

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM:
EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

by

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DEDICATION

For Eve Malo, a mentor and inspiration. Thank you for all you have done for me through the years, for your belief in me, and your encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This project attempts to answer one tiny part of a life-long question: how do people influence others to care about social justice? To narrow this question down, I focused on the classroom as a potential site for change, and researched pedagogical practices and classroom materials that could help teachers achieve a goal of teaching for social justice. Using Action Research, I examined the effect of using learner-centered teaching methods and relevant social justice themed content with my Writing 101 students, to assess if they would be influenced to care about a specific social justice issue. Students examined the dominant use of “Standard English” in the classroom, and the effect that can have on students who do not speak “Standard English” as their home language. I asked students to question whose language is allowed in the classroom, whose is not allowed, and who decides whose language gets to be spoken. I administered a pre and post survey, collected student writing, and used my observations to assess results. I found that many students in the course did shift their opinions. It appeared that using “adult learning centers” along with a variety of other teaching methods contributed to students’ shifting opinions. This study adds to the small body of knowledge about teaching practices and materials that work towards social justice, but also points to the need for more qualitative research in this area.

INTRODUCTION

Over the summer between the first and second year of my master's program, I designed a research question – it grew from a big question, a life-long question that has both a million answers and none at the same time because it is too complicated and too vast. I wanted to know how people influence others to care about social justice; I wanted to know specific techniques - the nuts and bolts. How did people get others to care about equality for different cultural groups in society? I recognized that the answer to that question was situated in the context of every instance where change happens, but I still wanted to pursue answers. I looked at my life, and wondered how I could apply the question to what I was doing, to make the question small enough to study, to try and ferret out one little answer. My project had to be small and complete-able. The Fall of 2010 marked my first year as a college composition teacher. I decided to look at my own classroom. In one semester, by using learner-centered techniques and accessible content about social justice issues, could I, a beginning composition teacher, influence my students to care about a social justice issue? Of course, the issue had to relate to writing – as it was a writing course – and so I chose language, because language represents the hierarchies of our culture; when students study language they may be able to see the discrimination and the objectification, the oppression, the domination of certain social groups in our culture over other social groups.

As a teacher, I hope for my students to gain more than functional skills in literacy. I want them to practice critical literacy as well; I want them to question aspects of culture that are often treated as normal. In the Spring semester of 2011, I wanted my students to

examine and question the treatment of “Standard English” as the language of power and to think about why Standard English is the form of English that is institutionally supported. In other words, I wanted my students to develop and use critical literacy when thinking, writing and talking about language and power.

Language is a key area where a culture’s power structures and ideologies can be examined. Practicing critical literacy helps students to unveil the way that language can be a tool of the dominant culture, used to exclude those who do not speak and act within the confines of Standard English, while promoting the population who does. Looking critically and deeply at the meaning behind and within language and examining whose dialect and language is taught and rewarded in institutions illuminates oppression in our society. By doing this, students have the potential to understand and disrupt hegemony. Victor Villanueva gives a concise definition of hegemony when he says, “Hegemony represents the ways in which ruling classes affect a society’s moral and intellectual leadership so as to have the rulers’ interests appear the interests of other social groups” (250). For example, when a child, who comes from a home where her family speaks African American Vernacular English, goes to school and feels ashamed of her dialect, and wants to speak Standard English because that is what is spoken in school, on television, and what she reads in books, she is unconsciously working to support a system that discriminates against her home life. The ruling class’s interests appear to be her interests, even though those very interests work to keep her in a lower position in society.

Literacy scholar, James Paul Gee, claims that it is a writing teacher’s job (or any teacher who works with “Discourse”) to work towards changing the social structure (12).

I don't believe that only those who work with language are responsible for a job of such gargantuan proportions, but I do agree with Gee that teachers who work in the realm of language are in a position to ask students to question domination and oppression in society, as language is a site of a culture's beliefs and values.

Brazilian educator and prominent theorist of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire describes thinking of language's influence on culture as an essential part of critical teaching. He says "language should never be understood as a mere tool of communication. Language is packed with ideology, and for this reason it has to be given prominence in any radical pedagogy that proposes to provide space for students' emancipation" ("Literacy" 128). I did not expect that the students in my class would become emancipated from the culture that they live in. Yet, I did hope that by questioning and thinking about the culture, through language, they would develop their critical literacy, which is a step towards being a more empowered citizen in a democratic nation. Morell and Duncan-Andrade say, "To be literate is not to be free; it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (248).

I didn't want to indoctrinate my students into my belief system, even though I hoped that they would agree with me by the end of the course that there are staggering social inequities in our society and things that people can do about it. However, I wanted them to decide this on their own, and I knew that it was entirely possible that they would not come to the conclusion that I hoped for. I knew ways that I had been influenced in my life, but my beliefs came from experiences that spanned thirty-two years, from books, from places I had traveled, from teachers, friends, enemies, my parents, brothers, and my

extended family. I could not duplicate that for my students, but I could give them pieces of information and try to duplicate some experiences – I could try to foster an environment where they could be honest, but respectful, where questioning was encouraged - and see if they could relate the information and experiences of this class to their own lives, making connections. Some students surely come to the class sharing my values, while others come to class with conflicting values, or no interest in social justice.

Though it is a question that is a thesis in itself, I wondered if it was fair to have a desire to influence my students to care about social justice. In the space of this thesis, I cannot fully address this and do justice to all the nuances of the question. But to quickly discuss it, I cannot separate my desires from my being, and when I go into the classroom as a teacher, I am still me. In any job, I bring myself. In any conversation or interaction, I bring myself. I can try to disguise who I am, what I believe, hope and strive for, but it is still there. I think it is important for any teacher to recognize this, and to reflect on it. Truly, I could not imagine teaching, and feeling good about it, if I was not able to share my values.

As a teacher, I must ask myself, if I am striving to change the social structure, whose idea of the social structure am I working towards? In my classroom, I tried to present ideas, materials, and learning opportunities that lead students towards my idea of an improved social structure, a social structure where more people have access to equality. However, in my classroom, I understand that my students have their own unique visions of an ideal social structure, which may even be in direct contradiction to my vision. Even though I hoped they would leave my classroom seeing the injustice that

some people suffer due to unequal access to power, and could imagine ways to work towards equality, I hoped that I could remain open to allowing them their own opinions. I know that I am allowed my own opinions, and I want that for my students as well. There is a fine line between indoctrinating and teaching, and I fear crossing that line. I work carefully to avoid crossing that line. But, in every classroom where teachers are teaching, there is that line. Knowledge comes laden with beliefs, with histories, with directions for our futures – And teaching practices are the same - they cannot be innocent of ideology. An influential theorist and scholar in the field of composition studies, James Berlin, concisely defines ideology as a “set of tactic assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (492).

Myles Horton, a community educator and cofounder of the Highlander School, describes:

There can be no such thing as neutrality. It’s a code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be – that’s what neutrality is. Neutrality is following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be (102).

I could not simply teach my students writing skills, free of any political or ideological stance. Teaching students functional literacy, or for example, expecting them to simply write in Standard English, or academic discourse, without questioning that choice is not neutral. It only appears neutral to some because it is most common – it is the “status quo,” as Horton says. Using a curriculum that promotes critical literacy, that asks students to question, puts the imagined “neutrality” to rest. Ideally, students will realize culture is created through choices. In my class, I hoped students would realize that culture is created through choices, and that language choices in the classroom are not neutral.

James Berlin claims that no rhetoric is innocent of ideology, but rather exists within an ideology. “A rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of other because it is always already serving certain ideological claims” (Berlin 477). Rhetoric cannot be outside of cultural influences and forces and therefore, it serves a purpose, pushes forward a belief system even if it is believed to be innocent. Though I do not believe my students will be saved from oppression, or start a revolution, from one semester of college composition, I believe that changes in our culture are possible and that by working with students on functional literacy *and* critical literacy, I am making small steps towards change.

As a teacher, I reflect on my own practices and constantly question what beliefs I promote or deny. Like every teacher, I make choices every day in my classroom based on my ideology; I hope to make them consciously. As I mentioned, this subject alone could be a complete thesis. There is so much more to say, but I must leave space to describe my project.

To work towards students’ development of critical literacy in the area of language and power, I implemented a four week unit centered around the theme of language and power. It was sandwiched between a personal literacy narrative unit, and a study and description of a discourse community. Both the unit before and after contained reading materials that connected to the themes of the language and power unit. I used learner centered practices, allowed the students to engage in dialogue and had them role play different experiences. They responded in dialogue and writing to readings and video clips that dealt with issues of language and power. During the implementation of the unit on

language and power, I sought to discover if students would be influenced or change their opinions about language and power, based on the content of the course and the instructional methods that I implemented. I assessed students' changing understandings and opinions with a pre and post survey, observed and took field notes during class, and collected students' writing. This was one classroom, with one group of students, in one certain point of history, filtered through my lens.

My views on education have been formed primarily by my experience as a student and a pre-school teacher. As a student, I had the unique opportunity of experiencing a whole range of schooling situations. Up through my bachelor's degree, I had attended ten different schools. The schools ranged from being homeschooled, to attending different medium sized public schools, to several small rural schools. Also, I attended a traditional state university, a small language school in Mexico and a non-traditional state university where there were no grades and the focus was on experiential education. As I was moving through schools, my mother was working her way towards a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, and I was exposed to her and her colleagues discussing ways of educating. I was encouraged to develop meta-cognition about my own learning style, and I observed what worked and did not work for me and for other students. As a student, I found that when I had more choice and more freedom, I flourished. It felt best to be in environments where all the students were respected. That was not always the case, and it felt oppressive to be in a learning environment where there were set answers to memorize, where some students received respect, while others received scorn or where their opinions were not tolerated. I often thought about what I

would do if I were the teacher. As a pre-school teacher, I was able to practice the beliefs I had formed. And now, for the first time, I have been able to practice teaching with adult students, in the college composition classroom. I know the classrooms I enjoyed as a student, and I hope to create a classroom that students not only feel comfortable expressing their lives in, but also a classroom where students and I work together to think about difficult social issues, and where students can work towards improving their skills in writing.

In my thesis, I explain my perspective as a first-year composition teacher, as a student who attended many different schools throughout my life, as a prior pre-school teacher, and as a person who is committed to social justice and curious about the impact one person can have. I begin my first chapter by discussing some relevant terms: critical and functional literacy and learner centered teaching. I also will give a brief review of ways that the field of composition has been involved in social justice. In the second chapter, I will describe the Unit I used with my class, which centered around language and power. The third chapter will discuss the methods and results of the study I conducted and what I have learned through this project.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

Critical Literacy and Language and Power

The term “critical literacy” has been used differently by different scholars (Green 7). For the purposes of my project, I use this term to mean questioning of ideologies that sometimes appear hidden or natural because they are treated as normal by the majority of culture, and specifically I am applying the term “critical literacy” to the language that is accepted in the classroom and what the treatment of that language can teach us about culture. To apply critical literacy towards language challenges the idea that words on a page have a single meaning, or that they exist in a vacuum. Rather, it promotes the idea that language and literacy are influenced and created by cultural forces. Literacy scholar, Pam Green defines critical literacy as an, “active, challenging approach to literacy” (10). As Green states, reading critically or writing critically means actively striving towards awareness of the ideology that is behind language, rather than simply reading with the goal of absorbing ideas that are laden with belief systems. Knoblauch and Brannon argue that critical literacy, “entails an understanding of the relationships between language and power together with a practical knowledge of how to use language for self-realization, social critique, and cultural transformation” (152). This means that critical literacy does not simply stop with reading for comprehension, but also incorporates knowledge of how to use language to express personal beliefs and to critique and affect parts of culture.

It is important to push past reading with the goal of absorbing knowledge, but it is important for students to develop functional literacy as well. Functional literacy refers to

the basic skills deemed necessary by institutions of power (for example, schools) in order to read, write, and communicate. Students need functional skills in literacy to succeed, and to have a voice in our society, but literacy can go deeper with the inclusion of questioning; functional and critical literacy can work together. In my classroom, I work with students on developing their academic discourse, but simultaneously, I ask them to question Standard English as the language schools teach and expect students to speak in and write. While working on functional literacy skills, we are also working on critical literacy. Linda Christensen, who writes about her practices as an educator who works for social justice, includes both functional skills and critical literacy with her students as well:

Now that I'm working on developing a classroom that focuses on justice as well as skills, we continue to look at our lives and we still respond on both the technical and the human level to each other's writing. But we also study those essays, stories, and poems as a text to get at the social roots of our feelings of alienation and inadequacy, as well as our possibility for joy and resistance (*Reading, Writing and Rising Up* 59).

Christensen shows it is possible to practice the technical skills of writing and functional literacy, while also looking at the social aspects in the writing and reading and questioning those, practicing critical literacy.

In a literate society, reading and writing are essential tools for a citizen to have a voice, but stopping there is not enough. Having a voice without considering the effect that voice has, or reading without considering the influence of those words on culture, sells students short of the full potential of literacy. Rich literacy experiences allow someone to read, to write and to consider multiple viewpoints, and the affects those viewpoints have on culture. To be critically literate is to read and write *and* question. The

questioning aspect is essential, especially in a democracy where there is potential to make a difference. Green argues that literacy, “can be seen as a double-edged sword in that it can be enlightening or liberating but also may be restrictive or dominating” (8). Without questioning as one reads and writes, literacy can become a tool used to indoctrinate people into the culture of power, with all its hierarchies and judgments. When teaching students to read and write, it is most just to teach them to examine and question as well.

Ira Shor, a professor of composition and rhetoric who writes about critical pedagogy, describes critical literacy:

Critical literacy . . . challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development. This kind of literacy – words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society – connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequality” (“What is Critical Literacy” 282).

As Shor describes, students plug themselves into a larger world when they practice critical literacy. When students seek to understand the meanings and histories behind the words on a page, they are working towards understanding the culture that they live in. For example, in my class, I wanted students to question why they and others are expected to speak in Standard English in the classroom. I hoped as they pondered this question, they might see that other cultures have been oppressed, that one culture has been dominant. Without questioning, if I simply expected them to speak and write in Standard English, the risk is that they may continue to see Standard English as the natural choice, rather than seeing that there is a history behind that choice, and by seeing that there is a history, that something doesn’t just happen for no reason, it is also possible to see that there are alternatives. Practicing critical literacy allows students to critique and think

about the culture, rather than simply being pawns of culture. When Shor says critical literacy promotes justice, it is because when a person thinks of herself as an active part of culture, she can potentially imagine new ways to make culture work, or as Shor says, “discover alternative paths for self and social development.”

Composition Studies Involvement in Social Justice

Something that surprised me as I learned more about the field of Composition Studies was that Composition Studies has a history of working towards social justice. Bruce Herzog plainly states, “Critical consciousness has been and continues to be a goal of the profession” (116). Charles Bazerman, in his Chair’s address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), discusses ways that writing has been, “associated with a vision of participatory democracy and communal knowledge” (575). He discusses how writing and reading help students establish voice, which is a step towards empowerment. Also, Bazerman argues that writing works to strengthen hegemony, “The dynamics of power through which literacy has been associated historically have in fact established roles for most people that make it easiest to submit to being inscribed by others into the book of life, accepting the places assigned” (576). Further, Bazerman explains how writing is a public proclamation of belief systems, saying, “Every piece of writing states in public that we believe, desire, represent, act and are willing to be held accountable” (576). Thus, by teaching writing to diverse populations, composition scholars can see themselves in the role of disrupting hegemony by giving voice to those who have not had voice. Bazerman says, “Our place as educators is to assist people learning to assert their place in this world” (576). Composition teachers

work with basic writers has “played a key role not only in providing opportunities for research on adult literacy but also in illuminating the politics of writing in terms of race, class, ethnicity, and other social structures that would have remained invisible in the mostly white, middle-class classrooms that have traditionally constituted the ‘mainstream’” (Mutnick 183). This was a thrilling discovery for me, to realize that I was part of a group effort to examine the ways that language and literacy influence culture, and the ways that culture has been influenced by language and literacy. I saw the ways that my own desires as an educator fit into the history of the field of composition.

I also found that not only do many composition scholars want to empower speakers through teaching them to write and helping them find a way to express their voice, they also do not want to further oppression through traditional teaching methods. Composition scholar, Patricia Bizzell argues that, “Composition studies has shown an affinity for Marxist-influenced critical education theory, particularly its rejection of oppressive pedagogical power” (“Classroom Authority” 848). Composition scholars have debated about not just content but methods, that aid in the purpose of giving students a voice and countering oppression.

Bizzell described three major ways which composition studies has worked to improve education through implementing social justice values (“Composition Studies”):

- 1) Teaching people to write enables them to be empowered by giving them a voice.
- 2) By choosing writing for the syllabus that look at social justice issues and by talking about how those issues are rhetorically presented.

3) Students are influenced by coming into contact with their teacher's values.

In my classroom, all three of the aspects that Bizzell mentioned were present. I helped students to work on their writing skills, had reading material on the syllabus that represented different cultures and social issues, and tried to be transparent about my values. In addition, I asked students think about language, about the power that words carry, and the histories and ideologies that language holds.

Content and Methods – A Synergistic Relationship

My teaching approach has two main parts; there is the content of the course - the readings, the assignments, the discussion questions - and there are also the methods that are a vehicle for the content. For example, some methods could be: lectures, discussions, asking for student feedback, allowing student choice in certain areas, listening to students, or promoting student questioning. These two parts, the content and the methods, work together synergistically (ideally). For example, when questioning whose voice is most listened to and respected in the institution (through content), it is vital for honest questioning to allow students to use their voices in an environment where they will be respected (methods).

I asked my students to question who has power in our society by looking at language. None of the students in my class were English majors. Though a few of them enjoyed creative writing, none of them professed their enjoyment for dwelling in thoughts of language. Some of them even said how much they disliked writing and reading. How could I spark their interest in a subject that they were required to take? How would they learn anything if they didn't care? This semester, I tried to use reading

material that they could relate to and understand, and I found relevant youtube videos to show in class. I tried to use methods that gave students experiences that would help them connect the content to their own lives. We had discussions. They worked in small groups. I gathered their feedback and tried to keep in mind their goals as well as mine as I constructed plans for each class. It seemed essential that I allowed students to speak freely when I was hoping for them to question why some people cannot speak freely in the classroom. I wanted them to see alternatives, and it seemed vital that I offered them a chance to experience the alternative in our classroom. I had to think carefully about the content of the course, and also the methods I used to present the content. If I was asking them to critique power structures, to recognize their involvement in the creation of culture, I wanted our classroom environment to reflect that. I tried to practice learner-centered teaching.

Learner Centered Teaching

Learner centered teaching, also referred to in literature as student-centered teaching, strives to adapt the content of the class to the learners in the classroom.

Learner-centered teaching is not a new idea. For example, Frances Campbell Berkeley wrote and edited a textbook for Composition Studies in 1910. In the preface, she explains:

The editor has particularly striven for a sequence in selections and exercises which should represent the normal, logical growth in comprehension and facility of the average Freshman or Sophomore. Under nearly every type of exercise, however, alternative “models” have been offered, in order to provide greater breadth of choice to students of varying tastes and capacities (Berkeley 378).

She later adds that “the ‘adapted subjects’ and the ‘suggestions’ are intended to be suggestive rather than definitive. Every class will have to have its subjects modified, or more closely adapted to local conditions” (Berkeley 385). You can see that Berkeley expected that each class would have different needs, and the instructor would be in tune to those and adapt the lessons to fit the class. It makes sense that even far back in history, teachers have been trying to make the materials they teach relevant to the students they are teaching

Debates around learner-centered teaching now often involve Freire, who coined the phrase, “the banking model” of education – referring to the model of education that sees students as blank receptacles who can be filled with information (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 72). Freire argues that teachers must take into account that all people bring their cultures and contexts with them when they learn. He argues that to teach effectively, it is important to consider and respect people’s prior experience and their learning goals.

Other terms could be used to describe similar goals as I have with using “learner centered teaching.” For instance, Knoblauch and Brannon say, “Liberatory education presumes that the teacher is less dictatorial (though not less assertive) than in traditional school, that the student is more active, that attention is differently focused, that the very purpose of the enterprise are newly conceived” (75). Other terms that researchers and theorists use are “Critical Teaching,” (Knoblauch and Brannon 75) “engaged pedagogy,” (hooks 13) and “critical-democratic pedagogy” (Shor 17). For my thesis, I will refer to this style of teaching as “learner centered teaching.”

Terry Doyle, a professor of reading, defines learner-centered teaching as “subjecting every teaching activity (method, assignment or assessment) to the test of a single question: ‘Given the context of my students, course and classroom, will this teaching action optimize my students’ opportunity to learn?’”(web). In order for a teacher to do this, he has to know his course goals and he has to know something about his students. In a college classroom, it is difficult to know a lot about each student, as the class convenes for only a few hours a week. An instructor can try to learn about his students, and adapt his teaching activities to work better for those learners. For example, through observation I found that this semester my students enjoy class discussions. This is different than last semester, where the students had more to say if they were placed into small groups. By realizing this, I can spend more time in large group discussions, optimizing the students’ potential for learning.

A key word in Doyle’s definition is “context.” In learner-centered teaching, each classroom has a different context – different goals, different students who come in to the classroom with previous knowledge, different outside factors (access to technology, ability to move desks around, time of day, etc.), and different institutional standards to meet. Because the context of every class is different, the steps a teacher takes to “optimize . . .students’ opportunity to learn” will be different in every class also.

Why Learner Centered Teaching for Goals of Critical Literacy

It is one of my goals that students question what they may have perceived as natural or normal. If I were to tell the student what to think, it would work against my goal. Instead, I hope that asking students to think, to question, to ponder problems, works

with my goal of students practicing critical literacy, of students questioning Standard English as the institutionally supported language. Also, by engaging students, by finding material that is relevant to their lives and by welcoming their unique perspectives and trying to work from students' understandings, I hope to reach more students. Were I to teach in the "banking model" or in a more dictatorial model, it would be difficult to even get to know students, and without knowing them, I would not know what materials fit with their understandings. By knowing students, I can be flexible in my teaching methods, trying to use what it seems students are most receptive to, like small or large discussions for instance. By giving students some voice in their education, a place in the classroom, I am also modeling that their voices matter. Because I want them to question why some people's cultures are less valued, and I want them to think of alternative possibilities to this dilemma, it is important that I model value for the individual students in my classroom through my teaching practices.

I want students to use their authentic voices and bring their experiences to the classroom in hopes that they will connect the issues we talk about to their own lives; I also hope that if students experience some level of freedom of expression in the classroom, they will see the value in having multiple home cultures in the classroom. However, this doesn't mean that I don't also have expectations for students. Lilia I. Bartolomé, a scholar who researches critical pedagogy, writes:

Creating environments that incorporate student language and life experiences in no way negates teachers' responsibility for providing students with particular academic content knowledge and skills. It is important not to link teacher respect and use of students' knowledge and language bases with a *laissez-faire* attitude toward teaching. It is equally

necessary not to confuse academic rigor with rigidity that stifles and silences students (346).

Respecting diverse student voices does not mean ignoring academic discourse requirements that students will need to know to be successful in college. In this unit, I respected students' voices, and encouraged them to bring their own experiences to the classroom, but I also expected them (and worked with them on how) to write papers in Standard English, in MLA format. Through this unit, I questioned with students why academic discourse is important, and we discussed ways it is possible to remain respectful of alternative discourses, while also learning academic discourse. By doing this, I blended content and methods. I also worked towards students' development of functional literacy skills while promoting critical literacy.

Learner Centered Teaching in a Required Course

Montana State University requires all students to take Writing 101 (unless they test out) in order to graduate. This poses additional problems for teaching. Many students who enter the course already dislike or lack interest in the subject of writing, which impacts their attitude towards learning, and their openness to trying new ideas. For example, this semester when I asked students what they hoped to gain from the course, some of them wrote:

“Nothing else scares me but reading and writing because I have to dedicate time and hard effort to do something someone else enjoys.”

“I never really was a free thinker in my writings. I'd just answer the question

often going in circles just to make it long enough in order to get a passable grade. I truly never cared.”

“I despise reading and writing.”

This is my first year teaching this course, and only my second semester. In my first semester, I entered with high hopes for engaging my students. I worried that because the course was required, they wouldn't be interested, but I hoped that by bringing in things like youtube videos on relevant topics, relating what we were learning to their lives, and explaining how it could benefit them in the future, that they would be more engaged. I tried to involve them in decisions about the class as much as I could, so that they would feel that they had more control over their own learning. Some students tried and some worked very hard and felt they learned. However, I felt disappointed at the apathy and unwillingness of other students to put in effort. Some had thrown in the towel before the first day. Some students wished I would lecture instead of asking questions and having discussion. However, that was only one class, one semester, I told myself, and I entered the second semester hopeful that this group of students might want to engage.

Teaching a required course poses an enormous challenge to learner-centered teaching, as the structure of the course sends a message to students before they even enter the classroom – someone else is telling them what they need to learn, not based on their future interests or past experience, but often based on their test taking skills. However, that is beyond my control as the teacher, so the best I can do is to begin using learner-centered methods when they enter my class. Though I cannot change that they are required to take the course, I can at least allow them to share in some decisions once they

enter my classroom, and try to make the course as relevant to their lives as possible. Of course, learner-centered teaching does not guarantee student learning, but it recognizes that the student plays an enormous role in their own learning. If the student doesn't want to learn or doesn't try to learn, she probably will not, even if the teacher strives to adapt the lesson to the student.

A Square Peg and a Round Hole

It is hard to demonstrate value for students' desire to learn in a system that is not set up for this style of teaching or learning. Ira Shor describes the difficulty of leading what he describes as a democratic classroom in a university. Practices as common as creating the full course syllabus before ever meeting the students who will be in a class become suspect when trying to teach in a learner-centered fashion:

Under these circumstances, a kind of epistemic illusion is delivered by the traditional syllabus: culture is presented as nature. That is, what has been socially and historically constructed by a specific culture becomes presented to students as undebatable and unchangeable, always there, timeless (*When Students Have Power* 11).

Students and teachers grow conditioned to believe that education means one thing – the teacher tells the students what to know, the students learn it, end of story. Shor is describing how everything about his campus re-iterates that story. It is such common practice that it goes unquestioned and is seen as natural. It sets the purpose of an education as transmitting content knowledge rather than promoting questioning, engaging learners, or fulfilling a student's desire to grapple with complex ideas and create meaning.

It can be challenging to teach in a style that is uncommon. First, as Shor mentioned, there is the way that the institution is often set up to naturalize certain methods – for instance, in the classroom where I teach, the chairs are in rows facing a podium at the front of the room. I prefer a circle. When I leave, I am supposed to put the desks back into rows. Who decided rows were best? Besides the challenge of working against deeply embedded institutional expectations or standards, a teacher who uses a different method may also face frustration from students. For years, many students have been taught with certain methods – the teacher as expert, the chairs in rows facing the expert, memorizing information to repeat on a test. And those methods become what students expect. They equate those common methods with schooling, and when they encounter something different they may feel uncertain or frustrated.

The idea of learner centered teaching in which the teacher expects the students to engage, rather than simply giving them information, is often theorized about but can still feel radical, as bell hooks describes. bell hooks describes how teachers may feel as if they are rebelling against deep seated conventions when they change the focus of education from simply planning to transmit knowledge to students into instead adapting the class by working collaboratively towards learning goals in a way that is beneficial and engaging for a particular group of learners. “To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress” (7). Teaching with these goals also disrupts the authoritarian model of learning and puts some responsibility into the students’ own hands. This method also liberates the teacher

from the authoritarian role. She becomes a facilitator of learning, a participant in the generation of new knowledge in her classroom, rather than the sole giver-of-content.

Though it can be easier to go along with the institutional standards – keeping desks in rows, lecturing, designing a full course syllabus where all the materials are chosen and set - and to meet students' expectations of what learning is, by telling them what they will learn rather than expecting them to do the hard work of engaging with the course content - the potential benefits of learner-centered teaching outweigh the challenges. Teaching this way has the potential to teach respect, at least to model it. To respect individual's different backgrounds, learning styles and learning needs takes a step towards an education that serves more types of people, making it a more socially just education.

hooks describes her experience as a young black woman in the school system, “To fulfill [the mission of uplifting the race through education], my teachers made sure they ‘knew’ us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family” (3). hooks' teachers knew her and they used that knowledge to make her education applicable to her life. I attended high school in a small town where the teachers ‘knew’ me too – they knew everyone and their families, their economic status and where they worshipped. However, it was too often used as a sorting method rather than as a way to connect with students on an individual basis, to model respect for difference, or to create a curriculum that applied to the students' lives. It is important to add to bell hooks' statement that along with knowing

students, teachers must treat all kinds of different students with respect in order to foster a collaborative, positive learning environment.

A Brief Look at Issues of Authority and Objectives in Learner-Centered Teaching

Teaching with a learner-centered philosophy doesn't mean the teacher completely relinquishes control over the classroom. Ken Macrorie, speaking of his classroom, says, "Freedom as a religion, as a way of life, I have never seen work . . . I want some habit, some regimen, some discipline to what I do" (179). He speaks of the balance between allowing the students to have freedom and maintaining authority. As Freire describes "authority is necessary to the educational process as well as necessary to the freedom of the students and my own. The teacher is absolutely necessary. What is bad, what is not necessary, is authoritarianism, but not authority" (*We Make the Road* 181). This path is not simple. Determining when to impose a rule, for instance, an attendance policy, beckons a teacher to question how much freedom she should allow her students.

Lazere, who worked in a school with wealthy, right-wing, Christian students, said that learner-centered teaching methods worked against what he wanted, by only further empowering his students to voice their conservative beliefs. He argues, "We need to demonstrate the body of our knowledge on the subjects at hand, perhaps even if that means a reversion toward the lecture and "banking" modes of teaching" (Lazere 77). Lazere talks about learner-centered teaching in one way, where the teacher has no authority. It is not so black and white, however. Lilia I. Bartolomé writes that when allowing students' lives into the classroom and showing respect for their unique voice, a

teacher is still in charge. “The teacher is the authority, with all the resulting responsibilities that entails; however, it is not necessary for the teacher to become authoritarian in order to challenge students intellectually” (Bartolomé 346). As Bartolomé explains, because a teacher allows students’ experiences and voices in the classroom, does not mean that he has to let go of his authority and allow the students to have complete control over the curriculum. Learner-centered teaching does not mean that there will be no instructional goals, structure or classroom authority.

Even when a teacher strives for a balance of freedom for her students and authority as a teacher, she still has specific learning goals for her class to achieve. She recognizes that there are many ways to achieve those goals – there are many paths that lead to the same place. Which methods, materials and content she chooses to use to meet those goals will depend on the particular group of students’ needs, background knowledge and learning styles. Myles Horton says:

I insist on starting where people are. That’s the only place they could start. I can start somewhere else. *I* can start where *I* am, but they’ve got to start where *they* are. But then if you don’t have some vision of what ought to be or what they can become, then you have no way of contributing anything to the process (*We Make the Road* 99,100).

He is describing that as a teacher he has a vision, or a learning goal, that he wants his students to work towards. For example, I had a vision that my students would work towards recognizing the ways that Standard English is institutionally supported, at the detriment of other dialects. I hoped they would connect language to culture and think about why one group’s dialect is more valued institutionally. However, rather than simply lecturing them on this concept, I presented them with different scenarios, stories, videos, role playing activities and chances to talk and write where they could form conclusions.

Horton's idea is echoed by Freire, "As progressive teachers and educators, we have first to get the knowledge about how the people know. . . Then secondly we have to invent with the people the ways for them to go beyond their state of thinking" (*We Make the Road* 98). Freire doesn't just ask students what they want to know and teach them that. He begins by finding out what they *already* know and from there he determines what will work best to aid them in their acquisition of new ideas and concepts. This concept requires a teacher to be flexible. For instance, I had my unit on language and power designed before I met the students who would be in my course. It takes time to gather relevant reading materials, videos, to design activities, and to think of stimulating discussion questions. In this way, I felt prepared to present rich and relevant material to my students. However, I had to do this before I knew what they already knew. As the class developed, there were some activities that I scrapped, although they had taken a lot of preparation, because the students seemed to grasp the concept I was working towards more quickly than I anticipated, or they showed a lack of interest in the method I used to convey the materials. This meant re-thinking my methods sometimes. Also, I found sometimes that they needed more help with other areas, which meant that I had to add more materials and make more lessons – I scrambled between classes to find the materials I wanted. This challenge of working with a group of students who will be different every time is part of what draws me to teaching – it is constantly lively; though tiring at times, it is also always thought provoking.

Learner-centered education requires a lot of a teacher. It means the teacher is constantly adapting curriculum to meet the needs of different students and classes. It can

be particularly difficult to keep the learning goals in mind and determine differing ways to meet those goals. Freire describes this challenge:

This also is the question, how to make this walk with people starting from more or less naïve understanding of reality. Starting from people's experiences, and not from our understanding of the world, does not mean that we don't want the people to come with us in order to go beyond us afterward. This movement for me is one of the many important roles of a progressive educator, and it is not always so easy" (*We Make the Road* 158).

Here, Freire says that a teacher can adapt the curriculum to meet the students where they begin from, but the teacher must also be working towards the desired learning goals. This requires much consideration, adaptability and skill from the teacher. This relates to the idea of providing students with experiences that allow them to come to their own conclusions rather than simply telling them what to think. That begins where they are, rather than starting from where the teacher is.

The challenge is when a student comes to a conclusion that I really disagree with. This tests my resolve to allow students to form their own beliefs and values. As long as students are respectful of others, by which I mean they do not insult others or make degrading comments, I have not told them their opinion is wrong or incorrect. I did encounter an instance where a student's opinions were disrespectful, and in that case, I decided to tell him that he needed to re-write his paper. These kind of challenges push teachers to consider what they mean when they hope for their students to construct their own knowledge, or when they hope for their students to experience the freedom of expression. And these challenges push at a teacher's beliefs about exerting authority – I exerted my authority by telling that student I would not accept his paper for credit,

bordering on authoritarian, and yet sticking to the class rules that students helped create – by not allowing anyone in the class to speak disrespectfully towards others.

Are Other People Wondering How to Influence Students to Care About Social Justice?

In an honest examination of my hopes, I desire that my students will come to similar conclusions as my own if I present them with learning opportunities for them to work through. I wanted to know how many students would be influenced if I used learning centered teaching practices combined with relevant content. Other researchers have asked the same kind of question that I ask now with my class. They wanted to know if certain methods, class styles, or content would impact students' feelings about social justice issues.

Enberg and Mayhew examined the outcomes of first-year “success courses” on students learning democratic values, multi-cultural awareness and an increased commitment to social justice. They surveyed students at week one and week fourteen in three courses – a first-year success course, a communication course, and an engineering course. The latter two courses were used as a control for the success course. They invited all students enrolled in those courses to participate. Engberg and Mayhew report that the success courses were more discussion based, incorporated group activities, had smaller class sizes and emphasized diversity awareness and social justice principles. They found that students in the success courses had scored higher on the post-surveys, showing they had a significant change in awareness about multi-culturalism, social justice and increased democratic values. Comparatively, the communications and engineering

students showed markedly less difference from their pre-survey to the post-survey.

Engberg and Mayhew's study shows that first-year success courses have the potential to teach students skills they may not receive in other courses. However, their study was just a survey and it leaves much of the "how" un-answered. Did students in the success course change their attitudes due to the curriculum, the teaching methods, the class size? Further qualitative studies would be needed to determine what created the effective outcomes that Engberg and Mayhew found.

In another example, Nagda et. al. conducted a quantitative study of a course that focused on "intergroup relations and social conflicts" to determine whether using engaged, active teaching methods along with certain course content would impact student's beliefs and habits. They wondered if students would increase their "active thinking and understanding of socio-historical causation as well as student's action strategies that promote more tolerance" (1). They used a pre and post test to measure the student's learning and growth from the course. They had a sample size of 203 students and all but 3% completed the survey. They wanted to know how different pedagogies and learning methods impacted student's learning about social justice and democracy. They found that the course overall did not change student's active thinking or perspective taking skills. Their study did show that the course content and engagement in the material had a direct effect. They say, "The results indicate that active forms of learning in which students actually practice what they are learning are especially influential in fostering understanding of action in solving intergroup conflicts" (187). Nagda et. al. felt that

future qualitative studies would be beneficial, by giving a more in-depth perspective on why some methods were or are more effective than others.

Matthew Mayhew and Sonia Fernandez conducted a test to determine how different pedagogical practices impacted student's gain in social justice learning. They polled the students in five different courses that emphasized social justice. They conducted the survey at the end of the classes, asking students to assess their gains in knowledge across a spectrum of social justice ideals using a five point scale. For example, students assessed whether they, "Learned to think critically about my role in society" and "Gained understanding of my own forms of prejudice, expressions of discrimination" (Mayhew 69). They found that students in classrooms where there was exposure to, "course content dealing with systematic oppression, the societal structures and inequalities that cause and sustain it, and how individuals perpetuate and/or discourage its reproduction" had a higher rate of achieving the desired social justice outcomes. Also, they found that greater social justice learning took place in classrooms where students were encouraged to analyze the individual's role in societal oppression and inequality (Mayhew 74). Classes that included pedagogical practices where there was a chance to reflect and also opportunities for discussions of diversity also contributed to students gaining greater social justice outcomes. Mayhew and Fernandez's study points to the need to use pedagogical approaches that include time for reflection, discussion, and making issues relevant to individuals to help them recognize their part in societal oppression.

The research I did with my class asked similar questions – How did students’ attitudes or understandings towards linguistic diversity change throughout the course of the unit? How did students demonstrate their understanding? What might this tell me about the impact of the course? I looked at one class, one semester and as one teacher researcher– I would not claim to be objective. What I have to offer is the story of what worked in my classroom and what didn’t and my analysis of the results I found.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE LANGUAGE AND POWER UNIT

In this unit, I wanted my students to examine and question the treatment of “Standard English” as the language of power and to think about why Standard English is the form of English that is institutionally supported. In other words, I wanted my students to develop and use critical literacy skills when thinking, writing and talking about language and power. I broke that main goal down into more concrete specific goals.

As a result of the unit, I hoped that students would:

- understand whose dialect and language is taught and rewarded in institutions
- question why Standard English is the form of English that is institutionally supported
- realize that the choice of whose dialect/language is used in a classroom is based on who has power in that culture
- consider/question who makes rules in our society, who has power – also who does not make rules, and who does not have power
- think of alternative ways non-standard English dialects can be handled in the classroom and in culture

To work towards those goals the students participated in a variety of activities that explored how language is related to power. Students read short stories and wrote response papers which they posted on a wiki. In class students discussed the stories, watched video clips that supplemented the reading, examined quotes from scholars, and listened to short lectures. They also considered dilemmas surrounding language and power as they participated in adult learning centers. The adult learning centers allowed

students choices of role playing, discussions, problem solving scenarios, and watching and responding to relevant video clips. By providing students with opportunities to read, write, watch videos, discuss and role-play, I hoped to meet the needs of a variety of learners in the classroom. The unit culminated in an assignment where students created a graphic narrative, using the software “ComicLife,” to educate other people about language and power in the classroom.

Before beginning the language and power unit, students had just completed a literacy narrative, where their own literacy had been the subject of a paper. In the four week literacy narrative unit, students explored what literacy meant to them, and in their own words, they wrote a paper where they analyzed their past and present literacy experiences. Aspects of the literacy narrative unit worked towards concepts that were also relevant in the language and power unit, particularly the readings. To prepare for the literacy narrative, they had read works by other authors that spoke of challenges and rewards of literacy – for example, “Literacy Behind Bars,” by Malcolm X, “Mother Tongue,” by Amy Tan and “Se Habla Espanol,” by Tanya Barrientos. These short stories brought up issues of oppression in society, and touched on code-switching, on discourse, and on discrimination based on the way someone speaks, while also talking about each author’s unique relationship or path to literacy. We discussed ways that literacy liberated people in our society – for example, Malcolm X wrote about finally learning to read and write while in prison, and says, “I had never been so truly free in all my life” (580). We also discussed discrimination people faced when they did not speak Standard English, like Tan’s mother in “Mother Tongue.” Tan says, “I’ve been giving more thought to the

kind of English my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as ‘broken’ or ‘fractured’ English. But I wince when I say that” (556). In class we talked about the different roads people take to become literate. Some students, in class discussions and in their responses to the readings related these issues to their own lives. Students responded to the readings in one page “thought pieces” where the requirement was that they talk about the readings, and their thoughts, analysis or reactions to them. Of the 22 student thought pieces, 13 (59%) included parts where students related the stories to their own lives. Here are some examples:

My father, speaks fluently in the Northern Cheyenne language, but he also speaks English as well, but not as broken as Tan’s mother’s English. Still, I can relate to Amy Tan by having a parent who sometimes struggles with speaking.

Tan’s piece “Mother Tongue,” made me think about the way different groups of people influence the language we use at different times. The lingo I use around my friends is much different than the language I use when around my family.

Even though I have been studying English for a couple of years, Barriento’s story spoke to me more personally because I often find myself struggling in expressing my thoughts with the English language because of my Spanish structure.

Growing up on an Indian reservation I was influenced by the Native American culture and the way they talk. Living on the reservation with my friends we had a unique way of communicating with each other. If you weren’t brought up like my friends and I were, [it would] be quite tough to understand the denotation of the way we used our vocabulary. In the "Standards of English" we weren't very close to abiding by them.

When I read of Malcom X's story of how reading changed his life and how he was filled with motivation, I saw connections in his experiences with mine. He spent hours and hours studying dictionaries and learning amazing new things from books. I can say that is a great feeling because I have such an opportunity here at MSU.

In discussions students also related the stories to their lives. One student told us that her mother speaks only Spanish and her father speaks English. She told the class

about the challenges and rewards of growing up and speaking Spanglish. Another student told us about her grandmother's broken English. I encouraged students to relate the stories and ideas we talked about to their own experience. For students to make sense of the information and stories in class, it is important for them to integrate their prior knowledge with the new concepts they are working on.

The literacy narrative paved the way for the language and power unit. During the course of the four week unit on language and power, students participated in a range of activities, including reading, writing, small and large group discussions and learning centers. The unit culminated in a group project where students wrote a graphic narrative using the software "ComicLife," so students also spent time learning about that technology, about the graphic narrative genre and working in groups. I began the language and power unit four weeks into the course. By then the students had opportunities to get to know one another, to get into the rhythm of the course and the semester, and I had a chance to begin getting to know the students.

During the course of the language and power unit the students read four short stories and one poem in the first two weeks. They read, "And Then I Went to School" by Joe Suina, "The Monitor" by Wangari Muta Maathai, "A Piece of My Heart/Pedacito de mi Corazon" by Carmen Lomas Garza, the poem, "Bilingual Instructions" by Harryette Mullen, and "Obituary" by Lois-Ann Yamanaka. The short stories were from Linda Christensen's book, *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. Each story was written from the perspective of a person who had either been forced to give up their home language in school, or had been ridiculed for speaking their home language. In each story, the

character was being forced or told to learn Standard English. In the poem, “Bilingual Instructions,” Mullen writes about voters in California wanting Spanish instructions on recycling containers and waste receptacles, but not in schools and or on ballots. I chose these writings because they illustrated the hardships that some people face with their language, and they highlighted the domination of Standard English over a variety of other cultures’ languages or dialects.

I followed Christensen’s model by asking students to look for patterns in the stories. I asked them these questions: “Who has to change their language? Who doesn’t?” (*Teaching for Joy and Justice* 228). I also asked, “Who is deciding which language or dialect is allowed in the classroom?” I hoped students would see the pattern of domination of Standard English, and begin to question why it is the language or dialect that is always used. Students responded to the readings in one page thought pieces. They posted their thought piece to our course wiki, which everyone in the class had access to. I wanted their pieces to be public, or open to the class, as we didn’t always have time in class to discuss their responses. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), a national association of writing professionals who are interested in developing and directing writing programs, state in their “Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” that students should “Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts” (WPA Outcomes), which the wiki allows students to do.

When we discussed the stories in class I brought in supplemental materials, such as youtube videos of the authors speaking or excerpts from scholars who write about issues

of language in the classroom to add a deeper dimension to the discussions. Lisa Delpit, a literacy scholar, writes about the ‘culture of power’ in the classroom. She lists five rules of power:

1. Issues of power are enacted in the classroom
2. There are codes or rules for participating in that power; that is, there is a “culture of power”
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power
4. If you are not already a participant of the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
5. Those with power are frequently least aware of - or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence” (“The Silenced Dialogue” 382).

I asked my students to apply Delpit’s rules to the story they had read, “And Then I Went to School” by Joe Suina, about a Native American boy who had been sent to a boarding school where he was forced to speak English and was punished when he showed signs of his home culture in the classroom. Many of the students saw how the rules applied to the stories. For example, students said, “The culture of power in the classroom is that of the white person” and “Success is measured by how well you conform to the culture of power.” Another student said that rule number 4 is “a blueprint for success.” He explained himself, saying, “The idea of that rule is that if you just follow it, you will be successful.”

For another class discussion, I read the students a quote from “Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis” by John Trimbur:

My argument is that middle-class anxieties about loss of status and downward mobility have repeatedly been displaced and refigured in the realm of language practices and literacy education. For the middle class, literacy appears to go into crisis precisely because of the faith they have

invested in schooled literacy as the surest means of upward mobility and individual success” (280).

I chose to use this quote because Trimbur makes an argument that clearly says the language that is allowed and taught in the classroom is related to who has power in the society. I wanted to hear students’ thoughts on this idea. I introduced the quote by explaining that in this piece, Trimbur argues that middle-class people don’t want to allow other languages or dialects in the classroom. Trimbur claims that the middle class are worried they will lose their place in society if other dialects are allowed in the classroom because to get many jobs and succeed in academia you have to speak Standard English, and this helps the middle class maintain their place. Those who don’t speak that form of English remain in their place.

Students actively participated in the discussion by making sense of the quote and then debating with one another and arguing their points. The discussion had moved towards how to educate students who don’t speak Standard English in American schools. As we neared the end of class, one student exclaimed, “What we’re talking about right now is just like the movie ‘Freedom Writers.’ I mean, we are talking about that movie!” Several students nodded in agreement. When I told them that I hadn’t seen the movie, they said, “Now you have homework for the weekend. You *have* to watch it! It is just like what we’re talking about!” The students’ excitement was contagious, reminding me again why I enjoy teaching.

Learning Centers

One class day of the unit was dedicated to learning centers. Learning centers are different areas, clustered throughout the room, each with their own activity, which students can move through independently. I borrowed the concept from early childhood educators. Learning centers are common practice in early childhood, although even in that field they are not common in adult education, but rather are typically used for young children. In an article that my mother and her colleague wrote about using learning centers in early childhood higher education settings, they found that students were more motivated and on task when using learning centers because they had the ability to choose activities that were relevant to them. More in depth learning resulted because students were able to work at their own pace. Students also displayed more ownership for their own learning and expressed appreciation for the experience of seeking answers to their own questions (Maloney and Bullard, J.).

Before returning for my Masters in English, I had been a pre-school and infant/toddler teacher, so the idea of learning centers was familiar to me. I like learning centers because they allow the teacher to truly step into the role of facilitator, and they give the students some control over their learning experience. I have beliefs about language and power in the classroom, but I want students to arrive at these ideas on their own. How do I create experiences and present ideas that allowed me to come to my beliefs without dominating the classroom? Learning centers are one way to accomplish this. They allow the teacher to set up environments where students can have experiences, and encounter ideas, while giving the students some control.

Learning centers put the teacher directly into the role of facilitator of experiences. For the teacher, it requires a lot of work to develop the learning centers and the different activities, but on the day or days that the students are using the centers, the teacher can simply observe, or can be available for questions or help. Learning centers give students some choice, while also giving the teacher control over the activities available. Because there are multiple centers, it allows the teacher to meet the needs of many students in one day, and to cover whichever concepts she feels her students need most. For example, in the previous unit, where students were preparing to write their literacy reflections, we were at a stage where I wanted them to focus on the writing task at hand, so most of the centers involved different pre-writing tasks, or writing activities. However, if I felt students needed more help understanding the idea of literacy, I could have included a center or two that worked on that.

Learning centers put the philosophy of learner-centered teaching into action, allowing students choice and freedom in their education. Students move freely from center to center, choosing which activities to participate in, whether to work individually or in a small group, and how much time to spend on each activity. This meets individual student's needs. For instance, students can move at their own pace, so if they need to spend more time working on a concept, if they are a slow writer, or a fast writer, their needs are equally met. Or, for example, students can choose activities that are interesting to them. As students make choices between learning centers they also become more aware of their own style of learning. This can help them develop meta-cognition about

their learning style. I feel comfortable giving students this type of choice because each center is designed to meet learning goals for the course.

Description of Language and Power Learning Centers

At the point in the unit when I used the learning centers, I wanted to work towards students' deeper understanding of the learning goals. For the language and power unit, I designed four centers. To prepare, I group the desks in to the appropriate arrangement, and post the necessary instructions and lay out the necessary materials at each center. At the beginning of class, I explain each center to the whole class and explain that they can choose which centers they will participate in. It is possible to make certain centers mandatory and others optional, and to set time limits, but I wanted to give students the choice of any of the centers, and to allow them to take the time that they needed at each.

Center 1: "Play a Role in Your Learning"

In this center, students formed small group of four and each drew a card with a character description. They had to act out a short scenario as that character. The setting was in Quebec, Canada. Character 1 was a transfer student from the United States who didn't speak any French, but got lost in the French speaking section of Quebec and needed directions back to campus. Character 2 spoke English, but looked down upon people who did not speak French and felt English was encroaching on the culture. Character 3 was a tourist from France who did not speak English. Character 4 is a French Canadian who speaks a little English and likes to be helpful. The four characters work together (or don't) to help (or not help) the American student get back to campus. After

the students acted out the scenario, I asked them to write a short response about their experience.

I designed this center with several goals in mind. I wanted to meet the needs of students who learned well through doing, rather than through reading or writing. This gave them the chance to be work on class concepts in an active situation. Also, students had read stories about people who were treated unfairly or judged harshly based on their language or dialect. I worried that students in my class who spoke English all their lives and lived in English speaking communities might not empathize with the characters in the story, or understand. I wanted to create a situation where English became the language that was under scrutiny, in order to show students how it could feel. I wanted students to experience the discomfort of being judged for their language. I hoped that this experience would prompt students to feel empathy for people who were judged for their language and to reflect on what hurt or helped the situation in the role play.

Here are a few student responses from the center, taken from three different groups:

It was a little embarrassing trying to ask for directions when I couldn't really understand the others. I felt very out of place and got flustered when I was rejected by Liz.

I would not like to be in this person's shoes because you have a language barrier and it makes you feel completely foreign.

I think when you go to another country, it is your responsibility to learn some basic language for that country.

For the one American who transferred to Canada, communicating with French speaking people is hard.

This activity challenged some students. They did not want to behave rudely to their classmates. One group of four young women chose to work co-operatively and helpfully with one another, using hand gestures and speaking slowly to help the American student. The student who had the character that looked down on English speakers was quiet and said nothing, but looked uncomfortable. Although this wasn't what I envisioned the activity looking like, I still felt this group learned, and I found it interesting that they only wanted to help one another.

Some of the young women in that group wrote:

Using hand gestures seemed to help our group. Also we tried to help each other out with each part.

I had to talk super slow so that people who didn't know the language could understand. I also used signs so they could understand.

The women in this group avoided the discomfort of being in a situation where they were being discriminated against, or were supposed to discriminate, by finding a way to help one another despite the language barriers.

Center 2: "Solve a Scenario"

In this center, students could choose one of three scenarios to solve. Originally, I had planned for this center to be an individual center where students researched ideas on websites I had set up. I could not access enough laptops to make this happen, so I adapted my plan. I told students to work in groups of 2-4 and brainstorm ideas about how to solve one of the scenarios. These are the three scenarios students could choose from:

Scenario 1 – You are a High School Teacher in a small town in America. A new student comes to your class who recently immigrated with his family from Mexico. He hardly speaks any English. The rest of the class is writing a research paper on a topic of their choice. What do you do?

Scenario 2 – You just started a new job working as a cook at a local restaurant in Bozeman. Everyone else who works in the kitchen is white. You are African American. You are from rural Mississippi and you speak in Black English, or Ebonics. Some of your co-workers make fun of your way of talking and your boss joins in with them. Some of them treat you as if you aren't as smart as they are. What do you do?

Scenario 3 – You are the parent of a seven year old in Bozeman, MT. One day he tells you that a kid in his class is dumb and when you ask why, he tells you that that kid doesn't know how to talk. With more questioning, you figure out your son is talking about the boy who just moved to the school from rural North Carolina. His family has a heavy southern accent, and uses a lot of expressions that are specific to that region. When you drop your son off at school the next day, you observe the teacher telling that student that if he doesn't learn to speak in proper English, he will never get anywhere in life. What do you do?

I wanted students to work towards the course goal of “think[ing] of alternative ways non-standard English dialects can be handled in the classroom and in culture.” I tried to create situations that placed students in an active role as problem solvers. The scenarios placed them as either a teacher with a choice about how to treat a student, a victim of discrimination, or an observer of discrimination. Interestingly, no students chose to solve the scenario 2, where they would be a victim of discrimination.

11 of the 15 students who used this center chose to solve scenario 1. Students described solving the problem in the following ways:

Get the student some kind of resource that will assist the student in writing his paper. Such as bringing a Spanish teacher down and walking the student through the instructions. If I were the teacher, obviously there would be some exceptions for this student, for the language barrier in education is a big deal and should never be taken lightly.

Find someone or something to help with the language barrier . . . I might have the student research in his own language.

Have a case manager or a Spanish teacher help out the student for awhile. Most small schools like getting new students. For example, foreign exchange students. So some kids would be willing to help and get to know him.

I would make sure he understands the assignments. Give him more time for the assignment. Help him organize his research and guide through assignment.

In solving this scenario, all the students wanted to make sure the student understood the assignment and received extra help. Some students were willing to make special exceptions, and some suggested connecting the student with someone who could help him with the language barrier. Students worked towards thinking of alternative ways a student could be treated who does not speak Standard English (alternative to the stories we read, where students who spoke other dialects or languages were treated poorly or ridiculed).

4 of the 15 students chose to solve Scenario 3. Some of their ideas are as follows:

I'd tell my son that he was mistaken and explain why his classmate talks like that. I would then proceed to go and discuss with the teacher how wrong they were to tell this new student something so harsh, and then I would go talk to the principal.

I'd probably deal with my child first and tell him that there are many different ways to speak and just because someone doesn't talk the same way doesn't mean they're dumb. I would then strongly encourage my child to befriend the new kid. Then I'd do some discussing with the rude teacher and the principal.

In this scenario, students were also thinking of alternative solutions for how to treat someone who does not speak Standard English. All four responses were similar. They felt the teacher was wrong and should be corrected, and that the child from North Carolina should be treated better.

Center 3: “Interesting Conversations”

In this center, students discussed one or more of the stories they read over the course of the unit in groups of 2-3. I had discussion questions available at the center. In class, we did not have time to discuss all the stories that students read for this unit, although they had all written responses for each story. Discussions are an important way for students to share ideas, build on one another’s ideas or encounter viewpoints that challenge their thinking. As we did not always have time for discussions in class, this allowed them to discuss the stories in small groups with guided questions that related to course goals.

I observed students discussing the stories, although I also noticed that they seemed to have a challenging time staying on topic. I realized that in large group discussions I am the facilitator and most students probably don’t have any practice with facilitating discussions. I told the groups to appoint one person to keep the conversation going, and if they began to stray from the topic, it would be that person’s job to bring them back to the discussion about the stories. In small group work, I think a little bit of small talk is appropriate, as it builds community and helps students feel comfortable with one another, but I wanted the small talk to be only a small part. Once someone had the task of keeping the group discussion rolling, it seemed to go better. Were I to include this center again, I would assign roles to the discussion members.

Center 4: “Marvelous Movies”

In this center, students watched three video clips and wrote responses to questions about each video, which I posted in the center. I hoped to capture the attention of students

who learn well visually by using videos that centered around our course themes. The first video clip was “Urban Rez Magazine Release and Benefit Party,” a video clip documenting the celebration of the release of the magazine “Urban Rez” in Los Angeles. I wanted students to see ways that cultures celebrated their heritage, while also belonging to a modern society. In the video, students see Native Americans who live in Los Angeles participating in everything from traditional dances to showing off their graffiti art all at the same event. Several of the stories they read in class discussed Native cultures who had to give up their way of life to fit in to mainstream society. I asked them, “In what ways does this event help preserve and celebrate a culture, while also allowing for changes that people who belong to that culture may undergo?” I hoped for them to see positive ways that cultures blend together. In selecting videos and readings for this class, I felt it was important that some of those materials recognized Native American heritage, because in Montana we have a large Native American population, and also this assists in satisfying the constitutional mandate of Indian Education for All (“Indian Education”).

Students responded to the video in the following ways:

They realize they can be part of our world but keep their culture, and further teach their culture through videos and magazines they wrote.

I think this magazine helps the people of the culture heal and express themselves to people who are like them or people who want to learn about their culture.

The people who are in that specific culture are effected the most because the magazine helps them have a voice and share their thoughts, ideas and history.

The second video clip was an excerpt of an interview with the African writer and scholar, Ngugi wa Thiong’o. In this interview he talks about why African writers so often

write in English rather than in their native language, and he also expresses his hope that more young African writers should write in their native language. Ngugi talks explicitly about language and power as he discusses the way that his language was not allowed as a way to force his people to integrate into British culture. This was a common theme in the stories students read for class, and I wanted them to think about language being related to who has power in a society. One of the questions I asked them about this video was, “If you were an African writer, which language would you publish in? Why?”

Some of the responses to this video were as follows:

If I were an African writer I would probably write in English even though it isn't as personal, but it wouldn't get you in as much trouble and you still get your message across.

I would probably publish it in my native tongue if I was an African writer because it's something I would be able to understand and it would bring out my culture.

Most of the people who are going to read the book are going to be English speaking and reading people. Very little copies will be sold if .1% of the world population speaks this mother tongue. It's awesome and so 'I'm fighting the man' by using this language, but authors will sell no books.

The third video was “Gerard McClendon on Black English.” It is an interview of McClendon who is talking about his new book, *Ask or Aks*, a book that claims to teach African Americans “better English.” But also, McClendon talks about the reasons why he believes it is important for African Americans to learn to code-switch, and he describes how Black English is a valuable dialect too. I wanted students to watch this video to help them work towards several course goals, including the most basic – whose language is taught and rewarded in institutions (like schools). I also hoped that it could prompt them to think about ways that language is related to who has more power in a society, and that

they may consider learning to code-switch as an alternative to forcing students to give up their home culture. I had a longer list of questions for this video, including, “Do you agree with McClendon that African Americans should learn to code-switch? Why or why not?, McClendon’s guide claims it can teach African Americans ‘Better English.’ What do you think about that statement?”

Students responded to the clip on McClendon by saying:

I feel like McClendon is right that it’s an educator’s responsibility to correct grammar and pronunciation of ALL children. Otherwise they are doomed to fail in the employment world.

Gerrard has a point [about code switching]. I know when I am in a professional setting I wouldn’t say the things I say around my family and friends.”

I don’t believe it is essential for the black minority to be able to ‘code-switch.’ One can still be smart and succeed without speaking perfect dialect.

Learning from Learning Centers

The learning centers fused together my belief in learner centered teaching and in promoting critical literacy. They allowed students to have some choice, while allowing me to facilitate learning experiences, and as students engaged, I saw them exhibiting signs of critical literacy. I explain my results more thoroughly in Chapter 3. Before I move on, I want to mention another exciting thing about learning centers. I enjoy them very much, but I also found that students enjoyed them too. The first time that I used learning centers, in the literacy unit, I asked students to write about their experience. I said, “I observed you in the learning centers, and know how it looked to me, but how was it for you, as a student, to use learning centers?” Out of 18 responses, 16 wrote 100%

positive responses, describing why they liked the centers. The other 2 said they liked the centers overall, but offered suggestions on how they could be better. Besides discussing ways that they felt the centers helped them feel prepared for their literacy narrative, or that they were enjoyable, over half of the students mentioned that they liked that they got to know their classmates better, or enjoyed working with their classmates. Here is a sample of things students said:

I enjoyed the writing centers. I felt that they were very helpful in getting my mind going. They helped me think and be able to discuss other literacy narratives.

I that the learning centers were a fun and creative way to learn about our writing styles and literacy abilities. It is also nice hearing about others' literacy thoughts. I think it is a useful tool to use in the future.

I thought the learning centers were very helpful. They helped me become more prepared for my paper. I realized that writing is more than just writing. I have an actual process and I like that. I think it could help me in the future. I know what I want to write now and how I'm going to write it.

I really enjoyed the writing center these past two days because not only was I able to review my writing experiences, I also met more of my classmates.

After receiving an overwhelmingly positive response from students, and also watching them engage with the centers during class, I felt even more affirmed that this is a teaching tool I plan to continue developing.

It's Not All Bad News – What People Are Doing to Make a Difference

I devoted one day to what people were doing to make a difference. Most of the stories discussed scenarios where students were discriminated against or ridiculed for their way of speaking or their cultural background. Part of the students' final assignment

was to pose a potential solution, so I wanted students to have a few ideas and see what other people had done. I read them a story out of a Lisa Delpit article, “The Silenced Dialogue,” that described a teacher who taught her Athabaskan students Standard English in a creative way, while also honoring their home language (293). I showed them a blog by a man who went to First People (the term used for the Native people of Canada) communities and schools and helped students create puppet shows using their native language. On their website they say they are dedicated to, “Making community stopmotion animated movies in the Xaayadaa Kil (Haida) language for Xaaydaa Kil speakers everywhere” (Leslie, Kenneth). I also showed them a video of a group of inner-city teens who write and publish a newspaper. In that example, the teens develop the stories about their lives and experiences, but work closely with mentors to write the stories in Standard English (“Changing Lives”). In this example, the teens’ home cultures are valued and respected, while mentors also help them work towards learning Standard English. After each example, we had a brief discussion where I asked them to respond to these ideas. “What do you think?” I would ask them. “Do you think this is an effective solution?”

The Students Use the Genre of Graphic Narrative to Tell a Story

The unit on language and power culminated in a group project, where each group of three or four students created a graphic narrative using the software ComicLife. Their narrative had to be about the themes we had talked about in class – language and power in the classroom. It also had to propose a potential solution to the problem they posed. They had to turn in a group proposal first, explaining their ideas and their strategy for

completing the project. When students write their major papers for class, they typically do so in stages, handing in a first draft and then a revised draft. The proposal was a way for them to work on drafting their ideas and getting feedback before showing their final product to the class. (See assignments in Appendix A). Each group presented their final product, the ComicLife they created, to the class.

I chose to ask students to create a graphic narrative because it worked towards many of the goals the WPA has for first year composition, and it also offered students a chance to present what they had learned to the class. Some of the reasons I chose to have students write in the genre of a graphic novel, and to do so using technology were:

- It gave them the opportunity to build rhetorical skills by approaching a new writing task and assessing what they had to do to complete that task successfully
- It gave them the chance to collaborate on writing ideas as a group
- It offered reluctant readers and writers a different medium to succeed with
- It offered students a chance to share what they had learned with the class
- It gave students practice using images to convey meaning in conjunction with alphabetic text

Dale Jacobs, a scholar of composition and rhetoric, describes the value of graphic novels in teaching literacy to students:

By embracing the idea of multimodal literacy in relation to comics . . . we can help students engage critically with ways of making meaning that exist all around them, since multimodal texts include much of the content on the Internet, interactive multimedia, newspapers, television, film, instructional textbooks, and many other texts in our contemporary society (21).

Students expressed excitement about trying out a new genre:

I'm excited about the comic life project because it is something completely different from the norm that no one has experience with.

Rarely are pictures allowed in writing, even less so encouraged. I look forward to this assignment 'cause I think it will not only be fun but practice a fresh outlook.

I find it very interesting and fun. It's a way to learn and think creatively in a way different than when writing a paper.

At the end of the unit, the groups presented their ComicLife projects to the class.

The presentation included a short explanation of the project, where they explained to the class how they arrived at their idea, along with any other information they wanted to share. After they showed their project, they opened up the floor to questions. They answered questions such as, "Why did you choose to make the photos sepia toned?" or "Why did you choose to use three frames to convey that idea?" Students asked each other things like, "How did you get the program to play music?" or "You used sign language in your story. Do any of you know sign language?" The students watched each other's presentations attentively, not talking or whispering, and gave each other positive feedback, like, "Wow! You guys took amazing photos!" or "I'm impressed by your presenting skills!" Although this unit lasted only four weeks, students were able to participate in a wide range of activities that worked towards course goals, and share what they learned with their fellow classmates and I.

THE STUDY

Through this study, I hoped to ascertain how students' attitudes or understandings towards linguistic diversity changed throughout the course of the unit. I wondered how students demonstrated their understanding of the learning goals, and how I might assess the outcomes of the course.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-six students participated in this study. (25 of 26 students returned the demographic survey). All of them were freshman students in their second semester. There were 9 males and 17 females. 44% were full-time students, with no outside jobs. The majority of students self-identified as Caucasian. Five students identified as a variety of mixed races – Asian/Hispanic, American-Indian/Caucasian, American-Indian/Hispanic/Caucasian, Black or African American/Caucasian, and Hispanic/Asian/Caucasian. As this unit was focused around languages/dialects and power, I wanted to know how many of my students had been exposed to other cultures and languages in their homes or through travel. More than half the class grew up in Montana (68%). There were nine students from out of state, and two who grew up in another country. Eleven of the students had traveled to a non-English speaking country, while twenty-one had traveled within the United States. Most students (22 out of 25) spoke English as their native language. Three students spoke two native languages. Ten students had learned a second language, and the rest spoke one.

Procedures and Data Collection

I sought to measure students' changing understandings of the course goals through a variety of methods. I used a pre and post survey (see appendix). I also collected students' in-class writing and reading responses and their final projects, and I observed and took notes during class discussions and in-class activities.

The purpose for using a survey was to supplement the other qualitative data I collected. I assessed, analyzed and compared the survey data with my observations, notes and student writing. I wanted the survey to be anonymous so students felt they could answer honestly. To assure that I received matched pre and post surveys and that they were anonymous, students wrote a four digit number at the top of their survey (the last four digits of their phone number), and I matched the numbers on the pre and post survey. Out of 26 students, I received 22 matching pre and post surveys. The survey had 10 statements that students responded to on a 6 point Likert Scale. I administered the pre survey before beginning the language and power unit, and administered the post-survey four weeks later, after students had all presented their final projects for that unit.

I also asked students to respond to this prompt: "As a result of this unit, I learned the following about language and dialect in the classroom:" They wrote for approximately 3 minutes in class. I told them I was not grading their response but would simply use them to assess the unit, and that they did not need to write their name on their response. Out of 26 students, I received 21 responses, although 1 was illegible.

Approach to Analysis

On the survey, I identified questions which showed a significant difference. A Wilcoxon Rank-Sum test was used for determining significant differences ($P \leq 0.05$) between pre and post response data as described by Robertson (1995) using JMP 8 statistical software (SAS Institute, Cary, NC). I ran two tests. The first test looked at the effect of the treatment (the unit) on the whole class. It showed whether students moved *uniformly* in either direction. One question, in this test, showed uniform movement, in the direction I desired. No other questions showed uniform movement in either direction. In the second test, I looked at whether there was a difference in individual's response *in either direction* between pre and post test. In this test, students' movement in either direction was measured, meaning that they *did not have to move uniformly* to show a statistical difference, but they had to simply move. If students changed their opinion, this test measured that.

After determining which survey questions reflected differences in students' opinions, I thematically coded my data (class plans, written observations, student writing) and identified patterns that correlated with the survey questions that showed significant difference. I color coded places where students had talked, written or watched media that correlated with the survey question. Once I had color coded my data, I looked for patterns and places where students may have been influenced to determine what might have been the cause of students' change in opinion.

Findings

Students' Changing Opinions

Three statements from the survey reflected enough student movement to warrant further examination: Statement 3, Statement 6, and Statement 9. Below, I analyze each statement, and explain the student movement, and examine which parts of the four week unit on language and power correlates with students' changing opinions.

Statement 3: "Children who don't speak English should not be allowed to attend American schools until they learn English."

The pre and post survey showed that 59% of students changed their opinion in response to this statement. It appears that students grew more polarized. In the pre-survey, 17 students either somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed. In the post-survey, 9 students somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed. 5 students moved to "disagree" in the post survey, and 3 students moved to "agree" or "strongly agree." That can signify several things. First, 14% more students disagreed with that statement at the end of the unit as compared to at the start of the unit. Second, it appears students' opinions about this statement grew stronger in either direction, which tells me that it is something that they thought more about by the end of the unit than at the beginning. That tells me that in class, this issue must have stuck with students and caused them to think about it.

The stories that we read for this unit addressed the issue of students going to school who did not speak Standard English. All the stories were written from the main character's point of view, and the main character described how it felt to be left out, teased, or shamed for their home culture. In responses to the readings, the majority of

students empathized with the main character. I did not directly ask students or bring up in discussion whether a student who does not speak English should be able to attend school. In designing the unit, I realized that I assumed most students would feel that was acceptable. However, when I looked at the results of the pre-survey, I was surprised to see how many students agreed with the statement that non-English speakers should not be allowed. Several of the discussions touched on how to accommodate non-English speakers, which again went on the assumption that public schools should accommodate them. For instance, when we discussed Trimbur's quotation about the literacy crisis, I asked students what they would do if they decided every student should speak Standard English in order to get ahead. I asked, how would they show respect for the students' home language and still teach Standard English. Perhaps this kind of problem solving prompted students to see that the language barrier can be surmounted, and can add to the classroom even. In another discussion, we talked about traveling and what made it fun to go to other countries. Students discussed that it was the mutual exchange of interest in cultures that made travel rewarding. We talked about what that would look like in the classroom. Their final project had to contain "a problem that can arise in a classroom around language or dialect" and "a potential solution, or way of handling the situation." This pushed students to think about dilemmas that come up in the classroom, but also of ways that those dilemmas can be resolved.

In a writing prompt at the end of the unit, where I asked students to respond to the statement, "As a result of the unit, I learned the following things about language and

dialect in the classroom.” several students brought up the variety of language that can be found in the classroom, and ways the situation can be handled.

Language barriers are always being pushed to the wayside in the classroom and are continually going unnoticed. All it takes is one single person to start the chain reaction of a friendship to make that person in an uncomfortable situation feel a bit more welcome.

Another student mentioned gaining awareness that there are different languages and dialects in classrooms:

I learned that in the classroom, there are many different backgrounds. People should be open to everyone and help each other if they don't know the dominant language. I find that each classroom will have different languages and dialects in it. It would be hard to make a place use only one type of language instead of being open to all different dialects.

In these responses, students are showing awareness that allowing children into a classroom who don't speak a different language means that other teachers or students should make accommodations. Their statements reflect that it is important that other students reach out in friendship, or even that “people should be open to everyone.” I believe that by focusing on what is possible and on solutions to problems that arise with “English only” rules, students could see the problem could be managed. Also, by empathizing with the characters in the stories who were victims of discrimination, students perhaps had more of a desire to think of solutions and alternatives.

Statement 6: “‘Standard English’ is the dialect that is used in schools because it is the best way to speak.”

Students' responses to this statement showed a statistically significant difference between the pre and post test ($P=0.017$). In response to this statement, 18% of students moved from “Agree” to “Disagree.” In looking at individual paired surveys, 8 students

did not change their response in the pre and post survey; the remaining 14 students changed their responses. Only 3 students moved towards the agree side in the post survey, while the other 11 students who moved, shifted towards the agree side. That means 50% of students shifted their response towards greater agreement or less disagreement with the above statement.

As I coded my data looking for instances where the perceived superiority of Standard English came up, I found myself highlighting things from many of the days during the unit. This theme appeared throughout the four weeks, in the readings, the discussions, the learning centers, and in things I read to the class. In the learning centers, several of the activities focused on whether Standard English is superior, or not. In the video, Gerard McClendon discusses teaching Black students Standard English, but he also clearly states that Black English is a dialect that has equal value, and that it is an important dialect to be able to speak in certain situations. In center 2, where students solved scenarios, the most popular scenario involved handling a situation where the teacher is telling a child who speaks a different dialect that, “If he doesn’t learn to speak in proper English, he will never get anywhere in life.” One student responded to this scenario by saying, “There are many different ways to speak and just because someone doesn’t talk the same way doesn’t mean they’re dumb.” Another student wrote, “I would talk to the teacher immediately and ask what his problem is . . . Then I would talk to my child and explain to him that everyone is different.” I believe that putting students in a situation where they had to confront the problem of Standard English being treated as superior, helped them to claim this learning as their own, and to see how this information

could work in their lives. In the quote I read them from the Delpit article, where a teacher is helping her Athabaskan students learn Standard English, the teacher is explaining to her students, “We listen to the way people talk, not to judge them, but to tell what part of the river they come from. These other people are not like that. They think everyone needs to talk like them” (“The Silenced Dialogue” 293). The teacher explains that students should not forget their beautiful home language, but that they should remember how beautiful it is and how good it feels to speak the language of their home. Students liked the way this teacher handled her students. They expressed that they liked the way she taught them Standard English but honored their home language. Examples like these showed students that it is possible to have two languages that are important, that even if Standard English is necessary for success in school or to get a job, it does not mean that it is superior.

In students’ writing about what they learned in this unit, 6 out of 21 students expressed learning about the way other languages hold value, or that Standard English is not the only or best way to speak. Some examples of student responses are as follows:

Speaking broken English or another language apart from English makes a person no less smart than someone who speaks the native tongue.

I learned that no matter what language you speak or have a different dialect, you’re significant in your own way.

Statement 9: “The language and dialect that is most valued in a culture depends on who has more power in that culture.”

Students’ responses to this statement showed a substantial difference ($P=0.14$). Overall, in the post survey, 3 more students strongly agreed, and 3 less students somewhat disagreed/disagreed or strongly disagreed. That means, in the post survey, 14%

more students agreed with the above statement. In looking at individual paired surveys, I could see that 9 students moved towards the agree side (41%), while only 4 students moved towards the disagree side (18%). This shows me that a substantial number of students changed their understanding about language and dialects being valued based on power. Not only that, but many of the students moved towards agreeing that the value placed on languages and dialects in a society depends on who has more power in society.

In class we worked towards greater understanding of this concept through a variety of activities. Most of the readings implicitly touched on this topic, as they were written from the perspective of someone who had been discriminated against for their culture by someone who had come from a more powerful position, and wanted the character to give up their culture, and to speak Standard English. We directly addressed this issue in class on the day we discussed Lisa Delpit's 5 rules of power for the classroom (refer to Chapter 2). In the discussion students talked about how they saw Delpit's rules of power in the story they read. For example, one student said, "English speakers have the rules for the power in the classroom." One student applied Delpit's rules of power to a later reading in her thought piece. She wrote:

It is very obvious in Garza's piece that the issues of power are being enacted in the classroom because she gets punished for simply speaking with a Spanish accent. The code or rules for participating in that power is that you have to act American and speak English, which is the 'culture of power.'

The poem by Harryette Mullen, "Bilingual Instructions," questions why Spanish is not allowed in schools or on ballots. By posing this situation, Mullen is asking why Spanish is marginalized, or why English is privileged. In discussions, I asked students to discuss the quote by Garza who talks about feeling that she had to leave her Mexican

heritage behind to be accepted in school. She said, “It seemed I had to negate one [culture] in order to be accepted and exist in the other” (246). I pointed out to students that this was a common theme throughout the readings, and asked, “Why do the authors feel they must give up one culture?” Students discussed that the schools where these students went did not allow the students to have both cultures. I asked, “Can you see other alternatives?” Students thought that if teachers would accept students’ home cultures, students could have both. Several students in the class came from homes where one or both parents spoke a different language. These students talked about how they could see the value in their parents’ culture. I think hearing from students their own age who had experienced being treated differently due to their background helped students see that this issue is real.

In their final assignment, their narrative had to be, “within the theme of language and power that we have been talking about in class.” This pushed students to integrate what we had talked about in class into a story they created.

Changes Reflected in Students’ Reading Responses

Some students showed little movement between the pre and post survey, and showed little movement in their writings as well. When looking through the students’ reading responses, I noticed some patterns that made me think about the way that some students come to the classroom with deeply seated beliefs. Some students have been taught what is right and wrong, and have not been taught that critical thinking is acceptable, but rather that listening to authority is the preferred method of learning. When this is the case, a teacher, over the course of one semester, who presents ideas that may

challenge what that student has been taught, holds little chance of making an impact. In other cases, students expressed holding a belief that they were not willing to question. 3 of the 57 readings responses explicitly expressed an unwillingness to change a belief. For example, this student wrote in a response to a reading:

I honestly believe if someone from another country wants to live in the US they should have to learn to speak English. We shouldn't have to change the language of our schools and government documents so foreign people can read them. These are my beliefs and I will always stand by them.

This student clearly expresses that he has no intention of ever changing his beliefs, “I will *always* stand by them” (emphasis mine).

Other students began the class with strong opinions, but by the end, it appeared through their writing and in discussion that they were questioning their beliefs. For instance, one student, who I will call Jessie, stated on the first or second day of class that Spanish should not be allowed in America. She grew up in California and said that English was becoming a second language and it was just wrong. As we worked through the readings, she voiced a strong opinion less often. In this writing she is responding to Garza's story, where Garza describes the confusion and frustration she felt at being punished in school for speaking Spanish. Jessie is also responding to the poem by Mullen about Spanish not being allowed in school or on ballots, but being allowed on trash cans and recycling bins. Jessie says,

Many mixed feelings went through my head when reading both the poem and the short story. I agree with a lot of what the authors were saying about how being punished for speaking Spanish in school was not acceptable. I find it a little odd that schools would physically harm their students for talking in a different language. What made my feelings even stronger is that white people could talk to each other using the new Spanish words and phrases they learned, but the Mexican-American kids couldn't speak the Spanish that they already knew. I found that unfair and

extremely racist of the schools. The poem by Harryette Mullen was interesting, I thought. It brought up a good point about how California votes no on bilingual ballots and instructions but yes on waste receptacles. I found that to be curious, but not too surprising. I've realized that in California Spanish is quickly becoming a more popular language. Something is a little wrong with that, I think. I feel that if you live in any one place, you should learn the language of where ever you are. The place shouldn't have to adapt to you. It is your choice to live there and if you don't understand the language, it will be a lot harder for you to be successful.

While Jessie is still expressing her belief that it is important for immigrants to learn English, she has also stopped saying that Spanish should be abolished, but instead says learning the language where you live will allow you to be more successful. She even expresses empathy for Garza, and states that it is wrong that she was punished for speaking Spanish. What particularly struck me in Jessie's response was her opening statement, "Many mixed feeling went through my head when reading." It seems she is experiencing the discomfort of integrating new information and beliefs that contradict with old information and beliefs.

Students empathized with the characters in the story, or related the characters story to their own lives. This happened in 17 out of 57 reading responses (30%).

The piece "The Monitor" by Wangari Muta Maathai made me feel very sad. It makes me feel bad that people today are still being forced to be someone that they aren't. She said that these teachers had made them feel embarrassed that they had even spoken in their native language in the first place. I don't think it's right that people are forced to give parts of themselves up, to get an education.

It was sad to hear about a first grader getting punished and hurt because of his language. It was saddening and confusing.

I feel like I wouldn't be able to give up English even if I was forced to. Joseph [Suina] managed to get his point across by telling the listener he was frustrated and irritated when he himself knew no English. . .When I read this I thought of myself, and how I struggled with English when I was

young, and I grew up with English language. I can only imagine how he feels through my struggles with schooling and the dramatic change in culture.

In other cases, students reacted emotionally to what they read, either expressing that they felt upset or passionately disagreeing with the way the character was being treated. This happened in 26 of the 57 reading responses (46%). In response to Maathai's story, where she writes about being punished as a young African child in Kenya, for speaking her native language, one student wrote:

I literally am, I don't know, just not liking this. It is good to know about, but I don't like to read about how we are forcing English on some other country. I think it is horrible and there has to be a better way of doing it. I can't even imagine taking someone's past away from them or making them even choose what heritage they should be.

Responding to the story by Suina, where he describes being punished for his Native American culture in a boarding school, a student wrote:

Overall, it made me feel really sad that Indians, and not only Indians, but anyone who wanted to be in America, had to go through that much trouble and lose who they really were.

I was very much appalled by both pieces . . . because being a Spanish American this targets me as in individual. I know these sort of racist acts are true, but I had no idea it used to be that bad in Texas. It makes me feel proud to be of the ethnicity I am and to accept it.

Some students wrote about how the readings changed their old ideas. 4 out of 57 responses explicitly expressed that they were changing an old belief:

Living in America I always thought that we were the greatest place in the world. From a young age we are taught that many people came to America for their freedom. As if we were all foreigners in this melting pot. From both of the readings I got more of the impression that instead of being a melting pot, we are a bleaching pot stripping people of their cultures and language.

Living in America, it seems odd people would be punished for speaking their own language. It is cruel, unnecessary and very inhumane.

Immigrants come here because America is “the home of the free”, where we are supposedly entitled to free speech, but this is proven to be wrong after reading stories such as [the story by] Carmen Lomas Garza. She and many others are living proof that the “American way” is not what it is hyped up to be. I find it horrible that teachers would actually whip and beat children for speaking their native language.

One student responded to each story with a response that showed no empathy.

After his second thought piece posting, in response to the Garza story, another student responded to his posting in her posting. In Carmen Garza’s story, “A Piece of my Heart,” Garza describes being a Spanish speaking student in Texas. In her High School, the English speaking students practiced phrases from their Spanish class in the hallway, but if teachers overheard her speak Spanish in the hallways, she was punished.

This student wrote in his response to Garza’s story:

I worked at McDonalds for over two years when I started high school. And while working there, I met several Mexicans who didn’t speak English. McDonalds hired them because they were cheap, cheap and inefficient. I am still friends with one of them (who now speaks decent English) and I don’t judge people based on their language or what their mental capacity is. But they were all but worthless employees. It only makes sense that you learn the language of the country you live in. . . I have no issue with people coming here for a better life. But they must be willing to put in the effort. They must come legally, they must pay the price, and they must learn the language. If I traveled and lived in another country I would expect nothing less. I am sorry she (Carmen) had a bad experience, but I don’t believe she deserves special treatment.

Another student replied:

I agree with my classmate that mentioned [in the thought piece above] that if you go to learn their language and pay the price for a better life, but it does not mean that you can control or impose on others. Carmen was not expecting special treatment, but the rest of the kids, White, Mexican or Indian, deserve the same treatment and the same rules.

What I Learned as a Teacher

I began the semester wondering how these students might change, and what things I could do to influence them. I knew that I toed a dangerous line in hoping to influence students, but also, I also recognized that nobody would teach if they did not hope their teaching made an influence of one kind or another. My hopes were high. I informally assessed what was happening in class after each session, but it wasn't until I went back through my data with a careful eye, looking for patterns, that I really noticed how students had changed. After looking through the data and analyzing it, I felt more proud of my students than ever – at the compassionate and honest things they had written and said during discussions, at their willingness to try a new genre, at what they wrote about in the learning centers. With careful analysis, and looking for patterns, I noticed things I had not noticed in the rush of preparing, grading and also being a full time graduate student. As I compiled students' reading responses, I began to see how many of them empathized with the characters.

There were other things that surprised me as well. For instance, I had one student who I felt discouraged by. His reading responses were, in my eyes, racist. As I read through each one, I saw a small change – maybe nothing big, but by the end of the unit, he wrote less about the superiority of his culture, and more about things like how the story was constructed. Perhaps this was a sign that he was developing audience awareness, and not necessarily changing his viewpoint. But, even that, I felt, would be an improvement. Through conducting this project, I recognized the value of systematically looking through data, of collecting student writing and coding it, of looking for patterns and seeing when and where course goals may have been met. It is not every semester that

a teacher has time to do Action Research, but for me the experience was invaluable. It will help me in the future to be a more reflective teacher, and to reflect on trends and patterns rather than isolated incidents. I see the way that classroom research can strengthen a teacher's practice, helping her to see what may touch students, or what may not – to see when students push back, or when they don't. I will carry what I learned from researching this unit with me – which means I will take away the information I gained from this specific unit, as well as the value and importance of conducting classroom research.

Discussion

Much of my inspiration came from Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, two well respected critical pedagogues. However, they work with different populations than many university teachers, including me; I wondered if my students would care. Horton and Freire worked with students who had more direct reasons to care, students who either wanted an education, or whose lives would be greatly improved by gaining critical literacy. It seems to me that empathy building activities are important for students who have less reason to care. Even raising students' awareness of the issue is a big first step. When I asked students to write about what they learned in this unit, 10 out of 20 students wrote that they learned there are different dialects and language in the classroom. Without this awareness, students would see no reason to change the existing system. One student wrote:

Through this unit I learned how big of a role language really plays in the classroom. I had never really thought about it before because I have

always been in classes where everyone can speak the same language. I see now though what a burden it can be to not be like everyone else.

In assessing my research results, it seemed that some students did move towards critical literacy about language and power, although they may have had less of a reason to be motivated to learn, as compared to Horton's and Freire's students. After thinking about this problem, I worked hard to include activities in the classroom that put the students into situations that could help them empathize with hardships students undergo who encounter discrimination based on their dialect. I felt if they could empathize with people who suffered due to language and power issues, they may have more impetus to change their understandings of language and power, and then, ideally, to change their behavior. I think more classroom studies could be done to examine how we can apply concepts such as developing critical literacy, or critiquing dominant culture, to classrooms where our students may see less need to change, or may not see what they will gain personally from changing.

It was in the learning centers especially where students had opportunities to participate in activities where they role-played being an advocate for someone who does not speak Standard English, or where they role-played in a scenario where English was the language that was marginalized, for instance. I felt the learning centers were a valuable aspect of this unit. As I reviewed the literature, I did not find instances of any other composition teachers writing about using learning centers in their classrooms. I see the potential in adult learning centers, and think that the concept could continue to be developed. It would be interesting to see other teachers trying this method in their classroom, and writing about it – to critique the concept, and continue to refine it.

I wonder if this semester I was lucky, to have a group of students who were often engaged, and to have students who seemed to enjoy group discussions. In this group of students, there were students who were willing to share personal aspects of their lives that added dimension to our readings. For example, one student, whose father is a Northern Cheyenne American Indian, shared the story of her father sometimes having trouble finding an appropriate English word, and talked about her grandmother going to boarding school. The other students listened to her. These things cannot be duplicated – the community that each classroom has. However, I don't think the community happens on accident. I worked hard from the first day of class to make our classroom an environment where students felt free to express themselves, where it was expected that they respect one another, and where they knew I wanted to hear their voices. And yet, even when a teacher works hard to build community, she never knows how each group will work together. I hope to have a chance to try my ideas out with future classes, to see what pieces of this lesson impact other students.

Unexpected Outcomes

Something that I saw in many students' final projects, as well as in their responses to what they had learned in this unit, was something I had not anticipated. Students expressed the idea that it only takes one person to make a difference. 5 out of 20, or 25% of the responses, where I asked students to write about what they learned in this unit, mentioned that it takes one person to help someone who is struggling with their background. In their final presentations, many of the groups had one character who reached out in friendship towards a character who was experiencing isolation or

loneliness due to coming from a different background, or not speaking Standard English.

For example, one student said:

All it takes is one single person to start the chain reaction of a friendship to make the person in an uncomfortable environment feel a bit more welcome.

Another student said:

I learned the importance of acceptance in people who are already in the particular culture that one is emerging into. For example, with our project, we did a girl moving to the USA from Mexico. As she came to the USA, friends were very willing to accept her. I just think it is important to accept others regardless of their race, culture, or ethnicity because they are human too.

Though I had not planned for this to be a course goal, I was gratified that students would feel this way. With the attitude that it only takes one person to reach out in friendship, they may feel that it is possible for them to make a change. At the beginning of the unit, one student had stayed after class and said, “I just don’t understand why we’re studying this stuff. I mean, our class isn’t going to have a revolution or anything. And that is what it would take to make a big change, some kind of big revolution.” I left class that day thinking about what he said. He did not realize he was questioning a doubt of my own – is it possible to make a difference, even if it is small? I felt encouraged by students’ final products for this unit, and their statements about what they learned. Their idealism refreshed me.

For Future Study

There were several goals that I had for students for which I didn’t assess outcomes, but were I to teach this unit again, I would design some assessment tools for

these goals as well. I hoped that students would apply what they learned about oppression, through the study of language and power, to their everyday lives; I hoped that their new understandings would lead to a change in their actions. It would be interesting to see how they integrate their knowledge into their own lives.

Conclusions

Teaching is a demanding job, but it comes with rewards. Assessing the outcomes of this unit, I felt the hard work was worth it. Reading student responses, and going through discussion notes, looking at the survey data – it confirmed my belief that the classroom is a place to make change.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COMIC LIFE ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS

Comic Life Project

Due 2.28.11

With your group, create a graphic narrative that is within the theme of language and power that we have been talking about in class.

*Your narrative should contain these elements:

- a problem that can arise in a classroom around language or dialect
- a potential solution, or way of handling the situation

*Your narrative should also have:

- a beginning, middle and end
- engaging text and images that communicate your group's meaning

Remember that all the elements of this form of communication can enhance your message. Carefully choose pictures, backgrounds, text and sound that all contribute to the story you are trying to tell.

Comic Life Project Group Contract

Names of Group Members:

How is this group going to communicate outside of class? Email, phone, text? Be sure to exchange appropriate contact information.

How will your group distribute the work? (Writing dialogue, taking photos, choosing music, choosing backgrounds, borders, formatting into software, preparing presentation)

What specific tasks will each member complete, if you choose to divide tasks among group members?

Whose camera will you use? Whose zip drive will you use?

What will the group do about member(s) who do not keep up their end of the bargain? How should the instructor handle group members who do not participate fully? Decide this as a group.

Signatures of Group Members: _____

Comic Life Proposal Directions (To be written with your group)

Make your proposal informative and engaging. This is a formal piece of writing.

Content:

- **Introduction:** Present a brief introduction to your project. What is your focus? Why are you doing this topic? What message are you delivering to your audience? Who is your intended audience? What should they "take away" from your presentation?
- **Summary:** Summarize how you want to address the issue you are discussing. How will you present it in Comic Life? What type of "story" will you show/tell your audience?
- **Timetable:** How long do you think it will take to create this presentation? Break your story into individual parts and think about how many frames it will take to "tell" your message. Identify the times outside of class that your group members can work on the project together. Who will be responsible for which aspects of the project? Who has a digital camera available for taking the necessary pictures. Who might be looking at outside pictures, graphs, or illustrations to help present your message. Who is going to focus on color, font, and other issues? Discuss any particular challenges that you need to overcome.
- **Wrap-up:** Present any other information pertinent to your project here.

Most importantly, have fun with it!

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM AND SURVEYS

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM
FOR
PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Assessing Learning from the Student and Teacher Perspective

You are being asked to participate in a study. The purpose of this study is to provide information about the effect of differing teaching methods on learning outcomes. Results from this study have the potential to add to the field of knowledge in Composition and Pedagogy. I may collect aspects from this class to include in my research (discussion items, surveys, written artifacts, classroom vignettes, photographs). Participation in the study takes no more time than being in the class takes. The extent of your participation in the study involves giving me permission to collect writing and surveys you already do for the class, to use for my thesis research. You are free to choose to participate or not, and your choice will not affect your grade in this course. All data collected will be kept confidential. Your name will not be disclosed or connected to results in any way. Risks to individuals are no more than would be encountered in everyday life, or in any college writing class.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:
Lisa Bullard, Teaching Assistant at Montana State University, via e-mail at
lisa.bullard@msu.montana.edu

I have read the above and understand the discomforts, inconvenience and risk of this study. I, _____ (*name of subject*), agree to participate in this research. I understand that I may later refuse to participate, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signed: _____

Investigator: _____

Date: _____ .

Q. Gender

- Male
- Female

Q. Age

- 18-19
- 20-24
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 50 or more

Q. Education

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.

- 1 semester of college
- 1-4 years of college
- a Bachelor Degree

Q. Employment Status

Are you currently...?

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A full-time student
- Retired
- Unable to work

Q. Where did you grow up? (If you grew up in more than one place, you can mark more than one).

- Montana, rural
- Montana, in a city
- In the United States, rural, outside of Montana
- In the United States, a city, outside of Montana
- In another country, rural
- In another country, in a city

Q. Travel

Please specify the places you have traveled (you may mark more than one).

- Within your home state
- Within the United States
- Outside of the United States to an English speaking country
- Outside of the United States to a non-English speaking country

Q. Race

Please specify your race.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Other

Q. Language

Please specify your native language/s

- American-English
- Spanish
- Other_____

Q. Language

How many languages do you speak?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- more than 3

Q. Language

How many languages were spoken in your household when you were growing up?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- more than 3

Pre/Post Survey

1. Strongly Agree= Agree with a passion
2. Agree= Totally agree
3. Somewhat Agree=Agree partially (more than you disagree)
4. Somewhat Disagree = Disagree partially (more than you agree)
5. Disagree=Totally disagree
6. Strongly Disagree=Disagree with a passion

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Minority groups are negatively affected in school subjects because they are taught in Standard English.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Immigrants to any country will be more successful if they learn that country's language.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Children who don't speak English should not be allowed to attend American schools until they learn English.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	If someone wants me to think they are smart, they should speak to me in proper grammar.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Teachers should try to think about students' home cultures when choosing what lessons to teach.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	"Standard English" is the dialect that is used in school because it is the best way to speak.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Dialects and languages are connected to social power and political power.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	It is not possible to speak more than one dialect.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	The language or dialect that is most valued in a culture depends on who has more power in that culture.
Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Somewhat Agree 3	Somewhat Disagree 4	Disagree 5	Strongly Disagree 6	Standardized tests should be written in different dialects to make them more fair.

APPENDIX C

PRE AND POST SURVEY RESULTS

1. Minority groups are negatively affected in school subjects because they are taught in Standard English.

Survey Results	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre		1	6	6	4	5	22
Post		2	6	5	8	1	22
Difference:		1	0	-1	4	-4	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

6 students moved towards the disagree side (27%)

9 students moved towards the agree side (41%)

7 students answered the same on both surveys (32%)

2. Immigrants to any country will be more successful if they learn that country's language

Survey Results	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre	9	11	1			1	22
Post	9	11	1			1	22
Difference:	1	0	0			0	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

5 students moved towards disagree side (23%)

6 students moved towards agree side (27%)

11 students answered the same on both surveys (50%)

3. Children who don't speak English should not be allowed to attend American schools until they learn English.

Survey Results	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre		1	8	9	2	2	22
Post	1	3	2	7	7	2	22
Difference:	1	2	-6	-2	5	0	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:
 8 students moved towards disagree side (36%)
 5 students moved towards agree side (23%)
 9 students answered the same on both surveys (41%)

4. If someone wants me to think they are smart, they should speak to me in proper grammar

Survey Results	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre	3	5	7	4	2	1	22
Post	2	3	9	2	4	2	22
Difference:	-1	-2	2	-2	2	1	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:
 8 students moved towards disagree side (36%)
 4 students moved towards agree side (18%)
 10 students answered the same on both surveys (45%)

5. Teachers should try to think about students' home cultures when choosing what lessons to teach

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre	1	3	6	9	2	1	22
Post	4	2	4	6	6		22
Difference:	3	-1	-2	-3	4	-1	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

4 students moved towards disagree side (18%)

7 students moved towards agree side (32%)

11 students answered the same on both surveys (50%)

6. "Standard English" is the dialect that is used in schools because it is the best way to speak.

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre		9	6	4	3		22
Post		5	6	4	7		22
Difference:		-4	0	0	4		

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

11 students moved towards disagree side (50%)

3 students moved towards agree side (14%)

8 students answered the same on both surveys (36%)

7. Dialects and languages are connected to social power and political power.

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre	3	6	9	2	2		22
Post	2	5	11	1	2		21
Difference:	-1	-1	2	-1	0		

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

6 students moved towards disagree side (32%)

5 students moved towards agree side (23%)

10 students answered the same on both surveys (48%)

8. It is not possible to speak more than one dialect.

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre				3	15	4	22
Post	1	1	1	2	11	6	22
Difference:	1	1	1	-1	-4	2	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:

7 students moved towards disagree side (32%)

6 students moved towards agree side (27%)

9 students answered the same on both surveys (41%)

9. The language and dialect that is most valued in a culture depends on who has more power in that culture.

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre		3	9	2	7	1	22
Post	3	3	9	1	6		22
Difference:	3	0	0	-1	-1	-1	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:
 4 students moved towards disagree side (18%)
 9 students moved towards agree side (41%)
 9 students answered the same on both surveys (41%)

10. Standardized tests should be written in different dialects to make them more fair.

Survey	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Somewhat Disagree	5 Disagree	6 Strongly Disagree	Total Answers
Pre		2	5	3	8	4	22
Post	2		5	6	5	4	22
Difference:	2	-2	0	3	-3	0	

Student movement from pre to post test, gathered from assessing paired surveys:
 4 students moved towards disagree side (18%)
 8 students moved towards agree side (36%)
 10 students answered the same on both surveys (45%)