# Applying Critical Race Theory and Building Community to Bridge the Disciplinary Divide Between ELL and ENG

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## ABSTRACT

The authors of this article co-teach two learning communities that bridge the traditional disciplinary divide between English language learning and English composition. Our pedagogies for these learning community clusters, as they are known at Bunker Hill Community College, draw upon tenets of critical race theory such as co-disciplinarity and valuing students' experiential knowledge, community cultural wealth, and linguistic diversity. Following an exploration of our theoretical framework, each co-teaching pair offers an overview of the relevant assignments and assessments in their respective cluster.

## INTRODUCTION

As we move into the 21st century with an increasing transnational flow of ideas, commodities, art and culture, most of us do not dwell in monoculture. It is almost impossible to associate a culture with a location, or a nation, or a group of people. We are all hybrids of diverse cultures. However, those multilayered cultures that English language learners (ELLs) bring to the classroom have not been appreciated, nor sometimes even valued. We all are creations of cultures interwoven within ourselves and affordances of cultural wealth and experiential knowledge. We, the four authors of this article, start with and always return to this shared belief. We co-teach in pairs two different sections of a 9-credit Integrated English Language Learning Level 3/College Writing 1 learning community cluster at Bunker Hill Community College. We have designed and taught these interdisciplinary clusters within the wider context of Bunker Hill's English Language Learning Program reform.

In designing these cluster courses supporting ELLs in their first college writing course, we are able to address the common goals of a very diverse group of students. Everyone in our classes wants to master English, leave ELL courses behind them, and embark on their personal, academic, and career journeys. There are many cultures, religions, and backgrounds in our courses, but the common goals create a strong community of learners. The commonalities far outshine the differences. The differences offer opportunities to learn from each other whereas the commonalities are the fuel that move these courses and students closer to their goals.

This community of learners understands quickly that they are part of an even bigger community as they are supported by their professors, success coaches, and many different campus support networks. These cluster courses allow students to attempt their first college writing course with a support system that they can access throughout their time in our two year institution, that models how to find and utilize support beyond these courses, and that prepares them for the next steps in their journey by arming them with higher order thinking skills and study strategies.

Along with this community building within the classroom and beyond, our co-disciplinary pedagogy is grounded in some tenets of critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Martinez, 2020). First, CRT, which "investigates and transforms the relationship among race ideas, racism, and power" (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 482), allows us to dismantle the hierarchy that has been formulated within education and beyond based on how much students "sound White" (Young 2014; Kwon 2017) and write in standardized White English. Some scholars in TESOL argue, and we concur, that "(Non)native English speakers" have been racialized and discriminated against and therefore demand that we more actively provide ELLs with access to the social ladder that they are cut off from (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lippi 2012 ; Liggett, 2013; Shapiro, 2014). In the

logical extension of this tenet, CRT equips us with the idea that we can identify and complicate "master narratives" that are told about our students of color and racialized non-native English speakers (Yosso, 2005; Martinez, 2020; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Liggett, 2013). Through their coursework, our students often produce "counter narratives" that reflect the CRT methodology of counterstories, in which "voices spoken over and buried by racist methods and methodologies become the voices of authority in the researching and relating of their own experiences" (Martinez, 2020, p. 21).

One of the lesser known tenets of CRT, bridging the disciplinary divide, also theoretically supports what we have strived to do in these clusters. According to Martinez (2020), interdisciplinarity started when the prominent scholars in the legal field, such as Delgado, Bell, and Williams, performed legal storytelling, initiating Critical Legal Studies, a harbinger of CRT. CRT advocates for interdisciplinarity as a way to challenge the essentialized identities of institutionally compartmentalized disciplines. Although as Matsuda argues we do not think that the two disciplines should be merged, CRT conceptually allows us to bridge the disciplinary divide to provide a pathway to the marginalized ELLs.

Our co-disciplinary pedagogy is grounded in critical race theory, making difference in culture, race, and nation of origin resources, assets, not deficits, through culturally responsive assignments and assessments so that we are no longer "reify[ing] White, monolingual, US-born students as the norm" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 387). Grounding our curriculum with CRT has created strong students, authors, and members of the community college, hence creating social change and strengthening the college community. We will be exhibiting this process through discussions and examples of our learning community cluster courses.

This article references class assignments, student work and other sources. To access these sources via hyperlinks, click on the article in a digial open access format at www.teachingforourtimes.org

## CO-DISCIPLINARY PEDAGOGY

Laying out the history of how the two disciplinary divisions, the teaching of ESL and the teaching of English, have been institutionalized and have constructed their disciplinary identities, Matsuda points out that the disciplinary divisions have affected English language learners for decades. In looking to establish the professional status of ESL teachers, the teaching of ESL is considered to center on "language as science" while the teaching of English centers on "language as an art" (Slager, 1956, as cited in Matsuda, 1999, p. 711). This "disciplinary division of labor" (Matsuda, 1999, p. 700) has constructed the idea that second language learners should take writing courses with so-called native English speakers only after they overcome language issues by learning languages as science. However, a number of institutions and writing instructors have seen that this is not always the case.

Collaboration between the two disciplines "...lead to more opportunities for ELL and non-Ell students to draw on their collective "funds of knowledge" across the curriculum (Shapiro, 2014, p. 401). However, "this collaboration is often prevented by a 'disciplinary division of labor' because the groups often remain segregated" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 402). Bunker Hill Community College, through the restructuring of the ELL department, is bringing these groups--the English Department and the ELL Department--together through this work.

It is important for us to work together across both disciplines because, more than likely, the professionalism in composition studies might not include an "analytical knowledge" of language as its counterpart in the discipline of TESOL. Also, professors in the English department are not likely to have expertise about the way multilinguals' primary or dominant language "interferes with their learning of the new language" (Matsuda, 1999, p. 711). Therefore, having these clustered courses that include both ELL and English faculty, we bridge the gap between the two disciplines which greatly benefits our students.

In addition, we do not hold the assumption that in order for multilinguals to be able to write in the standardized White English, they need to tackle a linguistic component prior to taking credit-bearing writing courses. In fact, "Being placed in mainstream English classes was a marker of achievement and greatly improved their likelihood" of success...and "the mainstream English classroom is seen by many ELLs as a site of power--a place that offers linguistic, social and cultural capital. Being placed in ELL-only English classes may be interpreted, therefore, as a withholding of that capital" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 401). We do not wish to withhold capital from our students, so being in this English class with the same curriculum as any College Writing class, but with the added benefit of a professor who is also adept in language acquisition, proves beneficial for both student and teacher.

Additionally, after the ELL program reform, cluster students can now earn General Education credit for the ELL credits of the cluster. This focus on meaningful content and credit toward graduation counters the typical "gate-keeping and tracking function that ESL has as an institutional label" (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 479). The community and embedded support within the cluster provide a foundation for students to continue building linguistic, social, and cultural capital as they pursue their academic goals.

So, we do not believe that lack of language skills or knowledge, such as around syntax and semantics, signals a deficiency that needs to be filled in. As Shapiro (2014) notes, "We are not here to 'fix' our students' linguistic limitations, rather…we want to "build their linguistic repertoires" (p. 387). Instead of seeing their linguistic resources as interference, we believe that their resources and cultural wealth are assets that they can bring in not only in their writing but also in the classroom community. Offering students the opportunity to look at existing systems, social problems, and controversial topics that affect everyone in the room is one way to break down the walls between students and the barriers they face. Speaking or writing freely about their feelings, experiences, and obstacles can be emancipating for students. Realizing that through education they can create and defend strong views on subjects that have held them back in the past is like offering them wings to take off into their academic journeys. We start this process off by working on low stakes in-class writing and at-home reflections. In reflections students can write without fear of consequence for grammatical and punctuation errors. Overtime, and through scaffolded lessons, students learn that strong editors are strong writers.

We also believe that when the topics and materials are relevant to ELLs' cultures, languages, and values, then they will have a lot to say about them. As a classroom teacher of college writing courses, one of the first things to do is to find one overarching theme, which the students in this writing course clustered with ELL courses will grapple with from different angles in different rhetorical forms throughout the semester. And the theme has to do with some aspects of their life that have been inevitably culturally shaped. The overarching theme has to be something that can direct them to look into what constitutes who they are culturally and to recognize how their culture, belief, value systems, etc, make them unique. Therefore, both of the classes that we are discussing in this article have themes attached to them--one is *Connecting Cultures* and the other is *Identity*.

With a theme in place, we are able to attack planning our courses through backwards design. Together, we decide what we want our students to produce each semester and then we are able to plan the strategies we will use to get the students to where we want them to be. We choose course materials, readings, and design our three big writing assignments. Then, the class has a little breathing room to become its own community. We plan our assignments based on student-need, results of prior lessons, student feedback, and constant co-teacher communication. Based on these factors, our courses become stronger each time they are taught as we add to our curriculum to see what works and what doesn't, and have time to plan and prepare effectively. This is necessary to "create an English curriculum that is inclusive, equitable, and effective for all students" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 402). Furthermore, our goal is not linguistic remediation, but rather the learning of college-level content. We do not want to deny our students access to "more comprehensive and challenging literacy curriculum" because we do not want them to "stagnate academically and linguistically" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 387).

* See the introduction of this article for how to access this material.

## ASSIGNMENTS

*ELL-103/ENG-111--Connecting Cultures--Taught by Jennifer Valdez and Ashley Paul*

In our themed class, Connecting Cultures, we find it essential to emphasize the importance of the students' cultural wealth from day one. The goal of our class is to learn from each other about our varied cultural backgrounds through writing personal narratives, reading literature written from a variety of authors, and writing about cultural food. These major assignments serve to "create space for new stories about race and difference, rooted in the lived experience of people of color and aimed at promoting a pluralist vision of society" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 390). In addition to the major assignments, we offer a range of low stakes writing assignments such as journals and discussions that also revolve around the cultural wealth of our students.

The first major writing assignment of the semester is the personal narrative. As critical race theory purports, the "experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" and we must "view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). With this in mind, we have constructed the Personal Narrative Essay* assignment with a focus of writing about one's culture that values their cultural wealth. Their goal is to tell a story that will teach us something about a culture with which they identify. Our classes typically have students from all over the world. We have had students from Morocco, Brazil, Albania, China, Japan, Vietnam, Japan, as well as Kazakhstan and India. Each of these students has their own story to tell and no two stories are ever alike. The majority of these stories have not been written before, and we recognize that these stories are "tool[s] for exposing, analyzing and challenging majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano Yosso, p. 32). As Martinez (2013) explains, majoritarian stories "privilege whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, heterosexuals, and the able-bodied" (and we could add perceived "native speakers") "by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (p. 23). We want to transgress the idea that there is a "single story" for our students (Shapiro, 2014, p. 394) because the "majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences of people of color (Solórzano and Yosso, p. 29). For example, we may have two students from Morocco, but they have very different stories that reflect their varied cultural backgrounds. Here the CRT concept of intersectionality, originated by Crenshaw (1989), is crucial, as "using personal narrative to elucidate the complex intersection of identity factors that inform diverse perspectives allows for more accurate descriptions of lived reality" (Liggett, 2013, p. 117-118).

Furthermore, we recognize their ability to speak multiple languages as a cultural asset, and we encourage them to use their own language in parts of the narrative, especially through dialogue. We discuss how this adds authenticity and value to the essay, and we show them examples of how other authors do this such as Amy Tan in "Mother Tongue" and Junot Diaz in "Watching Spider-Man in Santo Domingo." Our goal is to get away from the idea that "students of color should assimilate to the dominant White middle-class culture to succeed in life and school" and that this "cultural assimilation may take place" by "learning English at the expense of losing Spanish" or whatever languages they speak (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31). We place value on their multilingual abilities and try to show them that their knowledge is an asset to their writing. However, "According to cultural deficit storytelling, a successful student of color is an assimilated student of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31), but that is certainly not the case. Students are successful through the telling of their own narratives* and using their own languages as cultural assets.

Another major assignment that draws upon cultural wealth, and our last essay of the semester, is the Exploratory Research Essay*. This assignment offers two options for inquiry, research, and writing: a personal comfort food or an interesting food from another culture. Students almost always choose the personal

comfort food option. While it is not unusual to share about cultural foods in an ELL course, this assignment design highlights the community cultural wealth, particularly linguistic and familial, that connects students to their chosen food and to their academic work. Yosso (2005) explains that "community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression" (p.77). Students draw upon their knowledge of multiple languages, translation and interpretation skills, and familial relationships to find and contribute to meaningful scholarship in English about their chosen comfort foods*.

A common obstacle, or "micro form of oppression" that arises during the research phase is a dearth of information in English about a student's chosen comfort food. For example, a student originally from Cape Verde chooses to research and write about cachupa, the Cape Verdean national dish. She follows all of the steps in the research process, which include consulting online encyclopedias and library databases, and finds nothing about cachupa. There is not even a section about Cape Verdean food in A-Z World Food, a popular database for this assignment. These research sources represent an "accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society" (Yosso, p. 76). At this point, the student may start to doubt her research skills or choice of topic. It is pivotal to ask at this moment: How are these sources failing you? What are they missing, overlooking, or erasing? Why might they be doing this? Students are often taught to think critically about their sources, and this is no exception--students think critically about this lack of sources as a systemic issue and not as a deficiency in themselves. Returning to our Cape Verdean researcher, we can relate her dilemma to CRT's "importance placed on understanding the historic effects of European colonialism" (Liggett, 2013, p. 116), since it is not difficult to find information about Portuguese cuisine in the A-Z World Food database.

To address this research obstacle and generate new English scholarship on the student's chosen food, we emphasize forms of research that draw upon linguistic and familial capital. Linguistic capital involves "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style," while familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledges among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78-79). Languages other than English become crucial here as students pursue alternative research paths: Internet-based research in other languages and primary source interviews with family members. Students may use sources in other languages by clearly translating and citing the information in English. This multilingual research is often done in close partnership with a professor or tutor to help vet and communicate the quality of the original source. The family interviews may draw upon generations of cultural knowledge as students learn more deeply about their comfort foods from the very people who introduced them into their lives: parents, aunts and uncles, siblings or close friends. The finished essay offers a venue for telling family, regional, or cultural stories that may not often or ever be told in English. Many of these stories reflect broader histories of oppression and resistance, such as that of soup joumou*, the Independence Day soup which is a popular research topic with Haitian students.

* See the introduction of this article for how to access this material.

## ASSIGNMENTS

*ELL-103/ENG-111--Coming of Age and Identity--taught by Naoko Akai-Dennis and Jennifer Burke Grehan*

Our students come to us with cultural wealth and experience that open the door to wonderful discourse, writing, and presentations. We acknowledge and appreciate their individual experience and it serves as additional content for our courses. Our job, as educators, is to offer the students the language and strategies they need to academically and socially navigate a flawed system. In creating a community of learners and moving within college resources and events, we are empowering our students to step out of their marginalized corner and into the college community, prepared to move within the system that challenges others who are less familiar or informed.

The overarching theme in our Spring 2019 ELL-103/ENG-111 cluster was *Coming-of-Age*, organized into 3 units. Our aims in this cluster course are multiple but interconnected with each other. One of them is for the students to develop higher order thinking skills through reading and watching the various kinds of texts and of course revising multiple drafts. Another aim is for them to find their voices by telling a story about their coming-of-age and to recognize the value in the voices. They are also instructed to situate their stories in wider social historical contexts and use their higher order thinking skills to investigate the contexts that inevitably play some roles in their lives and stories as well. The last two aims in particular are undergirded by one of the major tenets of CRT, "the centrality of experiential knowledge" (Solórzano &Yosso, 2002, p. 26), since experiential knowledge could "expose[s], tell[s] and retell[s], signal[s] resistance and caring, and reiterate[s] what kind of power is feared most" (Bell, 1995, p. 907, as cited in Martinez, 2020, p. 15). The students use "I" as a source to construct knowledge and also examine wider social cultural historical contexts. Utilizing this qualitative research methodology, we had the students delve into their narratives about themselves and discover their beliefs, cultural values and norms as well.

This "centrality of experiential knowledge" frames all three units in this themed course. Unit 1 is an autobiographical inquiry*. Informed by narrative inquiry in the qualitative research field, Unit 1 allows students to not only tell their stories about coming of age but also examine their beliefs, cultural values and norms that the story reveals by locating their stories in their wider social cultural contexts. To accomplish this objective in Unit 1, we carefully selected the texts that had them think about what it means for them by coming of age. In ELL courses, they read the book that was selected for the college's 2018-2019 One Book selection, *The Year of Zero* by Seng Ty. Along with that, the students read three short stories ("This is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" by Sherman Alexie, "The Flowers" by Alice Walker and "The Eleven" by Sandra Cisnerus), so that the students can get a better understanding that coming-of-age does not happen in silo, but rather in a larger social, cultural, and historical context. Also, since these stories question the Euro-American version of coming-of-age, the students learn that the idea of coming-of-age varies depending on culture, history, belief system, etc. These short stories and the movie version of the short story by Alexie, Smoke Signals, helped us to take a close look into the idea of "coming-of-age" in Native American culture, which helped them look at the idea of coming of age in their respective cultures and societies. Reading the scholarly article "Race, Ethnicity, Adulthood*" in ELL classes, which problematizes the Euro-American notion of coming-of-age, also furthered their understanding that the idea of coming-of-age varies among race and ethnicity/culture and needs to be examined within a wider social context.

Unit 2* is drawn from critical race theory's conceptualization of storytelling. Critical race theory contends that the value of storytelling is to give us ways to "strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 11). We wanted the students to find those "traditions of social, political, cultural survival and resistance" against the dominant ideology that people had to overcome. Further, Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) argument that other people's stories require "biographical analysis of the

experiences of a person of color" (p. 33) pedagogically fortifies Unit 2, in which the students interviewed a living person whose experiences and experiential knowledge they are interested in and analyzed their experiences.

Another theme that we have the students explore is identity, "what makes you who you are." As is in the other themed course, we wanted them to find the voices in recounting and reaffirming who they are, whether their identities that they narrativize are cultural, national, racial, gender-related, religious, to name a few, or a intersectionality of some of those aspects of identity. We also wanted them to explore complexities of identity. We especially aimed to have them dismantle essentialized identities, which CRT strongly denounces. Taking this anti-essentialist position that CRT promulgates allowed the students to tell their "lived reality from (intersectional) rather than about (essentialist)" racialized non-native speakers (Martinez, 2020, p. 14).

Aiming to have them de-essentialize their identities and see the complexity of identity, two of the three units enabled the students to explore and reflect on their multilayered discursive identities. Since identity is a concept that can be slippery and elusive to grasp, we started with a more concrete topic, their names. In an explanatory essay* "to what extent does the name represent who you are," and stand for, which they also wrote about in the ELL class, the students were asked to explain how certain incidents illustrate their responses to the question. Building upon their "lived reality" about who they are in Unit 1, we did separate assignments in Unit 2. Then, in the last Unit, drawing on their arguments about the different notions of identity in Unit 2, they go back to their identities, and examine their personal and social identities.

Through engaging with the Unit 1 theme, *Name and Identity*, the students in the ENG-111 course started to see the complexity of their identities by reading and watching the texts and then recounting who they are. First, they watched the YouTube video by Key and Peele's "Substitute teacher*," in which a Black substitute teacher comes into a White classroom and calls the students names in Black English. The students discussed the tension between the teacher and the students, the importance of pronouncing people's names correctly, and the importance of recognizing the linguistic identity of the Black teacher as well. They also shared their "lived reality" about how their identities are essentialized and so misconstrued. Filling out the social identity and the personal identity wheels, which eventually lead to our Unit 3, also required them to see the complexity of their identities. So, in the Unit 1 exploration, some students talked about their national and/or linguistic identities, while others portrayed their personal aspects of their identity. By reviewing peers' drafts, in which they focus on the content by relating to what they read and asking questions about it, they were able to see how identity is differently understood.

In conjunction with Essay 1 in the ENG-111 course, the students in the ELL course wrote about how their names present their identity and why. In this unit, students learn both content and strategies as they watch "(un) Learning My Name" a spoken word film by Mohammed Hassan, read about names and identity from Facing History.org while answering connection and comprehension questions, explore the NY Times article "What's In a Name? A Lot, as It Turns Out" by Erik Eckholm, and submit a writing sample response to Sandra Cisneros' "My Name". During these first couple of weeks, students explore reading and writing as processes in their ELL courses. They work on outlining for notetaking and outlining as a writing strategy for Essay 1. They focus on thesis work, paragraph work, understanding plagiarism, and using two-sided notes to record reactions to readings. Students also visit college resources like the library, Language Lab, Innovation Lab, and Writing Place.

As suggested in Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) social justice and critical race research "Critical race researchers acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 26), we built our course around acknowledging the value of student experience, cultural wealth, and backgrounds of our English language learners. We selected readings, videos, and discussions that would challenge students to discuss issues like professors mispronouncing their names or assigning nicknames instead of taking the time to learn to pronounce names and to explore identity as seen by them and others. In acknowledging that the students already possess the content necessary to write about identity and culture, we are able to focus on the strategies, opportunities, and language that students need to discuss, explore, and become a part of the college community, hence empowering students who may otherwise be marginalized.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) remind us that "down-playing the intercentricity of race and racism in the discourse helps tell majoritarian stories about the insignificance of race and the notion that racism is something in the past" (p. 32). In acknowledging

that ignoring names or re-naming students is wrong, students learn that they have both the right and the power to question authority and make social change. We do not avoid difficult conversations, we encourage them. Students are acting as agents in a culture where historically the story is told to justify the actions of the dominant. In telling their stories, students are flipping this dynamic and in truly hearing these stories we are aiding in this process.

After this exploration of their own identities and names in Unit 1, the ENG course and ELL course move on to two separate units. In Unit 2 in ENG-111, they read two scholarly articles about identity: "The complexity of identity" by Beverly Daniel Tatum and "Introduction: Identity in Question" by Stuart Hall, a pioneer of cultural studies. These two articles help them learn how to read closely and also more importantly grapple with highly conceptual articles. However, since they had already done the "literary circle" in ELL courses (see page 14), it was not so challenging for them to read these two articles. Along with this collaborative reading with peers through different approaches of visualizing, connecting, and creating questions from the texts, they also wrote journals about these articles. These journals help them not to just summarize sources but to speculate on and sort out their thoughts on them. Then, they drafted a persuasive essay* about notions of identity, based on the reading of the two articles. In Unit 2 of the ELL course they explore several coming-of-age short stories like Amy Tan's "Two Kinds", Robert Cormier's "Guess What, I Almost Kissed My Father Goodnight", and "Shaving Instructions" by Leslie Norris. These are enjoyable stories that are accompanied by comprehension questions, discussion groups, and workshops like choosing their favorite sentences to practice quotation integration.

* See the introduction of this article for how to access this material.

ENG and ELL courses come back together in the cumulative last unit, in which students explore the concept of personal and social identity. We have discussed that the theme of the class is "Identity" and have already completed 2 units, *Name and Identity* and *Coming of Age*. Identity is a muddled theme that incorporates perspectives and assumptions made by one's self and others. At the same time, we consider that identity as a theme is confidence and strength building when students are reminded of the power in "seeing" themselves in a broader social cultural context. They create not only a final essay but also a collage that represents who they are, their personal and social identities, and encourages them to see themselves within and beyond the college. Another goal is for the students to be independent readers and writers by having them revise their drafts by getting support from the supporting resources at the college. Thus, we aim to have them end the course with an empowered feeling about themselves, critical thinking skills, and study strategies.

From the ELL perspective, we work hard to institute study strategies and skills that will support students as they bridge from the ELL program to College Writing I and from College Writing I to the next steps in their academic and professional journeys. Students start off creating a reading process in a whole group using literary circles. This lesson is pared down throughout the semester as the groups become smaller and eventually it becomes an independent process of applying the reading strategies on their own. Similarly, students acknowledge that writing is a process and, through a series of reflections, identify the version of the writing process that works for them. These processes often incorporate campus resources such as the Language Lab, Writing Place, and Smarthinking. We are working to empower our students through both content and skill.

You cannot teach writing without reading and vice versa. "Teaching reading in terms of its connections to writing can motivate students to read and increase the likelihood that they find success in both activities. It can lead students to value reading as an integral aspect of learning to write. It can help students develop their understanding of writerly strategies and techniques," Michael Bunn (2013) exerts in his article "Motivation and Connection: Teaching Reading (and Writing) in the Composition Classroom" (p. 512). The class has worked with online literary circles in the previous two units and they will use them one last time in approaching "Identity: Personal and Social" by Virginia Vignoles, a chapter included in the *Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* (2nd edition). Completing a difficult reading with specific tasks in mind and examining it repeatedly in group conversation has allowed texts to become more meaningful for

the class and presenting what they learned to the rest of the class has made them experts on the material. Our goal is that in familiarizing themselves with the reading strategies necessary to take on a literary circle role, students will be able to apply these strategies to future independent readings. We discuss this in the follow-up activity.

Students create two sided notes for the next reading. Tajfel and Turner's "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior" (2004) is also an academic reading. We pre-read this article in class. Then, students work on the note-taking strategy at home. At the top of a page the students type or write the article's MLA citation. They then split the page into two columns. On the left-hand side, students record interesting quotes from the article with the page number. On the right-hand side of the page, students record their thoughts. In completing this exercise, students have an active, written conversation with the text. In class, we review the text one more time. We use the notes that the students take to work on an exercise integrating quotes into paragraphs in class. Online literary circles and two-sided notes are activities that we use in every unit of the class. These are reading, writing, and note-taking strategies that students will continue to use in writing across the curriculum in content courses, both independently and in groups when the opportunity presents itself.

We also work to relate to the assignment and apply the prompt to our lives in two activities that will serve as brainstorming for their essays. First, we will discuss social identity and personal identity by reviewing the idea of the "cultural iceberg". Following our discussion, students will have the opportunity to fill out an identity wheel about themselves. We model this activity. Then, we will define key vocabulary and describe people in photographs posted around the room in one word. We will then discuss perspective, assumptions, personal identity, and social identity. Students will be given fifteen to twenty minutes to write a reflection on this activity before we discuss it as a whole group. As online work for that week, students will watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Ted Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" and reply to Adichie in another reflection. Lastly, students will receive the essay prompt and project assignment. We will discuss the prompt and show the students examples of the collage. The rough draft will be due the following week.

Before turning in their final essays, students will fill out the cover sheet for their essay, staple it to the top of their hard copy, and turn it in. In her article "Encouraging Active Participation in Dialogic Feedback through Assessment as Learning," Rodway (2017) examines the use of interactive coversheets as an assessment tool for teachers and students in a first-year undergraduate writing course. In addition to the traditional red inking that teachers perform on essays, Rodway asked students to fill out an interactive coversheet. The left side of the sheet lists the criteria students were expected to meet in three categories (with specific points in each category): task fulfillment, coherence and cohesion, and grammar and vocabulary. The right side of the form leaves space for students to add comments on where they'd like feedback. Rodway (2017) specifically asks that students do not request feedback in all areas. At the bottom of the page there is a space where students can assess the strengths of their paper. This assessment, created as a learning tool, allows students to transfer their internal processes of reflection and self-assessment to both a written and oral conversation about how students think critically and use teacher feedback. This process empowers students, moving them from inexperienced students to thoughtful, authoritative authors.

In ELL-103 we work with students to develop a plan for studying, filling a graphic blank agenda with all other commitments (work, family, etc.) and setting aside time to attend classes and complete homework weekly. Similarly, we start off by explaining that reading and writing are processes and that successful readers are successful writers. A large part of the course includes revising and editing writing and because this cannot be accomplished in one sitting, we suggest that they block off a few chunks of time during their week when they can focus solely on schoolwork.

We believe all of the students in our classes benefit from very specific lessons on writing and study strategies. For this reason, we offer our students the opportunity to explore new information in small groups, as a whole class, and to reflect individually. For instance, students regularly participate in small group discussions and literary circles. As a whole class, we explore readings and participate in campus-led events. We also encourage them to make use of the support offered to them in the college's Writing Place and Language Lab. This study strategy often aids students in finding the writing process that works for them as individuals. The focus of the course is strong theses, strong paragraphs, organization, and integrating quotations. We teach them through peer editing and support to self-assess, edit, and revise their own work.

In the ELL courses, we approach individual meetings on essays in a way that encourages students to work with professors' feedback, acknowledge the sugges-

tions, question new ideas, and discuss the decision-making in their composition. Students are given their appointments and asked to arrive twenty minutes early. We expect each meeting to take about 15 minutes. However, students need time to prepare. When students arrive, they are given a pile of post-it notes and their graded essay. Students sit and independently read through the essay and feedback. The students post the notes to areas of feedback that they'd like to discuss or need explanation. They write their specific questions or comments on the notes to discuss during our meeting.

The benefits to this process are ample. For professors, we know that students are not looking at their grade and tucking their paper into their backpacks without acknowledging the feedback. For English language learners, this is an opportunity to discuss their work as an author, negotiate ideas, question, and explain. This adds an additional layer of academic discourse and also breaks down the barrier of approaching or questioning a person of power like an educator. Next, students will make an appointment with the Writing Place or Language Lab to review their draft with a tutor. They will approach editing with clear ideas of what the professor suggested, what they think, and what their next action step may be.

In Izabela Usscinski's article "L2 Learners' Engagement with Direct Written Corrective Feedback in First-Year Composition Courses" (2017), she exerts that students use more metacognitive thinking when they are encouraged by the instructor to engage with feedback. Uscinski explains that English language learners need to be taught to deal with feedback and use their errors as an opportunity to develop language and writing skills. The teacher needs to consider the feedback that they leave on ELL's papers and teach them to engage with their audience (their teacher) and take accountability for their learning. One suggestion the author makes is asking students to include a note with new drafts, explaining how and why they made changes.The post-it notes allow us to discuss important points with students, assess how they handle feedback, and serve as more evidence for the tutor when they visit in the language lab or writing place.

Valuing experience as an important part of identity construction fosters a better understanding of the situated interconnections between identity factors (Liggett, 2010). Liggett points out that "this aspect of CRT has been an important part of English language teaching for several years, used to build community in classrooms by allowing ELLs the opportunity to not only voice their perspectives but also to convey alternative understandings of their learning" (2010). The last two classes of the semester are the occasions where they can "voice their perspectives but also to convey alternative understandings of their learning." The classes are dedicated to presentations of their final project and collage. Students present their collages on "What Makes Me Who I Am*". Students separate their collage into two parts, *What You See* or social identity and *Who I Am* or personal identity. Students showcase what they've learned throughout the semester in a celebratory cumulative presentation and gallery walk to share their work with their classmates. At some point in this course, the class also worked on a group submission to 2019 Fall "Tell" magazine*, a campus digital literary magazine, about Taboo. The theme "Taboo" interested them since some taboos are culture, religion, ethnic, and race specific and so was tied closely to our overarching theme. This additional fun project knitted the class community across ELL and ENG since both professors also participate in this project and also brought up a sense of belonging to the college community. Further, seeing their piece of writing published helped them boost their confidence in writing in English.

* See the introduction of this article for how to access this material.

## ASSESSMENTS

*ELL-103/ENG-111--Connecting Cultures--Taught by Jennifer Valdez and Ashley Paul*

While we consider the type of assignment to be extremely important in valuing the cultural wealth of students, we consider the way we assess those assignments to be of equal importance in maintaining equitable grading. In traditional educational spheres, "Deficit discourse is closely tied to standardized testing, as test scores are assumed to be objective indicators of language and literacy skills, despite substantive research showing that they may not be the best measure of what ELLs know and can do" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 387). Therefore, we avoid standardized testing or high-stakes final exams when assessing the students. Instead, we use a holistic approach to grading through portfolio assessment. Throughout the semester, the students engage in the writing process through a series of drafts. There is an emphasis on scaffolding through a multi-draft process using peer review, professor review, and tutor review as means of feedback to use in the revision process. After each draft, the students receive feedback from one of the aforementioned sources, and they use that feedback to move onto the next draft. The three rough drafts are graded on completeness and not on structure, organization, editing, etc. Therefore, there is no pressure toward perfection. The students work at their own pace within their own parameters to get the work done. For some, this may mean only writing the three rough drafts required of them; for others, this may mean writing six or seven drafts with additional feedback from us during office hours or from a tutor. Furthermore, at no time during this process does language usage become the focus of the feedback we provide students. We are looking at their essays from a perspective of structure, organization, and complexity of ideas, and not whether or not they misplace a comma. The ideas are the most important part--the punctuation and grammatical errors will become fewer and fewer the more the student writes.

At the end of the semester, the students compile all of their working drafts as well as their final drafts into an ePortfolio*. This portfolio is then assessed holistically*--meaning they get one grade for all the work, which takes into consideration the process of writing and the product they produce. This grade includes the amount of effort and improvement displayed in the writing in addition to adherence to the assignments. The portfolio system also gives them the opportunity to work on their essays throughout the entire semester--they are never asked to turn in an essay and move on and forget about it. As Feldman (2019) points out, "thirty years of research has found that giving students a grade as formative feedback--that is, in the midst of the learning process-- demotivates students to learn" (208). Anything we learn at any point in the semester can be applied to the first essay because it will not have been graded. Our goal is to shift the "emphasis in the classroom from meeting dates and earning points to learning" (Feldman, 2019, p. xxv). Therefore, none of the essays are graded individually; we are not interested in how perfect one essay may be, but rather, how has the student developed as a writer over the semester--what have they learned and how have they demonstrated that learning?

In addition to the portfolio, the students also engage in low stakes writing like journals[16] and group discussions[17] on our Moodle LMS page to develop their writing and communication skills, but these assignments do not hinder their grade or add pressure to the student to be linguistically perfect. In fact, these writings are all considered informal, and they are not evaluated for language inconsistencies at all. While we may point out patterns of errors to students on an individual basis, their language acquisition does not become the basis of their grade. Instead, their grade is determined by the effort and progress they make holistically.

*ELL-103/ENG-111--Coming of Age and Identity--taught by Naoko Akai-Dennis and Jennifer Burke Grehan*

In this class, we use a similar approach to assessment that Professors Valdez and Paul use. Having moved away from isolated ELL courses and ENG, we are able to assess our students' work holistically in very layered assessments. While in the two ELL courses and ENG-111, students turn out five final essays and a presentation with a graphic accompaniment like the slideshow or collage. These works are placed in an Eportfolio that students can share in other courses, with peers and family, and serve as artifacts from their accomplishments in these courses. The Eportfolio is not only one way to assess students' work and development throughout the course but also a way for students to look back and see how much they have grown as readers, writers, and students in one semester.

These works are assessed and graded individually throughout the course. They also receive a grade for the final culminating project of Eportfolio. We assess our students constantly in low stakes, smaller assignments that build up to this final work. These assessments keep students moving toward their goals and allow them to adjust their sails as necessary. Students are still responsible for the grammar, reading, writing, conversation, and presenting that they were in isolated ELL courses. However, we teach these skills holistically as opposed to individually to allow students to develop their skills in an authentic college course. The design of these assignments and assessments also creates meaningful processes and strategies for students to use and incorporate in future academic and career scenarios.

Low-stake assignments are formative assessments that provide us the opportunity to monitor students' learning that leads them to draft essays. For instance, when they wrote journals about stories, movies, and articles, we did not specifically assess if they comprehend the texts. These were not the comprehension quizzes per se, although some prompts for the journals indirectly enable us to see if they totally misconstrue those texts. These journals all direct them to write about given topics and so were not tools for us to assess the reading skills. Rather, by allowing them to relate to the texts, these journal assignments could have them overcome the fear that they needed to get them "right." Literary circles particularly provide them different approaches to texts through the four assigned roles: discussion director, illustrator, connector, and wordsmith. The discussion director enables them to do "reading for ideas" and "critical reading" (Sprouse, 2018, p.41), while the connector encourages them to do "aesthetic reading" by relating to texts. The illustrator helps them to get a gist of texts, while the wordsmith initiates a dive into texts. This assignment also allows us to see their absorbing and branching texts, integrating ideas into their thoughts, and developing their thoughts.

We designed the cover sheet for feedback very similarly to the sheet Rodway (2017) uses. However, we broke down the rubric that we have used for all course essays. We felt that this was important as students are aware that these are the benchmarks set for them to successfully produce college-level writing. Our cover sheet includes the categories: focus, organization development, use of reading, language ease, and audience. The cover sheet serves multiple purposes. It offers a chance for self-assessment for the students. The cover sheet also lets us know where to focus feedback and gives something specific to discuss in our one-on-one meeting that will benefit the student. Finally, students can bring this completed sheet with them to the Language Lab or Writing Place to let the tutor know exactly what areas they need to focus on in their final revision.

The final project is an opportunity for students to showcase their independence and power as authors as well as their development throughout the semester. Students hand in the final draft of their essay on Tuesday at the beginning of class. Students staple their final draft to the top of all of their accumulated paperwork (rough draft, cover sheet, response to feedback, and notes from their visit to either the Language Lab or the Writing Place). In the first two units, students have the opportunity to revise their final draft and resubmit for a higher grade. However, time does not allow for further revision in the final unit. This serves as an opportunity to experience how writing may be handled in some future content courses. The goal is that through repetitive revising and editing students will create a version of the writing process that works for them. They will show mastery in this skill in this final paper.

The final assignment of the semester is a course reflection. Students reflect on how they learned more than what they learned. Students talk about strategies and resources that they have used during this course

and how they will use them in the future. Reflections are low-stakes writing assignments and in this case it takes place in class. As a whole group we brainstorm the strategies and resources we have used and learned throughout the semester. Students create a list of resources such as the library, Language Lab, Writing Place, Innovation Lab, Life Map, etc and a list of strategies such as annotation, mind-mapping, reflecting, free-writes, two-sided notes. When we have exhausted our lists, we post the steps of the writing process on the board. We then post the reflection question on the board: What does your writing process look like now that you have completed these courses? Students discuss the question in pairs for about ten minutes. We then reconvene and have a whole group discussion. Following the whole group discussion, students answer the reflection question. They have about thirty minutes to write.

This is usually our favorite assignment of the entire course. Students are often very proud of what they've learned and how they've grown as students. The students who sat staring blankly at us from their chairs on the first night of class and may have never considered writing as a process, have developed their own version that works for them. Students incorporate campus resources, strategies they learned and practiced in class, and successes as well as failures as learning tools for their future. They know what works for them, what doesn't, and how to tackle future challenges. We have scaffolded our curriculum with low-stakes reflections. This final reflection combines all that they've learned: content, strategies, campus resources, and community. Sometimes looking back opens up the path to the future.

## CONCLUSION

As we reflect on these courses, we unanimously agreed that the greatest benefit of these clusters is the community that our students build. The community of learners within our classes create an informal cohort with whom they travel toward their goals. These classes also give students the confidence and independence to navigate within the college system. These classes give them the agency to navigate this community where they have traditionally been marginalized.

Supporting the students as English language learners, we consider the lessons and activities that will help our students not only accomplish the immediate goal of writing and structuring strong essays, but also develop the higher order thinking skills and study strategies to carry them through their academic and professional careers. We start by acknowledging their stories: what they've already accomplished, the work ahead of them in our courses, and how they can apply our coursework to their future goals. We explain that the study strategies, building of a support system, and composition taught in these courses will not only help them throughout these courses but also in meeting future academic and career goals.

Our students create strong bonds with their success coaches from the Life Map Advising Center. They navigate resources like the Language Lab, Writing Place, and Smarthinking for tutoring and conversation. They incorporate the support of the Innovation Lab in creating e-portfolios to showcase the products of their hard work. Often, they arrive unsure of their potential and leave published authors in Tell Magazine. Our goal is to empower, inform, and launch these students into the next steps of their journeys. We work to instill both independence and membership in the college community. We are the products of not only what we teach but what we learn from our students. This particular cluster of courses has provided us with an opportunity to facilitate learning that extends far beyond the classroom for us, as professors and humans, and our students.

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