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INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY: CONNECTING DISABILITY AND RACE IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Meredith Persin
May 2022

Accepted by:
Dr. Megan Eatman, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

Higher education was never made for marginalized people. The academy was created based on the privileged white, able-bodied, males who preoccupied higher education for the longest time. While that has certainly changed over the years, the institution itself is still in the past resulting in BIPOC students and disabled students continuing to struggle within higher education. While instructors have begun to take interest in the need for inclusive pedagogy within the last decade, it still has a far way to come in order to help the marginalized students with intersecting identities and students who may not benefit from a one size fits all inclusive pedagogy. In this thesis I suggest the combination of antiracist pedagogy and disability pedagogy to center some of the most marginalized students within the classroom for the first time. I look at the composition classroom specifically as that is where both BIPOC students and disabled students face similar hardships. I then give examples on what it would look like to implement this combined pedagogy through a syllabus policy example, a grading example, and an assignment example that people can take and modify to then use within their own classroom.

DEDICATION

To the marginalized students within the academy that have had to fight to have their voices heard and be taken seriously. I see you, I hear you, I am one with you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my parents for their endless support, the rest of my family and friends for all of their encouragement, and my mentors and committee members who have been a tremendous help along this journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the last 10 years, more educators have engaged with socially inclusive pedagogical practices within higher education to adequately impact a larger scope of students and promote more compelling engagement with all students. Inclusive pedagogy has been studied since the late twentieth century but experienced a recent spike in interest around 2013 when Lani Florian and Jennifer Spratt came out with the article “Enacting Inclusion: A Framework for Interrogating Inclusive Practice” where they created an influential framework for inclusive pedagogy that relied on the main principles studied since the twentieth century presented in a way that was accessible and encouraging to educators of all backgrounds (Loreman). While this increased interest indicates a base level of awareness for how marginalized students are typically underprivileged in the education system, marginalized students are still struggling and even languishing while trying to navigate an institutional setting that was not made with them in mind.

Higher education was never made to involve certain people, such as disabled folks who at the development of higher education were intentionally not included. Jay Dolmage explains in his book *Academic Ableism* that since these structures were made initially without certain students in mind that even with the attempt to create an equal environment for all students it is nearly impossible without reevaluating the entire way we look at higher education. While a broad inclusive pedagogy is a start, the need for a more fine-tuned kind of pedagogy that focuses on some of the most marginalized groups that have been historically ignored within higher education has presented itself.

Two examples of fine-tuned inclusive teaching practices that are beginning to gain more traction are accessible pedagogy, based in disability studies and explained by scholars such as Jay Dolmage, Margaret Price, and Anne-Marie Womack, and antiracist pedagogy, based in critical race theory and explained by scholars such as April Baker-Bell, Christina Cedillo, and Asao Inoue. While there is some literature out there about the ties between race and disability within education, such as the book *DisCrit* written by Connor et al., there is currently a lack of published scholarship that focuses specifically on tying these two types of pedagogical practices together to create an overall new pedagogy, despite their many similarities regarding their application and outcome. Each of those pedagogical stances have been created to help students with said identities who are statistically at a disadvantage in the education system due to things out of their control that coincide with the marginalization of their identity as well as the fact that higher education was built on ableism and racism (Jay Dolmage, Asao Inoue).

To this day, educators are still having to work around the fact that higher education originally deliberately excluded certain people to try and help every student while simultaneously having to work within the institutional structures that are set in place. These are both examples of inclusive pedagogical frameworks, but there is still more that can be done regarding promoting equitable classrooms because even within these pedagogical frameworks they can be problematic on their own due to the fact that they might not be acknowledging all of the intersecting identities at play with the main identity they are looking at. For example, a Black, queer, disabled woman is going to have to fight against many more institutional barriers than a white, straight, able-bodied

man not only within academia, but within the world. By creating and implementing a pedagogy that understands those differences and the hindrances different people experience, it can begin to create a more equitable environment than what is seen as the standard within higher education. Disability scholar Sami Schalk explains within her piece “Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification with/in Disability Studies” that the field of disability studies often lacks a critical connection to race therefore making disability studies a field that is too white to accurately advocate for *all* disabled folks, specifically ones with intersecting identities such as disabled Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

Both of these pedagogies would gain insight by looking to the other and their specific practices by taking certain points and adapting it within their own pedagogy, but the issue is that each pedagogy on its own will still inevitably leave out people with complex identities as the focus would still be on only one aspect of a student and creates this need for a new kind of pedagogy. Educators need to be aware of the intersectionality of their students and how one specific pedagogy will never be one size fits all for everyone. This thesis will explore the ways that educators can draw these pedagogical techniques together to create a more equitable and inclusive pedagogy that begins to help some of the most disadvantaged students within higher education which obviously helps disadvantaged students but also, as a bonus, helps other students as well.

I will be focusing on English composition classrooms since all students need credit for a first-year writing course when coming into higher education and composition classrooms are known to gatekeep what is “proper” writing. Language and writing are

two common things that a majority of disabled and BIPOC students deal with unfair disadvantages on in higher education, so focusing on that specific element that brings these identities together within academia is important to note and analyze (Derilus). The kinds of assessment typically used to analyze writing assignments within the composition classroom have historically been methods that punish a student for deviating from the standard expectation therefore privileging specific students. For example, grading students' writing based on the proper use of "standard" English reflects both racism and ableism in ways I will explain later on, only furthermore separating marginalized students (Derilus).

Students from all different academic backgrounds come in with a unique range of experience. These differences make the composition classroom one of the first spaces where students may see how their identities and lived experiences have shaped their use of language differently than others. Through assessment they then see whose use of language is better than others based on the ability to fit within a set of outdated rules used within higher education. By teaching students that there is only one proper way to write and communicate, you are immediately putting your students into a hierarchy of success while still expecting the same outcome without taking the students' differences into account.

By creating a new pedagogy formed with concepts to apply within the classroom from both antiracist and disability pedagogy, we can begin to focus on the students who have been the most disadvantaged within composition classrooms and help them succeed but also take those techniques and examples of inclusion and apply them to other courses

as well since many elements within the composition classroom are required to be applied in other spaces as well throughout their entire academic career. Both antiracist and accessible pedagogy aim to reshape the classroom to benefit a wide variety of students with different backgrounds, needs, and learning styles. By combining both antiracist pedagogy and disability pedagogy concepts and transforming them into examples of practical application within the classroom I am hoping to highlight not only the changes that need to be made, but the successes that will come from it.

It is also important to highlight the fact that while I am a disabled student and educator, I am not a person of color so the way I interact with both fields differ due to that. While I have personal anecdotes and experiences regarding disability within higher education, I do not have the same experiences when it comes to race within the academy as I benefit from white privilege and the white supremacy that higher education is built on. When talking about both fields I intentionally position myself differently due to my own relation to that identity (i.e. my own voice is heard more within the disability area than the areas that have to do with race where I intentionally center BIPOC voices).

DISABILITY PEDAGOGY BACKGROUND

Disabled students, while being an important part of a student body, are often disregarded and their experiences discredited within higher education. While universities may claim that they are inclusive and accessible, even by providing proof of them being ADA compliant and including things like ramps and accessible parking spots on campus, once the student is actually within the classroom it is a different story. Once the student is

established at the school, the university's determination to stay accessible in all spaces decreases and according to Dolmage; disabled students who begin to struggle in the classroom due to having different needs are often then just chalked up to not being successful due to their own shortcomings. Within most of society, including higher education, disability is seen as a purely medical occurrence that is in need of “fixing” when instead disability is more than that, it is an intrinsic part of identity. Instead of focusing on how to change the way a disabled student learns and performs, we should instead learn that different people have a variety of different needs, and one is not better than the other and that despite the type of needs, the opportunities should be the same.

While universities tend to put their disability advocacy efforts into structural changes such as ramps, accessible parking, and buttons to open doors, there are many other accommodations that disabled students need while at university such as classroom accessibility which includes things like ADA compliant documents/presentations, closed captioning on videos, and alternate forms of activities. Dolmage explains how ableism spans further than just architectural hindrances and infiltrates how disabled students are treated in the classroom. Dolmage explains that disability has been constructed within higher education as what he claims is rather the “antithesis” of higher education by disability being positioned as “a distraction, a drain, a problem to be solved” which we see through the emphasis that Dolmage points out within higher education where certain characteristics are more valued than others and are oftentimes ones that disabled people cannot achieve. Because disabled students cannot do things constantly that count towards the expected rigor within higher education, they are then seen as less important to focus

on and are expected to advocate for themselves if they want things to be done differently. Dolmage argues that disabled students, like all students, bring a very important and needed perspective to higher education and that the institution itself needs to become more accessible for all if it truly wants to succeed.

Despite disabled students being very much present within higher education, the success and futures of disabled students are often not encouraged or acknowledged within academia by the administration, faculty/staff, and even other students. This idea that disabled people are less than and seemingly have no academic future can also be seen in Alison Kafer's article "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips" where she expands on the idea that disabled people have no future due to compulsory able-bodiedness within society and able-bodied folks not seeing disabled people as humans capable of having a future that they would deem acceptable. Although disabled people do have futures, incredibly meaningful ones I might add, the idea that disabled futures aren't acceptable futures creates this aversion to disabled folk and lets able-bodied people forget that disabled people exist and have needs and wants. There will inevitably be disabled students within higher education who want to learn and deserve an education regardless of if people believe they are valuable enough to the institution. The idea that disabled people lack a successful future can be seen in conjunction with disability being the "antithesis" of higher education (Dolmage) to therefore create an environment where disabled students are set up for failure. In fact, it is not a disabled student's lack of work ethic or ability that is harming them, but the ways in which classes are set up within higher education which doesn't account for any kind of variance.

There is a lot of literature supporting the disregard higher education has for disabled students with these different kinds of needs and a general consensus that the way to approach those needs is to change the ways that educators approach accessibility within the classroom. Bess Williamson explains in the article “Access” that we are having to move away from looking at accessibility only in terms of architectural changes and begin to identify and alter social barriers that are not physical but still influence disabled people with intellectual, psychological, or learning disabilities such as academic expectations. Currently, most disabled students who receive accommodations within their classes had to go through a process within their school that highlights the medical model of disability instead of the social model.

Ella Browning expands on the emphasis of the medical model of disability within the article “Disability Studies in the Composition Classroom” by explaining that disabled students have responsibility and pressure put on them by the university to advocate for the accommodations they need, but not only is the process to receive the accommodations through a university office difficult, but it is reliant on a model of disability that centers the disabled person as the negative instead of the barrier they are facing. The emphasis on the use of the medical model instead of the social model can result in students not receiving proper accommodations due to the office not having a clear understanding of what challenges disabled students realistically face and the different kinds of accommodations that are necessary, like using crip time instead of just limited time extensions on exams. Browning suggests that instead of putting the pressure on the students to use a flawed system within an institution that never planned on including

them in the first place, educators should attempt to create a classroom that is accessible to all students, meaning disabled students would hopefully not have to advocate for different accommodations, so they have equal opportunity to succeed in the classroom without having to advocate and navigate changes on their own.

Unfortunately, since the accommodation process is what has been implemented for disabled students to use for decades, the concept of educators *preemptively* making their classroom accessible isn't always reciprocated. Stephanie Kerschbaum explains in her article "Anecdotal Relations: On Orienting to Disability in the Composition Classroom" that many instructors may not believe that they will have a disabled student in their classroom, but regardless of whether a teacher believes they have or will have a disabled student in their classroom is arbitrary and that it is instead important to preemptively work to create a space already welcoming for that student. Kerschbaum explains that disability may not be brought up by a student for many different reasons and that just because you may think disability isn't present within your classroom until you are informed otherwise doesn't mean that you should just disregard any kind of accessible teaching practices. By trying to create an accessible environment from the start regardless of knowing your students' ability statuses, it takes the pressure off of the disabled students to have to fight and advocate for simply the same opportunities and experiences as their classmates.

Changes being made to things such as the way syllabi is worded, attendance policies, grading policies, how educators assess students in areas like participation, how assignments are designed, and overall how you teach the material are simple accessible

applications that could benefit disabled students from the beginning. These are practices that many disabled educators have adapted themselves and suggest to others to implement. Anne-Marie Womack and Tara Wood give examples of why accessibility is so important, especially within composition classrooms, and how educators should begin to go about creating a more accessible classroom by using the techniques mentioned above. More specifically, Wood talks about crip time being used within the composition classroom in her article “Crippling Time in the College Composition Classroom” and explains that not only does crip time benefit disabled students but that it would also benefit other non-disabled students as well since normative conceptions of time and production negatively constrain students’ performances altogether. Womack goes on to expand on this idea that accessible pedagogy will benefit all students within her article “Teaching Is Accommodation: Universally Designing Composition Classrooms and Syllabi” where she looks at different strategies for implementing these kinds of changes in a way that centers universal design to benefit all students.

These few examples of how to create a more accessible classroom overlap with some of the main practices I have seen being used by educators who are teaching through an antiracist lens. While the target audiences of each pedagogy may be different (if we aren’t looking at the direct overlap of these identities), BIPOC and disabled students are still some of the most marginalized students within higher education and since some of the practices are already do similar, it could be beneficial to look at the other practices that exist within each pedagogy to join them together and apply them to the larger population of students. Throughout the rest of this paper, I will provide more concrete

examples of the similarities and differences between the two pedagogical approaches and what I am proposing we do by combining them through example documents that will benefit both disabled and BIPOC students.

ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY BACKGROUND

The main purpose of both antiracist and accessible pedagogical practices is to help create an equitable environment for students with marginalized identities within higher education considering the academy was built on valuing whiteness and ability, among other dominant privileged identities. One of the similarities in these conversations about inclusive pedagogy is how both practices must justify their need to be used in higher education due to a general denial of the systemic oppression of those specific groups within the larger context of our nation, and therefore leading to the denial of the existence of oppression within academia. Both antiracist pedagogy and accessible pedagogy aim to center marginalized identities for the first time within the classroom, yet they are rarely discussed together. The overlap in these approaches potentially allows educators to create a new kind of pedagogy that focuses on two of the most marginalized groups of students within higher education by drawing in the similarities and differences within both practices that not only will help marginalized students, but all students.

Similarly to disability pedagogy, scholars who practice antiracist pedagogy typically need to begin with explaining the basic concept that society as a whole has not moved past its structural racism and therefore is translated into the institutions such as academia. Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young expand on institutional racism in the

introduction of their book “Performing Antiracist Pedagogy” where they also go on to explain that antiracist teaching cannot work if the educator is not always working to be antiracist themselves as a complicit part of the institution as well as advocating for a broader antiracist space like a classroom. Condon and Young further explain that race as an identifier translates into either a privilege or disenfranchisement within higher education and that most attempts to embrace diversity within the classroom are rooted in the myth that colorblindness is necessary to be antiracist in a diverse classroom when realistically race needs to be seen instead of ignored to properly understand the impact oppression has on BIPOC students. Educators need to acknowledge the ubiquity of race within the classroom and beyond in order to properly use antiracist teaching practices which is further argued by the authors Charise Pimentel, Octavio Pimentel, and John Dean.

In order for instructors to be able to properly implement any kind of inclusive pedagogy, it first requires that instructors acknowledge their own privileges, implicit bias, and identities within academia and the larger world. It is not simply enough to just be not racist or not ableist, you have to actively *work* to be anti-racist and anti-ableist. In the article “Strategies for Antiracist and Decolonized Teaching” written by Anamika Twyman-Ghoshal and Danielle Carkin Lacorazza, the concept of recognizing your own bias and personal part within a racist institution is the first step to beginning to teach through an antiracist lens. Within this article there are many examples of practical applications of antiracist teaching that I will get into later in this section, but Twyman-Ghoshal and Carkin Lacorazza begin with explaining that as educators there is a “social

responsibility to provide students with the comprehensive education they deserve, not one that is inherently racist and colonizing” acknowledging the systemic racism within higher education that educators cannot deny in order to begin teaching through an antiracist lens.

Not only is it important to acknowledge your own privilege and bias within the classroom, but you have to create an environment where the students can learn to do the same hopefully resulting in marginalized students feeling valued and welcome to be themselves unapologetically within the space. Twyman-Ghoshal and Carkin Lacorazza break up their article into five main examples of how to decolonize your classroom and teach with an antiracist perspective. Those five steps are listed as “Acknowledge our own biases and privilege, Revising courses and curricula, Amplify minoritized voices, Incorporating high impact learning activities, [and] Developing community partnerships” which are all very important but the most interesting ones in relation to combining antiracist and accessible pedagogy are “Revising courses and curricula [and] Amplify minoritized voices” as they overlap with some of the already existing examples of practices within accessible pedagogy. For example, regarding courses and curricula, some of the examples Twyman-Ghoshal and Carkin Lacorazza provide are making sure you are creating class content that ensures “social and racial inequalities are not re/produced” requiring “critical assessment of the core objects” within a course and “examination of the concepts that guide disciplines”. Meaning educators need to critically analyze the content they were taught and identify how systems of injustice are perpetuated within that content. This is especially important within composition

classrooms because the assessment of proper use of the “standard” English language often reflects racism and ableism (Patrick Jonathan Derilus). One of the examples both antiracist and accessible pedagogy scholars suggest is to grade from a perspective that does not support penalizing for the misuse of standard English. Therefore, impacting the way things like essays are graded which would mean switching the focus on things like grammar, sentence structure, spelling, etc. the focus should be put on the students’ ability to properly convey their argument in a coherent and cohesive manner that doesn’t rely on linguistic specificities. This is also extremely beneficial for disabled students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and even autism spectrum disorder who may have a hard time following all of the rules of standard English while writing and revising essays and other kinds of written work. Due to this kind of overlap within these practices, it allows educators to begin to examine other possible overlaps within the two pedagogies that we could use to create a new kind of pedagogy.

Asao Inoue further argues the racist history standard English has as well in his book *Antiracist Writing Ecologies* where in chapter one, “The Function of Race in Writing Assessments” he explains that language continues to change overtime and due to structural racism, we have developed a language preference thus expecting people to talk in a specific way in order to be deemed correct which doesn’t take linguistic differences, like AAVE, into account. Inoue goes on to explain that the ways in which we assess students' writing based on this idea of standard English puts nonwhite students at a disadvantage due to the lack of acceptance in linguistic variation. Which means in order

to assess students equally and in an antiracist way we have to ultimately shift the ways in which we look at language, writing, and assessment.

Some other examples of antiracist classroom applications include making sure your assignments don't include anything that assumes the background of your students, making sure your courses and curriculum value a "diversity of approaches and are not privileging dominant forms of knowledge", and purposely including voices of the marginalized within your class (Twyman-Ghoshal and Carkin Lacorazza) which can all be translated into practices within accessible pedagogy and to reflect disabled students and disabled identities as well. While these are suggestions that were made specifically for antiracist teaching, it is clear that these examples could be useful as well to apply to any kind of inclusive pedagogy.

SYLLABUS ALTERATIONS

The syllabus of a class is usually the first interaction students have with their instructor and the course therefore it is incredibly important to format your syllabus in a way that makes students of all backgrounds feel prepared to succeed within your classroom. Womack explains that by using universal design within the classroom and syllabi you will not only center disabled students and make sure you are presenting them with documents and spaces that are accessible, but it also benefits all students by creating content, like the syllabus, that is addressed and structured in a way that acknowledges the imbalance typically experienced within classrooms and is made in a way to proactively avoid that.

Womack explains that the use of cooperative language is important in order to convey the empathy and approachability of an instructor which is incredibly important to marginalized students, so they feel comfortable talking to their instructors about their needs and concerns, such as class accommodations (512). This means not only should all of the text within your syllabus be focused on students understanding that you are there to help them and work with their needs but it should also be working to create a community environment within your classroom where your marginalized students actually feel that sense of security and inclusion. Instead of focusing on only embracing students' different needs and putting the responsibility on them to advocate for those needs, the focus should be on creating a community of people that look out for one another and create a space that is safe for all while making it clear that if more changes need to be made then they will be.

Womack is talking specifically about areas within the syllabi such as accessibility statements, learning outcomes, and the structure of the syllabus to be preemptively accessible to disabled students in order to make sure they feel comfortable speaking up about the accommodations they need, but this concept of cooperative language can be applied to antiracist pedagogy as well. As I previously stated within this thesis, to actively practice antiracist pedagogy you have to constantly work to understand how race plays a part in all areas of life and just like preemptively creating an accessible syllabi, you should proactively write a syllabi that makes your BIPOC students feel safe and seen within your classroom as well, especially if you are a white instructor. This idea that you need to be able to understand how disability impacts all areas of life just like race is what

connects my suggested use of cooperative language used within syllabi to make all students feel seen and heard in their experiences and needs. Below is an example of an adaptation to a policy already required:

Inclusivity Policy:

Racism, homophobia, misogyny, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, classism, and other forms of intolerance including the use of slurs will **NOT** be accepted in our classroom. This class is a space where people of all backgrounds are welcome and valued. This is a safe space for all students to learn, grow, and be supported. I am confident that we are all capable of being mature adults and being respectful to ourselves and others. If you do not feel that you can abide by this policy, then you should reach out to me about dropping this course. Also, if you hear a student participating in harmful rhetoric that I am not present to hear, please let me know (you will remain anonymous) so I can speak with that student one on one.

<Insert University Inclusivity Policy Here>

I created this statement to include in combination with the standard university statement that is typically required to be included within a syllabus. It is important for all of your students to hear a more personalized version of the inclusivity policy in order to begin trusting you and your intentions as an educator. Since creating this statement is not required, it shows that you are already putting effort into making sure the marginalized students within your class are supported by you, that you won't tolerate any abuse towards them that may occur from other students, and that equity is actually an important

aspect to you within your classroom and that you are not just including the inclusivity policy because the university is forcing you to.

The statement above is modified a bit more compared to the inclusivity statement I was suggested to use when I began teaching English composition and rhetoric. Below, you can see the Clemson University standard Inclusivity Policy that instructors are required to include within their syllabus:

Inclusivity Policy:

Clemson University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, veteran's status, genetic information or protected activity in employment, educational programs and activities, admissions and financial aid. This includes a prohibition against sexual harassment and sexual violence as mandated by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. This Title IX policy is located on the Campus Life website. Ms. Alesia Smith is the Clemson University Title IX Coordinator, and the Executive Director of Equity Compliance. Her office is located at 223 Brackett Hall, 864.656.0620. Remember, email is not a fully secured method of communication and should not be used to discuss Title IX issues.

As you can see, the policy I used versus the policy the school gives us is more personalized and directed towards my classroom. While I do also include the official policy, I always make sure to include my own version *first* so they can hear it actually

coming from me. After my first semester teaching and doing this, I had a student come to me and explain it made them instantly feel safe and protected within my class. They went on to explain to me that as one of the few queer students of color within that course they were worried at first about speaking up due to the backlash they may have faced from their peers, but when presented with my personal inclusivity policy they realized that I would not let that happen and that they felt for one of the first times ever within school that they could speak up without fear while feeling like what they had to say was just as important as everybody else.

The reaction my students had to something that took me only a little bit of energy, a few minutes to write, and then a little bit of time to revise and add on to the standard policy proves that it takes minimal effort and time to make sure that your students know you are a safe person that is ready to advocate for them.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment within composition classrooms has always varied from instructor to instructor as educators can decide what they want to concentrate on, but most of the standard ways English instructors are taught to assess and grade are still rooted in racism and ableism even with the slight fluctuations in place. Some of the standard requirements that are used while assessing writing within the composition classroom tends to be looking at the use of Standard American English (SAE), if grammar rules are being followed, spelling mistakes, and if there is proper punctuation (Inoue, Mike Rose).

Over the years as antiracist pedagogy has continued to rise, it has been brought to attention that penalizing students for not properly using SAE in composition classrooms may result in BIPOC students being penalized for simply having a linguistic variance not taken into account within their writing. Asao Inoue explains this a bit further in his book *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*, where he argues that the existence of linguistic variance has been acknowledged within the academy for a while, but it has been ignored as valid forms of communication and language due to its connection to race resulting in BIPOC students continuing to have their writing assessed poorly. Inoue explains that realistically, linguistic variances like African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has just as many rules and stipulations as SAE and should be considered just as valued and valid as SAE. Inoue explains that we do not see AAVE as lesser than SAE because it is less “legitimate, rule-governed, or communicative” but instead because SAE has been historically connected to whiteness and dominant discourse thus connecting the two (29-31).

Inoue explains that BIPOC students with linguistic variances are then penalized for not performing language in a way that is connected to whiteness, so it is inherently seen as incorrect. This same concept of marginalized students not adhering to the dominant form of language and therefore being penalized can be applied to disabled students as well. While this may seem like there is not much of a connection, many disabled students who deal with disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (among others) may not write or communicate in a way that follows all of the requirements for SAE and the grammar and punctuation rules that come

along with it due to their disabilities. Margot Rosenblatt explains in the article “Grammar Upholds an Oppressive System” that certain disabilities, like the ones I listed above as well as others such as visually impaired individuals, may have a difficult time writing in SAE and employing proper grammatical applications due to their disability. For example, Rosenblatt argues that a visually impaired person who misses a typo within their writing such as a misspelled word and is penalized for it is an ableist force penalizing disabled students for things out of their control.

I am arguing that both of these critiques of typical writing assessment are extremely important to understand, and instead of just making exceptions for those students who you know may have linguistic variances or a disability that prohibits them from using SAE consistently that we as instructors completely shift how we look at assessing writing. Instead of focusing on things like SAE, grammar, punctuation, spelling etc. I argue that we instead should just focus on things like if the reader can identify their argument or main point easily, if they are conveying their information properly, if they are providing enough support to make their writing coherent and cohesive, etc., and only request changes to language, grammar, and punctuation if it is completely incoherent and therefore unable to be understood properly to be assessed. While some instructors already do this, I think it is important to assess and grade writing only based on those things and to be upfront and clear with your students in the beginning in order to take the pressure off of the BIPOC and disabled students that may already feel the need to perform a certain way on assignments due to their previous experiences before they even start their first assignment for your specific course. In order to do this, I believe there should either

be a section on the syllabus that addresses this in a clear way or within a kind of master document distributed to the students that addresses the way that you assess and grade their writing with an emphasis on the things that you will *not* penalize them for instead of what you *will* penalize them for. Example:

I will grade your writing assignments based on your ability to state a clear thesis, develop an argument that aligns with the prompt, support your claims, organize your paper, cite your sources, and other requirements that will be further expanded upon and specified per assignment type. I will **not** take points off for things like grammar errors, punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, or linguistic variation. In the instance that there is a part of your assignment that I cannot completely read, I will ask you to clarify what you are saying and make revisions to it instead of immediately penalizing you. I am concerned with your ability to read, cite, argue, support, and analyze things, not if you can memorize where to put a semicolon.

The goal of this is for students to feel that they are on an equal playing field within the composition classroom and instead of worrying about things that may be out of their control, they instead can just focus on developing their ideas, advancing their knowledge, and learning how to properly convey their thoughts. While it is important for them to understand what is going to be graded, it also acts as a kind of welcoming gesture to students who may have otherwise been excluded or are used to being excluded and struggling due to typical grading policies.

In my short experience of teaching English composition and rhetoric, I have already had students from both of the marginalized groups I am talking about come and speak to me personally about how that impacted them and the way they navigated our course. One student who had a disability that made it hard for them to spell correctly and follow standard grammar rules explained to me at the end of class on our first day together that when I talked about the things I wouldn't be penalizing students for, they felt like they had a weight lifted off of their shoulders and that they finally felt like they would be able to create the same level of work as their classmates when not having to focus on the hindrances their disability may cause. Similarly, I had a student of color tell me at the end of the year that when I talked about how I cared about *what* they were saying instead of the way they are saying it made them feel more secure within the class and gave them the confidence to speak up in class and talk about their ideas without the worry of "trying to sound smart" (sadly, their words) which Baker-Bell explains is a common reaction many BIPOC students have when they internalize the racism within academia. The result that I have had by being upfront with my students about what I plan on assessing is one that is definitely worth the small effort that it takes to bring up in the beginning of the semester and include in either your syllabus, within assignment prompts, or wherever else you see fit.

SELF-REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

Within both antiracist and disability pedagogical frameworks there is a main commonality that in order to properly teach with either of those pedagogies in mind you

need to be able to not only acknowledge the apparent need for said pedagogy, but also that you need to fully understand the impact that systemic oppression has on those groups of students within every area of their life. Instructors have to be able to assess their own bias in order to properly enact the practices needed to use that pedagogical framework properly, but should also encourage their students to do the same (Twyman-Ghoshal, Carkin Lacorazza, Kerschbaum).

To help instructors implement this combined pedagogy, I suggest a guided self-reflection assignment where students, through a list of required points to address, reflect on their own privileges, implicit bias, and expectations of writing and language. Ideally, this would be one of the first assignments that the students would complete and would introduce them not only to composition studies but also the inherent prejudice within composition courses and the academy. By assigning a reflection assignment like this in the beginning of the course, you are showing your students that you too work to address your own bias and privileges and are working to now help students who may have never looked at their own bias and privileges before do the same to create a more self-aware and safe space for marginalized students within your classroom. This also gives your marginalized students, specifically BIPOC and disabled students, the opportunity to, if they please, be vulnerable and share helpful information with you about the struggles they may have already had within the education system, giving you insight on what areas you may need to pay specific attention to within your own courses.

This assignment prompt could take shape in different ways, but my example takes the approach of using a bullet point list for the required topics to cover, as you can see below:

Bias Within the Composition Classroom: Self-Reflection Assignment

For this assignment, you will address your own privileges, implicit bias, and views of writing and language through a writing assignment. There is no specific format required, just make sure to include your name and course number. There is also no required length for this assignment as the focus should just be on fully addressing all of the points below. As long as you address all of the points, include your name and course number, and turn this in to me sometime within the next two weeks, you will receive a grade of complete.

Required Points to Address:

- What are your specific privileges? Think about race, ability, gender, religion, sexuality, class status, immigration status, etc. How do your certain privileges impact your experience with education?
- How can you use your privilege for good? How can you help amplify marginalized voices with that privilege through writing or communication?
- What does inclusive language consist of? What is your experience with using inclusive language? What do you do to make sure you are staying up

to date with how to communicate respectfully with people of all backgrounds?

- What are common stereotypes that you see people believing within your environment? Are you responsible for believing those stereotypes as well? Why? What can you do to challenge those stereotypes?
- Do you surround yourself with people different from you outside of school or work? Think about your own identity markers and the identity markers of your friends and family. Are they similar or not? Why do you think that is? What can you do to diversify who you surround yourself with?
- What qualities do you consider reflect “good” use of language? What do you believe qualifies certain use of language as “good” or “bad”? Do you think this is impacted by the representation you have been exposed to?
- What do you think “good” writing consists of? What characteristics differentiate “good” writing from “bad” writing? What connection does your views have to the common dominant voices within society?
- What are your own identity markers? What voices do you see prioritized within classrooms? People with similar or different identity markers than yourself? Do you know when your opinion is required and when it isn’t during conversations that include marginalized communities?
- Have you seen certain policies within your classes that seemed to privilege one kind of student over another? If so, where did you fall within that dynamic?

While not all of these points need to be included within your assignment as well as the fact that things could be added, as this is not an exhaustive list of topics related to this issue, this is a basic example of the assignment that you could adapt and mold to be your own. The example above also includes an example of the combined pedagogy I am advocating for via the other assignment requirements such as due date, format, grading, and length.

CONCLUSION

Not only are these practices extremely important to implement for disabled students and BIPOC students who are immediately put at a disadvantage within the academy, but by putting both of these pedagogical practices together and highlighting the impact that the concepts have on both marginalized groups, it allows educators to better understand how racism and ableism are prevalent forces within academia that we have to actively work hard against in order to provide equitable opportunities and experiences.

This new combined pedagogy also allows educators to see how different identities can intersect and overlap and that the needs of each marginalized group can be very different, there are also very similar practices that can easily be put in place to help benefit many different marginalized students as well as the student population as a whole.

As previously mentioned many times throughout this thesis, whiteness and ability are centered and admired within academia. This inherently puts those of us who do not fit into those categories into a box of what we can do, what is expected of us, and more importantly what we *cannot* do. The main goal of this thesis is to prove that regardless of

identity markers, there is a space for us within the academy regardless of the history or what others might believe. Having different needs or lived experiences is not a comment on our character, work ethic, or ability to succeed. By implementing the simple pedagogical techniques mentioned within this thesis to finally center the students who are often forgotten about while also benefiting the larger student population you are taking a stance of support for those of us who have historically struggled to be seen and valued within the academy while overall creating a more safe, comfortable, and equitable classroom for all of your students.

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