

## You have no Future without your students

### **Bring the NOIZE**

*"I intend for these stories to offer a context for the ways in which we must understand and rupture whiteness, racial violence, and the institutional racism of our disciplinary constructs in composition-rhetoric as central to the political work we must do." – Carmen Kynard*

As I research student perspectives for this very project I remember an experience I had at an undergraduate writing incubator, The Undergraduate Research Network. I was a participant during the Summer of 2018 at The Rhetoric Society of America conference. The submission requirements were pretty standard: 250 word abstract and \$50. You didn't even have to be attending the conference. Sick! Each participant would be matched with a faculty mentor that *most* aligned with their work and have a few hours to workshop an ongoing paper or project while also being able to have conversations about rhetorical studies issues at the time. Sounds good enough, now how do I get my Black ass there?

Sex work.

How else?

With my registration now paid, hotel booked, blazers bought all that was left on the docket was attending this incubator and meeting up with my favorite professor – it was lit like a wick! I arrived at the conference room a prompt four hours early. To beat the long lines that I had imagined must amass at major conferences like the Rhetorical Society of America. After finishing up a few assignments while sitting next to the locked entrance for a few hours I started to see other people walking into what I thought was a locked door. These people all carried around a laptop case and looked like children in their uncle's blazer. These must be the undergrads.

To my surprise there were only about twenty people total in the room including those of us who were participants. Must be a tight financial year. Or maybe other undergrads just didn't get the call. There were only a few of us there, so few that we made one small focus group instead of having the one – on – ones. I didn't mind the intimacy. I remember getting a bunch of feedback on a paper I bullshitted through at the behest of one of my well – meaning but completely over demanding professors in a last minute attempt to spruce up my doctoral program application. I remember mingling with undergraduates. And I remember the mentor I was paired with taking almost 7 months to send me any notes

back. I hadn't gained any new insights to the field I didn't already know. I left the room I had been sitting outside of for three hours and texted my friend, "Academics always talk in circles."

As I've continued to now choose my special interest in my doctoral program, I often tell folks how my mind feels like it never really left that incubator. I'm still pointing out nuances in conversations that have been had before. Still pining for special attention to my own specific needs. Still leaving meetings feeling as if I've been left out of the conversation. When will student voice have value to change power dynamics in pedagogy and not for the benefit of those who stand to profit the most from those seeking holistic education?

In *Necessary Disruptions* Valerie Kinloch affirms the value of student voice in the future of instruction when she implored students "provide the foundation for how we can engage in reciprocal learning relationships with students as we collectively (students and teachers) explain, model, demonstrate, listen, observe, think about, question, do, and remake learning (Kinloch, pg. 5)." Theoretically, collaborating with all actors of the knowledge production system strengthens our community and works to distribute the 'burden' of creating, sharing, and capitalizing on knowledge. When Friere told the

world that knowledge was subjective in his now canonical work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he was saying that only the individual themselves can classify "knowing." A practical way of affirming this power dynamic would be to switch language surrounding pedagogy from 'student, teacher' to 'learner, facilitator.' Committing to changing language that elevates students as also teachers affirm the complexity of the craft of curriculum and instruction. bell hooks speaks of dispelling instructional power dynamics in the *Good Sex* chapter of *Teaching Community*.

bell hooks remixes Friere's teachings and subjects them to a Black feminisms and afro-futurisms lens and offers the world *passionate pedagogy*. She claims that 'passionate pedagogy' inevitably results in erotic feelings between students and teachers. The type of eroticism that Lorde spoke of in 1984. Audre Lorde defined *The Erotic as Power* that comes from "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person;" and "not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor merely safe (Lorde, 1984)." She sources the erotic as an ever-growing collective consciousness felt by women since the dawn of the "face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society." I agree that the source of the erotic was created by marginalized self-named 'Third World Women' to show the power of intentional intimacy. I also agree that anyone can tap into

their erotic power but those who wish to have the responsibility of being educators *should* be expected to understand and employ their erotic power in their pedagogy. Try changing your language when referencing your students. Get intimate with your students. Emotionally invest in their wellness, create curriculum that excites their interests, and do **not** have sex with them. When educators feel empowered and supported to be vulnerable in our classrooms students may then start to feel similarly and begin to open up. Lorde helps us to understand that recognizing the power within us all to be our fullest selves can and in fact needs to be shared for all humans. hooks comes to similar conclusions the further you read into *Teaching Community*. Instead of dancing around the subject of power dynamics between students and teachers hooks urges teachers to do away with power dynamics in the classroom and, "openly talk[ed]' about where erotic desire surfaces, a space is created where choice is possible, where accountability can be clearly assessed (hooks, 1994, 154)." Following the teachings of both Black queer feminist pedagogues I would like to propose three functions of the erotic in an educator's pedagogy:

- 1) Share joy in learning with all members of the classroom community;

2) Make space for members of the classroom community to have and share erotic feelings;

3) Learning spaces must be accessible to all members. All members should have the power to create and have opportunities to experience joy.

Understanding our erotic power forces us to strive towards excellence and “not settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (Lorde, 1984).” Our teaching and enrichment activities should match this aim. But that isn’t to say that employing the erotic doesn’t come with a risk. Just like when we ask someone to be our friend, or to reassess personal boundaries, or when saying a relationship needs to be dissolved. All students are different and rarely do educators, staff, faculty, administration, or student faculty have the resources to do what they need in the classroom. These tensions between all levels of the campus community about resources that are needed for positive change should be happening consistently. Open spaces for these conversations. And start with listening to the students.

One of the ways scholars employ their own erotic and empower others to do the same is through counter-narrative story telling. These stories offer breadth and context to the complex ways that whiteness effects individuals pursuing an education in higher

education in America. Counter-narratives also align with the tenets of Black Feminist Thought as expressed by Patricia Hill Collins: 1) Self Definition and Self Valuation; 2) Addressing the Intersecting Nature of Oppression; and 3) Redefining Culture. [Ross, Rosetta E. *Witnessing and Testifying : Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Fortress Press, 2003.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin : The Language of Black America*. Wayne State University Press, 1986.]

Records show decades full of rebellion from students in 1776 – 1820, 1930 – 1975, and newer protests post – 1990 (Thelin, 2011) about a wide selection of topics including (but not limited to) tuition rates, deaths on campus, gender, and racial integration. For centuries students' rebellion against the university shaped the expectations, needs, and courses of Higher Education for generations. Despite the prioritization of student voice being one of the founding tenets of education in America, student voices and perspectives continues to be one of the least researched and recorded areas of academia.

Scholars nowadays like Carmen Kynard, Louis Maraj, and Valerie Kinloch continue to catalyze those of us in the field who also instruct to remember the seminal ideas about knowledge that Friere, hooks, and Lorde wrote about. Dr. Kynard implores us to stop seeing students as starting at a deficit. In *Teaching While Black* Carmen calls for more counter-narratives from Black

scholars, students, and members of the composition-rhetoric community. Kynard succinctly summarizes a call to teachers in 2015: "I am not talking to or about those scholars seeking celebrity status, acceptance, or more face-time; this is work that requires you to make people uncomfortable. Some folk gon need to get called out. (Kynard, 2015, 14)." In the *(Per)forming Difference* section of the "Are You Black Though" chapter Louis Maraj articulates his inspiration to focus on an autoethnographic scholarship in composition-rhetoric being Lorde's and his own call for "knowledge-producers to consider how "even the form our creativity takes" operates within oppressive matrixes (Maraj, 2020, 42)." He continues that we need to ask what value our work and teachings has for our "participants, readers, and ourselves" (Adams, Holman Jones, and Elliis, 2015, 44)." Show up for yourself. Bring the noize.

### **Where Do *EYE* Stand?**

Student voice is integral to imagining a future for American university students. I am pro student and choosing not to be in 2022 is a direct path to obstructing the future. How I see it, the moment educators forget that they are learners first and educators second, I think they lose their teaching credibility. Friere is hailed as one of the founders of our field, hooks has been on every syllabus in all of my grad



courses, but not nearly enough scholars are employing the theory into the practical. Carmen Kynard just told us a few years ago (and still today) to get our sh\*t together. What's the hesitation?

How would our futures as educators change when we work with our students instead of thinking we work for our students? Students are our center, if we continue to shut them out of the conversation – we lose our balance. We must do as hooks says and release the power imbalance in our classrooms, our policies, and in our university administration. When looking specifically at the research surrounding ideas like student – led programs, students in administrative positions at universities, or co-teaching with students I can see wherein the silences are. While Nicholas Fox states clearly that teaching is not activism, he employs a rather cookie cutter method to catalyzing students to “deploy[ing] texts as tactics outside the classroom (Fox, 2012,16).” I argue that those wanting to take up a more revolutionary teaching style also live a revolutionary life outside of one position of influence in an extremely privileged space. (Like being able to attend a major university or acquire enough qualifications to teach at a major public institution in the first place.) The real revolution needs to happen in the administrative offices. Administrators need to listen. And follow demands of the students and staff they aim to advocate

for. How easy it is to tell students that the big bad world outside of the university needs changing to avoid looking inward. Power dynamics between educators, students, staff, and administrators needs to shift for the future of higher education in America. Students need to be an active participant in their own learning. Critical literists and pedagogues alike need to create ways to include these marginalized students in what goes into the inquiry of, methods and techniques within, and critical movements of pedagogy and critical literacy.

For me, the incubator embellished my knowledge of the academy and its functions. Me dumb, you smart. Got it. Everyone felt like they were trying to say something but never really knew how to communicate it. The energy was very abysmal. My paper wasn't shopped around, I wasn't asked to join any projects or to help with the next cohort of folks. I felt like the show pony that doesn't win at the county fair. Alone, with shiny bows in my hair and a big participation sticker with a bunch of people taking my picture. If I had been a part of tailoring my own workshop experience maybe I would have left feeling a little less empty than I did in 2018. The purpose of our meeting was to help close the gaps in conversations between academics and budding academics, but it created a wall. By this point in my tiny but budding career, I had taken on dozens of student leader positions and had done a few projects on Black and Brown

student's perspectives on their institution. I was surrounded by my work. I wanted to talk about that. I wanted to know if any of these academics like their jobs. If they felt like the change they kept talking about was happening. Not to my surprise I was matched with the one other Black professor. He didn't really have any help for me. But he's one guy. And this was only one super traditional experience. No one in the incubator displayed intimate care for my work or my life as Dr. Kinloch urges. There was no eroticism, no intimacy. I felt used. Maybe they thought to themselves about how what I was researching could expand their own works. Maybe not. Their loss. Nonetheless, things will be better in grad school.

### **What's Tea?**

I want this section to act as a timeline of formative ideas in the composition-rhetoric field from the 1920s on. I do this to give context to the frequency and relevancy of student-voice in the field. I want to be clear that centering students is an idea that has been and continues to be researched and exploited in education. Understanding how this system began will help to imagine its future.

First, mixed sources describe the beginnings of critical literacies and pedagogies. In the 1920s philosophers like Hegel and Marx are attributed to highlighting discussions of class

struggles, political, and economic philosophy in Europe and Asia. These discussions from The Frankfurt School of Marxist thought built out the framework for the field of Critical Theory which seeks to confront the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures that produce and constrain it.

In the 1940s thoughtleaders, artists, and activists like Paulo Friere in Brazil, Civil Rights activists in America, and refugees of wartime occupied Europe and Asia started discussions around education's importance to Critical Theory. Specifically, Friere centered his topics around consciousness and critical pedagogy (Vasquez) until the 70s when he expanded upon the idea of literacy as 'knowing' and called for all who subject themselves to the literacy of the world to critique it.

From the 1990s forward, theoretical orientations of critical literacies and pedagogies have been influenced by; inspired by; and remixed by thoughts of scholarship. Vasquez summarizes it quite succinctly: "These include feminist poststructuralist theories (Davies, 1993; Gilbert, 1992) post colonialist traditions (Meacham, 2003), critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2003), critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Janks, 2010), cultural studies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011), critical media literacy (Share, 2009, 2010), queer theory (Vicars, 2013), place conscious pedagogy (Comber, 2016), and critical sociolinguistics and

linguistic anthropology (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Blommaert, 2013; McKinney, 2016)."

Definitions of Critical Lit and Pedagogy continue to alter and change but I describe it as a framework, perspective, attitude, or stance. The particularities of literacy like texts, images, and data then began to gain more notoriety in conversations in the field. The early 2000s brought about the popularity for models of how to critique the socially constructed text that is: the world we live in. Notable models within this field of study include Critical Race Theory. As a result of the uptick in conversation around socially constructed non neutral texts scholars then began to turn the lens inward and began to question the definitions of literacy, texts, and language.

Within this timeline the representation of student voice in the field have historically been underrepresented. Bradley et al exclaimed in 2015 that, "Student voices and experiences are a necessary, but so far under-represented, component in how we account for the progress of undergraduate writing majors and concentrations." Pedagogues are talking about students, but only in isolated ways. Looking specifically at a case study centering young girls we can see how elevating the storytelling from students with lived experience does an incredible job of laying out the gaps in service for Black girl students. *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls In School* by Monique Morris

demonstrates this by using interview transcripts, video and audio data to exacerbate how rampant the issue is of Black girls getting pushed out of school. Dr. Morris wrote several subsequent activities and solution-oriented books like *Cultivating Joyful Learning Spaces for Black Girls: Insights into Interrupting School Pushout*, and *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls*, and even having a *Pushout* movie. She's taking the girls' words and putting them into action plans for anyone to access. A similar move can be seen in April Clay's *Employing Critical Race Theory Lens...* where through counter-storytelling the paper "broadens the understanding of Black graduate students' challenges, successes, and navigation strategies with implications for counselors, faculty and mentors working with Black students and other students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds." This study highlighted the lived experiences of Black graduate students through interview to first inform all members of the classroom community (Clay names "educators, mentors, and counselors" specifically) of the complex oppression that is being a Black grad student and emphasize the necessity of new departmental policies on anti-racist teaching methods using Critical Race Theory as an analyzation lens. It follows the traditional argumentative formula by laying out the facts and detailing how serious the

marginalization of Black graduate students is in graduate programs and calls for grad students to use their writing and teaching opportunities to create bridges between student-faculty and their mentors. (Excuse me but I find it hilarious and ironic that often the only response that grad students have against violence against us is in our projects – our dissertations.) With intersectionality, traumatization, and carceral institutions like schools piling on the levels of marginalization for students, talking through issues that students have and working to solve them would minimize their marginalization. While yes, having a lens like Critical Race Theory can help to illuminate the challenges racialized people suffer while within the academy, hearing direct counter-narratives from Black grad students with other critical non racialized identities (like gender, wealth status, location, adverse childhood experiences, etc) to feel under investigated. Being a graduate student is a complex and precarious position, but undergrads are similarly complex and precarious. Critical race theory is important but so is listening to your bipoc, queer, older, housing insecure, international, and differently abled students. While elevating stories from these vulnerable student populations is important taking action to make their enrichment more generative, erotic, and joyful is similarly needed and important. One matrix isn't enough.

Instead, we should be doing more of the collaboration as seen in **Coauthoring the Curriculum: Student Voices and the Writing Major**. The portion of this paper that stood out the most to me were the student recommendations to better the writing gateway course at their university for all students. The students recommended a slurry of solutions including but not limited to: "expose students to influential theories; nourish students' abilities to think about what their writing is trying to accomplish and teach them to tailor their writing for different audiences, genres and purposes; rhetoric courses being accessibly described to students so that they can understand rhetoric's importance and versatility; should develop skills to obtain a job, infuse a desire to promote change, and develop students' capacities to fight against injustice, especially those based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexuality." If we were to listen and then implement this student contributed ideas to shaping our first-year writing courses students would leave learning more than we ever believed.

In *Teaching Must Be Our Demonstration!* Candace Epps-Robertson (2015) talks about **The Prince Edward County Free School Association** which acted as a site from 1963 – 1964 where teachers were provided pedagogical resources to provide Black and white students from 6 to 23 with "literacy instruction inextricably tied to preparation for becoming active citizens.



(pg.1)" These students were taught in direct demonstrations against white supremacy; students were hailed as intellectuals who deserved access to democracy; and the curriculum notes detail how to respect students, creating spaces meant for them, center curriculum around their lives; and asked for instructors to talk more with students and vice versa. It was refreshing to read about a Black woman curricullurist in the 60s creating schools out of necessity for Black children. *Curriculum Notes* has been added to my personal collection. The second thing is the specificity of an anti – racist teaching experience in the real world where teaching activism is inevitable – unlike the claim that Fox was making. Students should be treated as citizens because they are. They are intellectuals, colleagues, experts. Without respecting and listening to students, often, more instances of distrust can happen.

We need more efficient ways of communicating and collaborating with ideas in our teaching communities. "McWilliam (1996) muses that "apart from cursory and limited treatment of the body in relation to learning, student bodies are regarded in most modern educational literature as important to pedagogy only indirectly" (p. 341) (Ohito, 2019, p. 7)." In my own paper, *Reformation is (not) Revolution* I urged writing teachers to understand that we must go outside of *ourselves* to learn new methods of teaching. It's been this long, maybe teachers aren't

the best experts on teaching. Continuing Kinloch's recommendations from *Necessary Disruptions* she sympathizes with the long-standing history of indirect student interaction in our field. "If, in fact, educators of English and literacy studies are to "interrupt violence" by utilizing the "tools we have at our disposal," then we also need to determine productive and sustaining ways to engage with one another inside and outside the institutionalized spaces of schooling. Thus, my focus on engagement, writ large, in teaching and teacher education." She recommends that instructors listen to students without invalidating them. She also recommends reframing teaching as *Projects in Humanization* that pushes instructors to offer multiple literacies, modes of learning, varied culturally relevant pedagogies, and encouraging students to bring their identities into their enrichment instead of asking them to "take off" their identities. Channel that erotic power and empower your students to do the same. Start going straight to the source.

Who better to ask for out of the box ways of teaching than our students? Unfortunately, due to past and current traumas of violence against undergraduate students at the hands of the university, intensely classist procedures (internships, stipends, fellowships) meant to protect the labor and compensation of undergraduate students, and very limited black

led undergraduate student research studies continues to make us look like we build more walls than bridges. What is in it for an undergraduate student to help an institution that is more concerned with capital over the needs of their student body? Who will you be teaching in the future? As Bradley et al concludes: "The continued maturation of our major hinges on a dialogue between instructors and students (Bradley et al, 2015)."

**Ok, Pack It Up.**

Imagine that you are in sophomore year at a public university in America. You are one of three other siblings. Two of which are not out of high school just yet. You hang up the phone with your Father who is complaining about alimony payments, child support, and now tuition for your schooling. You walk to the café and go to open the door but are stopped by your abuser. You walk past them, laughing and poking fun at you with their friends. You walk to the student attendant taking ID cards at the front of the café and you are shocked when you notice that this student is *your* student. You are an RA in the residence hall and haven't seen this student since the first hall meeting. You strike up small talk about missing them in the community kitchen and then they ask you, "Can we talk for a minute?" In the back of the café hours pass as the two of you talk about everything under the sun. You talk about seeing your abusers in class, about the

creepy man in the Title IX office, and that fact that neither of you had your cases followed up with. You also talk about the last hall meeting. You point out that one resident made a particularly discriminatory remark and that they have continued to talk that way in the hallways, group chats, and in private conversations although you have already brought this up to the resident. As the time goes by the two of you begin to unravel a mountain of complaints on Twitter under a shared hashtag calling attention to similar student experiences. As the two of you scroll endlessly through piles of online stories of abuse and discrimination your student holds your hands and asks, "What are we going to do?" This story is similar to thousands of other student experiences that go unheard or heard by few. We need to remember that you without elevating the voices of undergraduate students who do not feel safe enough to use their erotic power in their education we have no future. Student activist movements begin with intimate conversations in dorm rooms, cafeterias, hallways, and study halls. Student activists use their erotic power to make their institutions better – not worse. If we aren't getting the source and solutions to community issues directly from those who have more marginalized experiences on and off campus we aren't really listening.

If you believe that students (individuals with the capabilities to create their own meanings of knowledge) are really at the *heart* of knowledge, say I. Now ask yourself, why is so much of the conversation of teaching centered around the needs of the teacher? What intimate stories about your teaching experience have you shared your students? What about times when your needs gone unacknowledged? Have your students' needs been ignored as a result? When was the last time a conference highlighted the works of a variety of *just undergraduate* student voices? When was the last time you hear of instructors creating a syllabus, an assignment, an agenda with one of their undergraduate students? Do your own students feel authority, hell even safe in your classroom?

In the article *What Do Students Have to Do With Educational Leadership*, the authors emphasized "the value of educational leaders intentionally including students in shaping the policies and practices that affect young people's schooling experiences (Van Lac and Katherine Cumings Mansfield, 2018, 38)." I emphasize that **there is no future without your students**. When leaders and administrators continue to disregard the stories of marginalized members of the learning community while also preaching about prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion they "cannot establish equitable learning outcomes for all students... (51)." All members of the campus community should be a

part of the decision-making process for the community. Student activism both on and off campus highlights the issues with administration directly. For higher education to become accessible to all protest must happen. Pietro Sasso and Joseph Devitis rereemphasize this point in 2019. "Learning is not static. Learning is social. And should activate students' collective sense of agency (Pietro Sasso, Joseph DeVitis, 2019, 6)." They continue to add how important student protests are to establishing discourse and creating what I call 'erotic campuses.' Protests serve as "a sort of flashing red light" (Pietro Sasso, Joseph DeVitis, 2019, 10) for university administrators to focus resources towards. Instead of having the classroom feel like an erotic and open space for all parties to experiment it feels more like a reflection of societal power dynamics. It reflects who we call experts, who gets a turn to speak, who feels safe, and whose needs are met. Our conferences do the same. Whose written works are hailed at conferences? Which ones receive honorable mention or are awarded at all? Who is worthy of receiving notes back and who is worthy of being forgotten? We can't do it alone.

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