Do Something!: Forging Constellations of Curricular, Co-Curricular, and Community Opportunities for Anti-Racist Writing Pedagogies at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine

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During my interview at Bates College, Crystal Williams, then Dean of Equity and Inclusion, asked how I (Stephanie Wade) integrate equity and inclusion in my work as a writing program administrator. That I did not have a good answer illustrates one of the ways that racism has shaped me, my work, and the field of composition. While my dissertation research had included study of world Englishes and portfolios as anti-racist assessment tools, it ended without investigating code switching. Once appointed as assistant director of Writing @ Bates, a position that includes working with faculty on WAC and WID as well as hiring, training, and supervising writing consultants, I furthered my study to address anti-racism via the work of Vershawn Ashanti Young, Neisha-Anne S Green, April Baker-Bell, Stacy Perryman-Clark, and Asao B. Inoue, which illustrated the harm of assimilationist writing pedagogies and offered alternatives in the forms of code meshing, translingualism, and labor-based grading contracts. I participated in local conversations about racism and the roles of allies via a series of lunches sponsored by our Office of Equity and Inclusion, which taught me to focus my attention on addressing the systematic structures that disempower students of color—especially Black students—in this case in regard to anti-Black linguistic discrimination. In the short essay below, I describe three steps I have taken to do this, and I weave my descriptions of this work with reflections from the students who have participated in this work with me.

My colleagues, a group of peer educators, and I collectively built upon my initial research to design a workshop that we ran on Martin Luther King Day in January of 2019. Peer educators offered presentations that reviewed the history of world Englishes, illustrated the illusion of any Standard English, and demonstrated the relationship between conventional literacy pedagogies, colonialism, and racism. Small group discussions facilitated by the workshop designed provided opportunities for participants to apply what they learned to their own work as writers and teachers. You

can find all of the workshop material here: https://spark.adobe.com/page/bgeZrQoZ2EnLX/. Drawing over thirty-five attendees and resulting in two campus publications, the workshop raised awareness of linguistic justice on campus and beyond and identified the Writing Center as a site for such work, as the excerpt in *the Bates Student* (our student newspaper) below indicates:

> Code meshing as a counter to code switching is the practice of moving between one or more languages or dialects in the same sentence or situation. Code meshing does not require the compartmentalizing of languages, and reduces the perpetuation of racism through language stigma. At Bates we ought to be committed to the encouragement of the use of multiple dialects and languages, but members of the workshop see places in the community where the commitment can be strengthened. If you want to get involved in promoting language diversity in the Bates community or elsewhere, get in touch with the Bates Writing Center. (Maintaining Our Wild Tongues)

We also used research on anti-racist pedagogy to redesign our practicum for writing tutors, decentering the whiteness of the professional staff of Writing @ Bates and framing the work of the writing center as inherently connected to social justice and racial equity by integrating texts by Neisha-Anne S. Green, Romeo García, Kefaya Diab, and Asao Inoue throughout the course, and having several of these scholars visit via Zoom. In addition to illustrating the harm caused by pedagogical approaches that reify conventional white language standards, our class material demonstrated the historical and linguistic integrity of translingualism and code meshing and offered concrete practices to follow, such as striving to listen across difference with a sense of humility, acknowledging the limits of what we can hear, mirroring, and asking questions rather than making corrections (Green 2016, Garcia 2018). You will find the full syllabus here: https://tinyurl.com/y7223yuj.

Cherrysse Ulsa describes her experience in this class:

> As someone who speaks multiple languages, the short term 2019 practicum allowed me to embrace my writing style by using different voices that my identity brings. Through writers such as Neisha Anne Green and Romeo García, I saw how different writing methods can serve as a tool to not only encourage writers to write in different voices, but also to diversify writing. This was important for me as a multilingual person since standards of writing have also been geared to favor individuals whose mother tongue is standard American English.

In this reflection, Cherrysse makes an important point, a point that scholars in the field of cultural rhetorics make, one that writing program administrators can use: teaching students to read texts in a range of voices and dialects—with particular attention to the intersections between aesthetics, epistemology, identity, and ethics—gives students the tools to push back against conventional, colonial, racist standards; to exercise their diverse voices; and to make spaces for their identities in academia (Powell and Bratta 2016). This means that Writing Program Administrators need to create structures that teach faculty how to do this and that provide ongoing support.

Our second community workshop built on and extended the first in several ways. Prior to Martin Luther King Day, students and staff helped facilitate workshops in the Office of Intercultural Education at Bates and at the Lewiston High School, thus putting research about translingualism, code meshing, and antiracist pedagogy into practice in co-curricular and community spaces. (Canagarajah, 2006; Young 2010; Bell, 2014) On Martin Luther King Day, Bates students shared their own research about and experiences with linguistic justice, and local teens shared multilingual poetry they had composed with their high school teacher and the support of Bates students. We concluded the workshop with a collaborative writing activity that encouraged participants to create multilingual poems. You will find workshop material here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1oq6Ge7Q7BOujNxhe9KbuGhhEVOXeF7nSWvuGURdS-yg/edit#slide=id.g6dd176b542_0_354

Three students reflect on this experience below:

> In high school and in college, many educators attempt to minimize the authenticity of a student's voice by implicitly communicating that their language or the use of the language is incorrect. The English language is important in the context of writing in American academic spaces. However, the use of phrases in Black and Latinx cultures should be allowed for students to add color to their language and to express their most authentic self. With this idea, students from Lewiston and Auburn public schools wrote their own poems that reiterated their exuberant backgrounds, languages, and cultures. They presented these poems that consisted of code meshing and multilingualism to the Bates and Lewiston/Auburn community. The experience was beautiful, a sense of community was created. — Alex Onuoha

> The aspect that had the most lasting impact was hearing from so many Lewiston students about their own cultures. Hearing the original poems gave participants the opportunity to see for ourselves how language can be used as a conduit for individuals to express their own experiences. The poems that they composed included pieces of their original languages and gave us a better sense of their identities. The experience of hearing them express themselves in a multilingual format helped emphasize the importance of linguistic diversity for equity and expression in modern academic and artistic works. We then tried our hand at the same exercise to explore how we would impart information about our identities using language and multisensorial detail from our own upbringings. This also helped native English speakers get a better understanding of the challenges involved in code-switching and the barriers posed by the academic English required in the academy. –Emily Tamkin

> The second workshop acted as a catalyst for meaningful campus conversations, deeper community relationships, and further projects. Stephanie continued to create a foothold for language justice on campus and others followed suit. I was inspired to write my senior thesis on linguistic racism at Bates and how translingualism, as an anti-racist pedagogy, can be used in the writing center. We expanded our vision for the future and pushed forward with the momentum created by the workshop. –Sarah (Raph) Raphael

In addition to underscoring the point that Cherrysse made, these reflections also emphasize the impact of community listening and demonstrate the importance of community partnerships and co-curricular spaces as opportunities for anti-racist work (Garcia 2016). Writing program administrators can enact this by building in support for community-engagement and by directing faculty to co-curricular opportunities on their campuses. For example, upon learning more about linguistic justice from our workshops, our grants office and our Center for Purposeful Work have begun to attend to linguistic justice in the ways they review student grant applications and the ways they coach students through the writing of professional genres such as cover letters and graduate school application essays. In these ways, our curricular, co-curricular, and community efforts have begun to create a constellation of anti-racist practices to enact systemic change through an array of mechanisms.

In the spring of 2020, I choose the theme of language justice for my first-year seminar to introduce research about linguistic racism and alternative to students at the start of their college experience and to provide oppor-

tunities for socially-distanced community engagement. This class reflected on and shared our experiences with language; we analyzed a range of texts in diverse genres; we worked with multilingual high school students via Zoom; and we designed and shared research projects. The full syllabus is available here: https://sites.google.com/bates.edu/fys-514-f20/home

Three students report on their experiences in this class:

> Coming into college, I wasn't ready. As a first year I feel like you have so many things you're adjusting from making new friends, adjusting to being at PWI, figuring out how you belong in this community. As a first gen student, I think my FYS has helped me become more confident with my writing and has helped connect with my classmates. –Sabrina Mohamed

> I never thought much about writing and language justice before. Now I know that ignorance definitely has something to do with my privilege in society; it's also from a lack of being taught about language justice in school. As the class continued, I began to get more and more interested in the subject matter. After completing the class, I have found that I question society's set standard norms. Also, I have realized how elitist and classist our society is. –Celia Tolan

> Coming into college I expected the English classes to be similar to my high school courses with an accelerated pace of learning and more difficult material. However, Stephanie flipped the typical English course on its head in her course, immersing us in many scholarly essays, poetry and more, which broadened our horizons on language injustice. In addition, we became more metacognitive about the way we speak, write, and express ourselves. This is truly the foundation of human thought: expression of our internal feelings, emotions and thoughts. By providing us the context of language injustice in our world and the power of rhetoric, Stephanie gave us the tools to become more intentional. –Ana Fowler

These reflections echo the points above and underscore the importance of assigning translingual texts that employ code-meshing, of building community-engagement into our work, and of recognizing the overlap between curricular and co-curricular work, practices that allow us to build community in class and beyond, so students learn to take the work of anti-racism out of the classroom. As another student from that class put it:

> I found that with time, the reasoning for studying this material and topic began to change into something that was actually important to me, not just something I had to learn for school. There is a direct

> change from simply learning about something to actually wanting to make a difference and do something with what we learned. –Lucy Del Col

As writing program administrators, we are responsible for putting research into practice so that we, the faculty and staff with whom we work, our students, and our community partners are able to do something about structural racism. Merely assigning texts in individual classes and running workshops are not enough to enact structural change. But, the fact that these steps are not sufficient does not mean that they are not necessary. By centering research in our field about anti-racist writing instruction and by participating in conversations about racism on our campuses, we can identify a range of curricular, co-curricular, and community spaces for sustained, ongoing work to enact structural change. And by listening to and amplifying the voices of our students, we can make the impact of this work visible, and, perhaps, encourage others to do something as well.

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