Encountering Lives on the Boundary: Mike Rose as Methodologist for Centering Minoritized Writers

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This essay considers how Mike Rose's work might be taken up to advance antiracist writing program administration. Throughout his career, Rose centered the experiences of minoritized writers through a variety of naturalistic methods. The author contends that Rose's equity-driven, emic-oriented research contributions provide a generative resource for emerging antiracist work.

I attend graduate school about forty-minutes east of Mike Rose's hometown of Altoona, Pennsylvania. Although it's difficult to explain, this fact is somehow a source of comfort and encouragement. As a Latino, first-generation college student from a working-class background, I learned quickly to identify the scholars and researchers who have my back, the scholars and researchers who support what I do and who do their best to make academe a livable environment for outsiders like me. Though I was not lucky enough to have met Rose, his work assured me that he had my back. And knowing that this early champion of minoritized writers grew up just "down the street" from where I live remains a source of personal comfort, however difficult that comfort is to verbalize.

I highlight this personal experience to gesture towards what I believe is the abiding element, the epistemological epicenter of Rose's distinguished oeuvre: his use of naturalistic methods to center the lived experiences of writers minoritized by culture, race, socioeconomic class, or education. Whether through stimulated recall protocols, ethnographic case studies, autobiographical narratives, or, of course, classroom observations, Rose coupled method to a research agenda concerned with making academe more accessible and equitable—less entrenched in its "club" mentality with its glitzy badges, opaque language, and worship of tradition (Rose 58). Rose's classic classroom study with Glynda Hull, Kay Losey Fraser, and Marisa Castellano is illustrative on this point. Recall that this study highlighted the lived experience of Maria, a precocious first-year writer who, internalizing the negative feedback from her instructor in classroom conversation, comes to define herself as having "some problems with . . . English" (Hull et al. 317). This study united traditional classroom observations with critical discourse analysis (CDA) and interviews to uncover the micro-interactional politics of classroom discourse and make recommendations for programmatic reform as well as teacher development. In short, this study deployed

a robust methodological framework to provide emic understanding of the myriad ways microaggressions manifest in classroom talk. As readers of this work, we become privy to the unfortunate but common process of minoritization in the writing classroom (through observations and CDA) and its toll on Maria's sense of self-worth (through interview data).

I stress the underlying methods of the above study because it is perhaps easy to overlook Rose's legacy as a methodologist. After all, we remember the outcomes of research more than the means of achieving them. There are many Marias in Rose's long list of publications: first-year and early-career writers that find themselves pitted against and undermined by hegemonic literacy practices and unstated discourse norms. Rose not only pinpointed such practices but also showed us how to remediate ourselves—our institutions, our writing programs, our classrooms, our attitudes—in ways that make for more accessible and equitable educational experiences. Underlying all this generative work was a commitment to the emic, to using naturalistic methods to understand the lived experiences of lives on the boundary.

Although we can certainly celebrate the impact of Rose's work in the areas of access, accessibility, and socioeconomic equity, I want to point to the ways Rose's work might be taken up to advance antiracist writing program administration. Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig demonstrate "how making race visible in our intersecting administrative and curricular practices creates opportunities to both explore and problematize writing program administration as a framework for institutional and disciplinary critique" (1). And Mya Poe reminds us that analysis of race and racism must be localized if we hope to glean actionable insight for programmatic and curricular reform (5). In my view, the viability of the antiracist turn in writing program administration demands attention to the emic. Such a turn demands an intentional use of naturalistic methods to tap the insights and lived experiences of the many stakeholders affected by writing program administration, especially the insights and lived experiences of minoritized students.

Attention to the emic is critical because making race visible presents numerous methodological challenges. Experiences of race and racism are neither static nor monolithic, and writing researchers and WPAs cannot assume that formal educational contexts operate as the only or most salient context in which race and racism become activated for any one individual. As Walter R. Allen contends, the problems faced by minoritized students in educational contexts are symptomatic of "larger systemic problems" (42). Thus, writing researchers and WPAs who delineate contexts of race and racism narrowly are missing out on the much wider racial picture. Access to the wider racial picture, furthermore, can be achieved through careful

attention to the ways informants—research participants—narrate their literacy experiences as raced individuals. By listening to *their* perspectives, writing researchers and WPAs can develop deeper, more holistic understandings of what it means to write from the racialized subaltern.

Rose knew that only a holistic approach to literacy would yield actionable insight, which is why he worked tirelessly to explicate all "the complex ties between literacy and culture" (8). As showcased in Hull et al. and more recently in *Why School?: Reclaiming Education for All of Us*, the writers at the core of Rose's research and social commentary are rarely one-dimensional. Instead, they are multidimensional, historically situated individuals who illustrate the range of literate experience from anxious and frustrating writing performances to confident and triumphant ones. Rose's life work, then, entailed the creation of granular, nuanced tapestries of literate experience; such tapestries undergirded his calls for educational equity.

Emerging antiracist work needs detailed tapestries of literate experience to support both broad and nuanced antiracist efforts. In this respect, Rose's brand of equity-driven, emic-oriented research provides a generative model for the work ahead. Ultimately, Mike Rose taught us how to leverage sound methodological protocols for the purpose of social and institutional critique. I believe we can honor and celebrate Rose's legacy by borrowing his union of method and equity-driven telos to advance our visions of antiracist writing program administration; I believe we can honor and celebrate Rose's work by making visible the context-specific ways writing program administrators can clear the way for minoritized writers to move from the boundaries of academe to the center.

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