilitated cross-racial restorative justice encounter could do much to increase understanding between races and dismantle the prejudices of individual participants. (Smith 2006, 168–69)

How should universities handle situations when potentially explosive accusations are leveled against those on their campuses, whether

faculty, students, or staff? In the case of hate speech, or racially moti-vated violence, the matter often is often taken up off campus since such matters are a federal offense. Outside law enforcement can also be initi-ated when a violent crime, such as a rape or an assault, takes place on a campus. But, administrators still need to consider what actions the uni-versity will take and, as can be seen from some high-profile incidents, they have not always been well prepared to handle matters in the heat of the controversy.

At such volatile times, having policies in place can increase the likeli-hood of just outcomes. Universities must devise procedures for handling accusations, procedures that are developed with and endorsed by the multicultural office and governing bodies representing students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Then if a campus tempest arises, the university can enact its process with strong campus-wide support. Having policies in place can assure those directly involved in the controversy, as well as the public, that as best as possible, prudent actions will be taken and that the issues will be thoroughly investigated and addressed. In order to carry out their educational missions, faculty, staff, and students must be protected from unfair attacks, sanctions, or dismissal. In this way universities can, by example, foster humane and just ways to handle incendiary events, calling for patience, upholding and protecting the rights of all parties.

Ideally, beyond these protections, campus conflagrations should become opportunities for reflection that can lead to actions to amelio-rate, whenever possible, the underlying fire that fueled the outburst. If handled well, such difficult occurrences can be extraordinary learning opportunities. Where better could this take place than in educational environments?

CCCC Statement on Ebonics, May 1998:

> The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), composed of 9,000 scholars who teach at colleges and universities across the nation, is deeply committed to the development of literacy for all students.
>
> News media reports and commentaries regarding the recent Ebonics con-troversy have been, for the most part, incomplete, uninformed, and in some cases, purposefully distorted. The public deserves a statement reflective of the viewpoints of language and literacy scholars.
>
> Ebonics—also known as "Black English Vernacular," "African American Language," and by other names—is a distinctive language system that many African American students use in daily conversation and in the performance of academic tasks. Like every other linguistic system, Ebonics is systematic

and rule-governed. It is not an obstacle to learning. The obstacle lies in negative attitudes towards the language, lack of information about the language, inefficient techniques for teaching language and literacy skills, and an unwillingness to adapt teaching styles to the needs of Ebonics speakers.

Teachers, administrators, counselors, supervisors, and curriculum developers must undergo training to provide them with adequate knowledge about Ebonics and help them overcome the prevailing stereotypes about the language and learning potential of African American students and others who speak Ebonics. Teachers in particular must be equipped with the fundamental training and knowledge that will enable them to be effective in teaching language and literacy skills to Ebonics speakers.

We strongly support the call for additional research on how educators can best build on existing knowledge about Ebonics to help students to expand their command of the Language of Wider Communication ("standard English") and master the essential skills of reading and writing. (Conference)

In 2005, I gave a presentation at CCCC about the turmoil I was swept into as a result of the dialect lesson. Afterwards, a man came up to me noticeably upset. He had observed a similar situation at his university in which his colleague was dismissed. He said it is not worth the risk to bring up AAVE in class. He advises others not to do it.

I understand but regret he has reached that conclusion. I embrace the sentiments in the position statement above and hope my story will not serve to silence other educators. To assure that will not happen, however, requires changes on university campuses so that tensions can be addressed before they escalate to explosive proportions and so that if an explosion should occur, opportunities for deeper understandings are likely to result.

Even well-handled incendiary events, though, do not guarantee fair, edifying outcomes with all emerging unscathed. In the case of language, as long as there is privileged speech, it is hard for disenfranchised speakers to hear others who are not in their circumstances discuss their disempowered language, regardless of the intent. Sometimes when an incident becomes a firestorm, the individuals involved must deeply contemplate what is right and what is best, wrestling with the tension and enduring the fallout that can result in the gap between the two.

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14

ON THE EDGES
Black Maleness, Degrees of Racism, and Community on the Boundaries of the Writing Center

Jason B. Esters

I'm an untenured junior faculty member, and I am building a writing center. Right now, I spend a significant amount of time sitting in the room that will become our writing center (we call it the "Writer's Studio") in the basement of my department's newly renovated edifice. The lights are off most of the time. The room looks less empty that way, less harsh. Even in its unfinished, partially renovated state, it is already a great place to think and to daydream. Even write. And while I have been thinking about implementing our strategic plan, securing funding, and training tutors, I have been thinking a lot lately about the influence of writing centers in my life and academic career.

I entered the writing center on a lark. My graduate university's writing center was in one of the older buildings on campus. I entered the doors to the building, walked down a flight of stairs that felt disproportionately large for a normal human's stride, and into a basement area, seemingly forgotten. I found the writing center nestled between what seemed to be an empty storeroom and a broken vending machine. The door, which I was told was usually propped open, was closed on this particular day. It was a large door, made of dark metal, which made its small glass window of grid-etched glass look even more repressive. But when I opened that door, I felt a spark. Maybe it was the warmth with which the writing center director greeted me, maybe it was hearing how she talked about writing and listened to my thoughts about the same. Or maybe it was catching snippets of a conversation a seasoned tutor was having with a student, exploring ways for him to "find his voice." Whatever the reason, I knew that I had entered a transformative space, a liberating space.

My writing center director was not only warm and friendly, but she showed trust in me as a writer and a teacher of writing. Though I walked onto campus with a teaching certification in secondary English education, I still felt that my being a black man teaching writing at a Research One university placed me on an unsettling proving ground, one where I would have to navigate the identity politics at play. As a graduate student instructor, it was strange, seeing some of my colleagues walk into a class-room wearing t-shirts and shorts and being called by their first names, knowing I couldn't forgo any of the accoutrements attached to authority and run the risk of being seen unprofessional or unprepared.

For me, the writing center didn't have the same burdens or inconsistencies; it was a haven of sorts during my first year of graduate school. I felt at home as a writer and a tutor. Within its physical boundaries, it was a place that was often democratic, ecumenical, tolerant. Admittedly, I experienced wonderful community as a graduate tutor and workshop facilitator. Not because it was a place for me to receive help in my own writing, but because it was one of the few places where it seemed acceptable for me to give it.

I could liken the experiences of the writing center to an intense church service or revival. Students come in with their problems and questions, downtrodden, confused. Wanting and waiting to be inspired. And then the bringers of the Word come—in the form of tutors and writing program administrators. We meet students where they are, the Word goes forth, differences (for the most part) are largely forgotten in the joys of better writing. And though most sessions don't lead to throes of ecstatic jubilee and spiritual awakening (though some do), most students get the encouragement they need.

And yet, at the benediction, while student-clients, our parishioners, file out of the sanctuary that is the writing center, one cannot help but feel the slow, steady, diminishing power of that mountaintop experience, especially in the face of the realities of the daily grind.

Students notice the subsiding feeling, too. They have dynamite sessions with tutors and walk out feeling supremely confident as their well-wishing tutors bid farewell, satisfied with a job well done, only to run across said student twenty minutes later sitting on a bench staring dumbfounded at his session notes, trying to figure out why he had felt so good about his assignment just twenty minutes earlier.

And it is there, in the places beyond the writing center and its sanctuary walls, where the writing center becomes real for me. Writing centers

are more than just the physical spaces they inhabit. Oftentimes, tutors and administrators function in classrooms, boardrooms, and the community at large as extensions of the writing center's mission and its ethos about writing and community. Yet, it is on the boundaries of the writing center, functioning as one of its ambassadors and practitioners, where I have had some painful, but instructive, experiences.

I didn't think about it often, but I remembered that I had faced such a reality the afternoon after my interview in the writing center.

I had taken a bus that afternoon to my girlfriend's neighborhood so I could tell her about my good feelings about the writing center. Her apartment building was about three blocks from the bus stop, and as I was walking, I saw my new writing center director approaching from the opposite direction, pushing her two daughters in a stroller. As I approached her, I started to think about the conversations we had earlier that day and how cool it was that she lived in my girlfriend's neighborhood. When I was four feet in front of her, I smiled and said, "Hey."

And, without looking my way, she walked right by me without a word.

And as I watched her walk away, feeling something like confidence slipping away from me, wrestling and struggling on the inside, trying to come to grips with what had just taken place, I knew that I, a black man walking down the suburban streets of Philadelphia, and she, a white woman with young impressionable daughters, still exist and coexist in the crosshairs of a racially dishonest society whose prejudices silently fashion our actions and reactions. We guard ourselves against the inalienable truths of our own racial biases and fears, even as we secretly gird ourselves with them, using them as cloaks of comfort, protection. Validation. I watched her turn the corner and felt that something in me was broken, disjointed. My head had been forcibly pulled out of the clouds, and I was shaken by the gritty reality that both she and I were on the outside now, and there were practices—codes of the streets—that we all invariably, instinctively follow. The rules of engagement were different here, and I had forgotten.

After a couple of days had passed, I mustered up the courage to bring up the incident to my writing center director. To her credit, she didn't dismiss what happened when I mentioned it; she was really apologetic and was genuinely surprised that she didn't see me. During that encounter, her gaze never met mine, but it was as if I had been doubled and my dopple-gangbanger walked the streets, echoing our society's culturally selective image of black men. The truth of the matter is, as a black man I have been "unseen" more times than I can count. I have had my salutary

greetings ignored by men and women of every ethnic group I have encountered, including black women and other black men, many times for the same reason: fear. This time though, my writerly *I* was extracted, relegating me to a ball-capped boogeyman that becomes a real threat when you acknowledge he exists.

I can't recall if my discussion with my writing center director was more than me saying the encounter happened and she acknowledging it. But that was enough. We were back in the sanctuary. She went on to become a great mentor and support for me through graduate school, just as I thought she would be during that initial meeting we had in that pseudo basement room. Upon reflection, it was an eye-opening insight into boundary crossing for me, because if one of the people who would come to know me best as a writing practitioner could look past the visual representation of my writerly self as we both unwittingly played our parts in a racialized scene entitled "Man approaches woman on the street," how much easier is it for others to look past the "writing genius" in me?

<div align="center">⚜</div>

There was nothing remarkable or unusual about the workshop I had given in Professor Taylor's race and society class. But a couple of weeks later, he slid a small envelope underneath the door of my office. Inside that envelope was a student reaction paper from his class. Every so often, professors would show me student work before and after writing center workshops in order to gauge the effectiveness of the presentation and to see if students achieved that ever-so-elusive transference of knowledge from classroom to writing space. But this student, Cecil—an African American male who was, according to Professor Taylor, engaging and articulate during classroom discussions—was particularly compelled to write about how the writing workshop affected him.

> I guess it may seem odd for a student to want to write a reaction on a regular presentation. I wanted to bring to light a part of Systemic Racism that is instilled on us as students, (particularly black students) from when we are young. Beverly Daniel Tatum poses a great question in her book, *Why are All the Black Kids sitting Together in the Cafeteria*? "How did academic achievement become defined as exclusively white behavior?" (Tatum, 65). From when we are young we develop these racial notions that to be successful is white and to be a failure is black. Rarely is being black associated with academic success, "Racist arguments about contemporary intelligence levels are grounded in nearly four hundred years of viewing blacks as having intelligence inferior to that of whites" (Feagin, 95).

Now you may still ask yourself, so what? Why this paper. Even now as I become a more learned individual than I had been merely four weeks ago, I find a century of Systemic Racism acting on my subconscious. When Professor Taylor initially spoke to the class about a Jason Esters coming to the class to talk to us from a writing center, I had no assumptions of who he was and what he looked like. Yet, as Professor Taylor kept mentioning this man's name and how smart this man was, I then began to build up an image of this "writing genius". White, tall thin man; well dressed (suit, business casual); nice dress shoes; golden blonde hair; blue eyes; and well-spoken. Ah-ha! The joke is on me. Yes Jason is well spoken, oh and yes he did seem to be the "writing genius" Professor Taylor made him out to be, but I was happily mistaken. As he walked toward our classroom, I watched him, and thought, "Look at this guy, what week are we in at school, and he still doesn't know where his class is?" He didn't know because he was our guest. A short black man with dreadlocks and Timberland boots. Was it because the color of his skin and the freeness of his hair why I asked myself that question? Honestly, I don't know.

This incident served as a basic reminder to me, that I am still at the beginning of my journey in knowing not only who I am, but who my people are. In erasing all of the negative stereotypes imbedded in my head of this evil black man that is me. If I were to walk down the street with another black man and we are looked upon by a white stranger, we are just two black men. What ever stereotype they make of that black man, they will be making of me. So if can look at a fellow brother who shares a similar history as me, and share the same thoughts of an ignorant white man, then I am still bound in slavery of the mind, with the white man's ideas/beliefs.

In his response, Cecil ties racist notions of intellectual inferiority to writing ability, or more explicitly, to writing knowledge. The racialized idea of a "writing genius" is framed by the existence and function of the writing center. In fact, the "writing genius" in Cecil's response functions as an extension of both systemic racism and the writing center. The question that Cecil borrows from Tatum—"How did academic achievement become exclusively white behavior?"—is one that works rhetorically and reflectively. He doesn't look to answer or explore this question directly, but uses it as a prism to refract and focus his self-reflection. Cecil opens the possibilities of exploration by offering his own self-examination, acknowledging that he has somehow been subtly harboring this idea of racial inferiority against other black men, and, of all places, it was revealed here, in a writing workshop. Tatum's question acts as Cecil's means to interrogate unspoken assumptions about knowledge possession. Oftentimes, investigations into theories of knowledge

possession deal with the *what*—the attainment, procurement, or critical lack of a particular knowledge base. Cecil uses Tatum's question to foreground the *who*. Who is expected to possess knowledge? Who actually has it? Who parcels it out?

Just as Cecil had internalized the myth of black male anti-intellectualism as a cultural and societal norm, institutions do as well. And that internalization is felt. Struggling students are saddled with a psychological barrage of monikers that stick, like "troublemaker" or "dumbass" or "ADHD." Middling (but often hard-working) students are routinely tracked away from honors or AP courses and are never given the chance to fail, learn, *and then* excel. On the other end of the spectrum, the belief in the collective anti-intellectualism of black men is rarely undone by the individual brilliance of an individual's academic success story; he is labeled a cultural deviant because of his academic prowess, enough so that he will be expected to join the rank and file of an institution's phalanx of "model minorities" who have somehow survived and relinquished their ethno-intellectual identities in exchange for a place at a table in the ivory tower.

And maybe even a spot on a brochure.

As a student, Cecil saw himself being acted on and reacting to racist notions of knowledge possession, that academic writing is somehow not germane to black men. That writing expertise, or "writing genius," is the providence of white malehood.

What Cecil brought to light for me was the startling realization that my color and my gender mattered when it came to matters of writing. On the surface, I knew this and I used it in my pedagogical practices all the time. I used issues of race to show my students how perspective informs arguments and rhetorical strategies. Often, students had never had an African American male teacher before and they were uncomfortable; questioning. I used those opportunities to generate sometimes uneasy, but rich and complex, questions that could help students write something powerful; something convincing. I understood that my race and gender together would give me unique teachable moments in the classroom and in my writing.

But what Cecil showed me was something different.

He showed me that as a black male writing practitioner, I was working on doubled margins. In one respect, our underrepresentation on college campuses, along with American society's racist assumptions of black men as anti-intellectuals, conspires to make our representation in

writing centers all the more sparse, which in turn indirectly reinforces stereotypes against our claims to the academy as intellectual writers. And it's okay for black men who are poets, rappers, and prisoners to write. It's okay for black men to tell the sometimes-shockingly-real-and-other-times-not-really tales of street life. And of course it was okay for black men to write themselves to freedom (before they died, of course). And the rest of us, in uncategorizable terms, exist in the ether. The unsettling idea that arises is that the academy is no place for a black male writer.

When black men are ambassadors of writing . . . no, check that, ambassadors of academic writing, within and outside the tower walls . . . we brush right up against its gates, wondering, like Cecil, if we are still bound by some racial ideology, or maybe wondering if access will be gained or denied. But in another respect, my African American male-ness danced on the edges of the minds of the people that I encountered, affected them and me in ways unconscious and subconscious.

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Critically reflecting on Cecil's response made me think about how I was inadvertently an ambassador, resisting the indoctrination of a pas-sive-aggressively racist mainstream and helping reclaim an oft-ignored and overlooked intellectual identity for another generation of black men. It also reminded me that being that sort of emissary sometimes felt like being a lamb led to slaughter.

I was conducting a writing workshop for an education statistics class, and I was covering some common grammar mistakes made by even experienced writers. Normally, if I know I am going to address grammar issues in a workshop, I make sure I have plenty of resource texts with me: helpful handouts, a couple of writing handbooks I like, and on this day, I even had an SAT verbal/writing workbook, which I found to be helpful to some students. During the workshop, there was one student, a young white man, sitting center-right in the classroom, flush against an interior wall, who peppered the latter half of my presentation with questions. The questions were engaging at first, or so I thought, but I realized pretty quickly that he was probing me, testing me, asking me discipline-specific questions that his professor had already answered, searching through handouts I had given out for a minute detail I might have missed, maybe something I couldn't explain. As we moved into the formal Q&A, he was unexpect-edly quiet until the last volley of questions, when he raised his hand and looked to correct me on a comment I made about ambiguous pronoun

references. I assured him I was correct, gave the class another scenario that included pronouns with no clear antecedent, and offered two sources that addressed the issue in more detail. Unsatisfied, the student still felt compelled to argue his point. We had run right up to the end of class, and I suggested that we could talk more after class was dismissed.

We stayed after class for about ten minutes during which I tried to show him a handbook that expressed the rule I was explaining to him. Without touching or looking at the book, he off-handedly remarked, "If you look into it, I'm sure you'll find . . ." At that point, I repeated a disparaging statement he had made earlier, one that used ambiguous pronoun references. He immediately got heated and defensive, saying that I took what he said out of context and that his comments weren't directed at me. I told him I believed him but asked, "How could I know if the pronoun you used does not have a direct antecedent?"

He stopped for a minute, realized I was actually making sense, and began to regather his thoughts, I assume for another platform to argue from, when a white male student from the entering class said, "Look. He's right."

My argumentative workshopper looked back at him sharply, turned to me, paused, picked up his books from the teacher's podium, and left out of the classroom without saying a word.

Though I was in a classroom setting and I had been invited to the class as a writing "expert," my teaching, expertise, even my resources were in doubt, and had to be validated by another white male (a student at that).

It was the type of hollow victory that didn't feel like victory at all.

✣

We proselytize the good news of good writing to an uncertain world that sometimes fears, sometimes disdains, and sometimes respects us. black male writing practitioners disturb the racial climates and expectations of the spaces we enter. Plato ruminated about his idealized "philosopher-kings"; the black community has always held in high esteem its "writer-leaders." But it isn't just a matter of challenging prejudice through visceral representation; the greatest tool for dismantling the mechanisms of academic prejudice is twofold: the working and manipulation of its institution's power dialect—the written word—and the vigilant engagement and assessment of the power dynamics of race, sex, and class among its institution's constituents.

These intersections of race and writing, of gender and expectation, of transitive possession and transformative power, exist in the academy and its writing centers, and move across its boundaries and back again. The racially polarized realities we face don't so much collide as they encroach on one another. But it is that encroachment that opens the way for those uncomfortable and revealing moments that provide fodder for our writerly selves. But, as Cecil pointed out to me, the writing center can be a place to begin a journey of discovering who we are, who we can be, and what systemic obstacles may attempt to limit or define us as black men.

It was a sanctuary, not because it was a place were prejudice and racism and sexism were silenced, but because it was a place for me where these often unspeakable things were unsilenced, given voice, expressed. In an organic way, I think, these damaging, sometimes soul-devouring, issues did not fester. For me, the sore spots healed. And as writing this piece brings more of my writing center experience to my remembrance, I realize it wasn't the writing center that provided a salve for the slights I endured, it was its people. My fellow tutors. I'd nearly forgotten that one session with the girl who seemed offended that she got the black tutor; I just always remembered Leslie, an Asian American woman and experienced tutor, showing me a poem she wrote about difficult sessions over dinner and laughs that day. I'd nearly forgotten that it was my struggles that day that prompted that sharing. And I nearly forgot about the heated discussions I had with another tutor, Phil, about race and writing center politics. I always recalled the arguments we had over the Phillies, politics, and bowling. Lastly, I wasn't the only black male tutor in the writing center during my tenure there. Benson, who left the writing center a couple of years before I got there, and Tariq, who came to the center two or three years after, were touchstones for me. I relished the opportunities to talk with them; we shared and compared stories and sought counsel and support from one another.

One of the most powerful dynamics of the written word and its composition is that it breaks such silences. A writing center community has the ability to open up those vivid experiences that are on its edges and turn them inward. The act of writing is revelatory. And maybe a writing center can be a place where we can bring our experiences and encounters in writing, in race, and in gender, and seek revelation. If someone had told me that these experiences, these wheels within wheels, could happen, would happen, I don't think I would have been able to process

it without a life of writing. I don't know how one can be teacher enough, speaker enough, writer enough to convey the shockingly blue-hot flashes of confused anger, the open-empty gut wretchedness of feeling your stomach bottom out.

The center isn't immune to the piercing reality of racism. The students we serve, their professors, and even our tutors are going to bring their prejudices and preferences to the writing center, and, if ignored, those biases can break the sanctity of what writing centers can do as a community, leaving nothing but a hollow and brittle hypocrisy. The center is fragile, and once broken can shatter into a thousand little daggers, a thousand little slights. And they hurt.

Writing centers work when their practitioners have built community. And there is no community if race or gender is an elephant in the room. They should be safe spaces, liberating spaces, not silent ones that never address the issues of race that imbue the center, its tutors, its clients, and its administrators. Community needs to be built, and it needs to be just as much a part of the strategic plan as computers and salaries and legal pads.

Writing centers can't be anthropomorphized as metahuman entities with the abilities to help heal emotional wounds, or correct injustices, or produce better writers, or portend racial or gender neutrality. A race-neutral writing center is as much a myth as the colorblindness of cyberspace because the operation of each depends largely on what its stakeholders bring to the sites of engagement.

The student-clients we serve will come and go, along with their issues and hang-ups. But for the ones who remain in the center, we should strive to make sure it is a place they want to return to, where they aren't marginalized. To be placed on those edges is like being invited to live in the home, but not have a place at the table. Those edges cut the deepest. And they get reopened again and again.

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Vershawn Ashanti Young is editor of *From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle-Class Performance* (2011) and co-editor of *Code-Meshing as World English: Pedagogy, Policy, Performance* (2011). He is associate professor of African American language, literature, and performance studies at the University of Kentucky.

Writing Centers and the New Racism

Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan have created a rich resource for writing center tutors, administrators, and scholars. Motivated by a scholarly interest in race, literacy, and pedagogy, and by an ethical commitment to antiracism work, contributors address a series of related questions: How does institutionalized racism in American education shape the culture of literacy and language education in the writing center? How does racism operate in the discourses of writing center scholarship and lore, and in what ways are writing centers unwittingly complicit in racist practices? How can they meaningfully operationalize antiracist work? How do they persevere through the difficulty and messiness of negotiating race and racism in their daily practice?

The conscientious, nuanced attention to race in *Writing Centers and the New Racism* is meant to model what it means to be bold in engagement with these hard questions and to spur the kind of sustained, productive, multivocal, and challenging dialogue that, with a few important exceptions, has been absent from the field.

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