

Dear Committee,

Hello! My name is Payton Clancy, and I'm so pleased to be able to share my thesis with all of you! I'm very thankful for your time, and I hope you enjoy my study and story on translanguaging pedagogies and creativity in the classroom!

The critical components of my research are pretty much revised and edited, but my story could be revised more heavily. I do know the things I want to change with it, but I would love your feedback on possible areas I could cut, as my story is a bit long, and areas where I could possibly lean more into Black vernacular, such as Eliza's poem. I'm also curious about Colleen's relationship with her mom and if I could signify that a bit more. All other feedback is welcome, and I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday for my defense!

Sincerely,
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Student and Teacher of Color Perspectives in Educational Environments:
A Fictional Approach

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ENG 498: Honor Thesis

Professor Emily Hoover

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Introduction

What if I told you that everything you thought you knew about English as a taught subject was based on the language and ideologies of white supremacy? Would you believe me? I don't know if I would believe me either, as it's so brushed over in our society that we categorize what we learn in English classes as "normal" or "proper" without even taking a second glance. This is why when I started my journey through writing studies courses in my undergraduate studies, I was left in shock. Everything I knew about the English I wrote and spoke in school was based on whiteness being superior to every race and identity, and I was mortified. The English I spoke with friends and family, however, was not "standard English," in fact, it was far from it. This was the English that was then encouraged to me in college, and soon, I began research on other forms of English that are not included in English classrooms but should be.

In a brief review of the literature I studied, translanguaging, as defined by Angel M. Y. Lin, started as a "pedagogical practice in Welsh/English bilingual education classrooms where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use" (1). For example, this means that a teacher of a Spanish-speaking student could then incorporate Spanish into their teaching to help them learn English, aiding bilingual and multilingual students. Although with the progression of translanguaging in English classrooms, it has changed into a new definition, defining itself as an "aim at mobilizing students' familiar resources to scaffold their mastery of the target resources" (Lin 7). This means that all forms of English and all languages should then be incorporated into English classrooms through translanguaging pedagogies, as this would allow students to use what is "familiar" (Lin 7) to them to master reading and writing. This is where the brilliant pedagogies of scholars Dr. April Baker-Bell and

bell hooks come into the picture. Dr. April Baker-Bell, through her impactful book titled *Linguistic Justice*, introduces the importance of incorporating Black vernacular and Anti-racism into English classrooms, as she writes:

Black people and Black Language scholars keep having to remind y'all that it is a legit language. James Baldwin (1979) said it best in the New York Times, 'If Black English isn't a language, then tell me, what is?' From a purely linguistic standpoint, like 'every naturally used language, [Black Language] is systematic with regular rules at the lexical, phonological, and grammatical level' (Stanford University, 2002, p. 1) (12).

bell hooks thinks similarly to Dr. April Baker-Bell with her book *Teaching to Transgress*, writing, "In academic circles, both in the sphere of teaching and that of writing, there has been little effort made to utilize black vernacular - or, for that matter, any language other than standard English" (171). To say the least, I was inspired by these two women and what they stood for, as Black vernacular, and any vernacular for that matter, should be taught in the classroom to help students connect to their identities. If they can't even have access to their own language and dialect in the classroom, how are they supposed to learn without stripping them of who they are? These ideas then led me to my first two research questions, one being how do the experiences of African American female educators differ from the experiences of white male and white female educators, both in student-facing contexts and in interactions with administrators? And two being is the concept of trans-language present in mainstream education, and how does this portrayal affect the identities of students of color? A story of a female teacher of color trying to incorporate translanguaging then started to ferment from these important questions, but before I could begin writing, I needed to return to the works of crafting effective fiction that I had become familiar with.

In my time as a creative writing minor, I learned from several craft books on how to write effective fiction, and if I wanted to bring Colleen to life—she is the protagonist of the story you will read below— I knew I needed to return to the one that has and probably always will have the most effect on me: Robert Olen Butler’s *From Where You Dream*. Butler’s narrative theory utilizes sensory and dream-like states to write fiction, bringing the reader into the world of the characters and their story. To write a well-developed and relatable story, Butler’s strategies were needed, as I wanted the reader to feel as close to Colleen and her desires as possible. This also meant that since I was writing outside my positionality, I needed to not only research the work of Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks, but also conduct interviews of my own with women of color and women of color educators, to which I interviewed two individuals. It would have been extremely unethical and unjust for me to write from my own positionality about the female Black experience without conducting these interviews. Because of my positionality, this work will never be completely finalized, but it’s important to do it anyway, as any awareness of these subjects needs to be expressed to change the state of our English classrooms and how qualitative research is presented as an option for creative writers.

In approaching translinguaging pedagogies through fiction, I knew I was not only acknowledging the experiences of women of color, specifically women of color educators, but I was also acknowledging the importance of creativity in English classrooms as a pedagogical practice as well. Creativity, alongside the languages and dialects that should be taught in classrooms, is a language in itself, as it brings out the identities of students in ways I never had and thousands of other students in America never got to experience. This is why I looked to genre-bending works, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer’s “*Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass*”, for inspiration to build my own genre-bending work. Writings like this bend what is

academic and what isn't, and question preconceived ideas of knowledge, creating a bend in what is expected from research-based studies. This idea then influenced my last research question: How is creative writing perceived in academic writing spaces, and how might these perceptions hinder a student's self-acceptance and awareness of their identities? Through Colleen's story, I will be addressing creativity in academic spaces, translanguaging pedagogies, the experience of women of color educators, and the dynamics they face in the classroom and by the administration of schools they teach in, creating a story of what needs to be taught in English classrooms to encourage educators and students of all identities.

Literature Review

In conducting my quantitative research, I wanted to first come back to novels and articles that I had been studying throughout my time as an undergraduate student in Writing Studies classes. This, more often than not, consisted of the works of two scholars: Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks. Though they both have significant numbers of work to choose from, I chose to focus my research on their two most well-known pieces of literature, Dr. April Baker-Bell's novel, *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, and bell hook's novel, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. I also wanted to effectively define the term translanguaging and its origins, since both of these scholars talk about translanguaging concepts to a familiar audience. Translanguaging, as I mentioned above, started as a pedagogy for bilingual and multilingual students to connect their language(s) to what they were learning inside English classrooms (Lin 1) and has since transcended to incorporating all languages and dialects inside the classroom to connect students to content. The starting chapter from *Translanguaging in Multilingual English Classrooms*, titled "Introduction: Translanguaging and Translanguaging Pedagogies" by scholar Angel M. Y. Lin details translanguaging's history, articulating its pedagogy and its importance to education. Outside of studying the concepts of translanguaging, I also wanted to return to the methods of craft when writing fiction. The novel *From Where You Dream* by novelist and professor Robert Olen Butler, although quite disheartening at times, teaches its reader to only write through their senses and enter a dream-like state to produce effective fiction. With these works from scholars, I was able to effectively build a story and primarily a main character, Colleen Davis, into an empowering educator. Her role as a teacher of color incorporates the ideas of Dr. April Baker-Bell, bell hooks, and Angel M. Y.

Lin, and I wouldn't have been able to bring her to life without the strategies of fiction taught by Butler.

To start, though Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks are well established in their studies, they both approach translanguaging in different ways, with Dr. April-Baker Bell's approach emphasizing the individual experiences of black students and educators fighting for their vernacular in academic spaces, and bell hooks focusing on the strategies of how to be an effective and inclusive teacher to not only black students but to all students of color and economic classes. This greatly impacted the way I approached the creative component of my study, as I wanted to make Colleen an inclusive teacher, per bell hooks's ideology, while also expressing pedagogies that are built off of black vernacular being used in the classroom. As talked about by Baker-Bell, the use of black vernacular in academic spaces shuns the white supremacist English we learn in English classes today, with her encouraging Anti-racist language in classrooms, writing:

Their confusion about the relationship between language and race points to the necessity of an Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy that provides students with space to examine how language, race, white supremacy, and anti-blackness intersect and how they can work against Anti-Black Linguistic Racism (19).

In making Colleen an endorser of Anti-racist pedagogies, she can then connect with her students of color, thus creating the storyline of her relationship with Eliza Berk. Similarly, bell hooks's emphasis on teacher/student dynamics of domination displays the risks and challenges of teaching in diverse classrooms, as of course, push back will be experienced by educators who choose to incorporate Anti-racist pedagogies in their classrooms, with hooks writing:

“In the classroom setting, I encourage students to use their first language and culture they know most intimately. Not surprisingly, when students in my Black Women Writers class began to speak using diverse language and speech, white students often complained. This seemed to be particularly the case with black vernacular” (172).

This difficulty inspired the relationship between Colleen and several other characters, such as Avy and Principal Cavri. Both Avy and Principal Cavri are subject to white privilege, in that they disregard Colleen’s teaching style and shun her for it without being aware of how their actions and words can hurt others, particularly Colleen and Eliza. hooks’s focus on empowerment of language also inspired several scenes, such as her emphasis on Black vernacular acting as a reclamation of English, saying:

I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor’s language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance. I imagine that the moment they realized the oppressor’s language, seized and spoken by the tongues of the colonized, could be a space of bonding was joyous (169).

In Colleen’s story, the poetry scene allows Eliza to take a personal experience and shape it around her vernacular. When she does this, Eliza reclaims her truth, asserting dominance over the oppressor’s English. Through the research of Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks, Colleen’s story was brought to life. Her story, although fictional, then spreads awareness of the concepts Baker-Bell and hooks have fought for in their careers, promoting translanguaging and the empowerment of students.

Furthermore, Dr. April Baker-Bell’s work and bell hooks’s work can be defined through one singular concept, translanguaging. In Angel M. Y. Lin’s introduction, *Translanguaging in Multilingual English Classrooms*, translanguaging was a Welsh term, “*trawsieithu*”, originally

coined by Cen Williams “in 1994 to refer to a pedagogical practice in Welsh/English bilingual education classrooms where students [were] asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use” (Lin 1). Since its debut, translanguaging has transformed into allowing all forms of language into academic spaces, such as with the pedagogies Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks encourage as educators. What they teach, although still technically in forms of one language as opposed to multiple, follows the “pedagogical functions” talked about by Angel M. Y. Lin, in that black vernacular and Anti-racist pedagogies create a home-to-school link for students, encourage a deeper understanding of the subject being taught, help integrate fluent speakers with early learners, and help the “development of the weaker language” (2), which is White Mainstream English, although most white speakers don’t even regard this as their native language. Though Colleen is a teacher of a creative writing class, and does not necessarily have to teach a second language to students, like in a standard English class, her utilization of translanguaging pedagogies, such as Anti-racist language, allows her students to embrace their identities through their speech, transcending into their creative writing. This is evident in the very start of the story, as she and Eliza engage in a conversation in Black vernacular when discussing Colleen’s published fiction. This then illustrates how her students’ creative writing will have no connection to White Mainstream English and will only represent who they are and the stories they want to tell. With Angel M. Y. Lin’s research, I was able to create links from the original concept of translanguaging to the work of Dr. April Baker-Bell and bell hooks, inspiring Colleen’s methods of teaching and its outcomes for her students.

Now, shifting to the effectiveness of fiction writing, the strategies of Robert Olen Butler were highly influential in approaching Colleen’s story. Butler emphasizes the importance of sensual writing, or writing from your senses, taste, smell, touch, etc, as opposed to telling a story

through our analytical mind. He encourages his students to enter their “zone” or “dreamspace” when writing, as anything written out of this space is not good fiction, and probably, from his view, should be “shelved” (Butler 24). In other words, Butler seems to want his readers to exit their academic, school-oriented minds, which can be linked to translanguaging’s pedagogical approach, as similar to embracing native languages in an English classroom, he values the emotional mind as equal to the analytical mind. Butler also has many writing prompts within his book, *From Where You Dream*, that can help writers enter their dreamspaces and write sensually, one being the seven stages exercise. In this exercise, the writer is asked to have their character wake up somewhere that is not their bedroom, and have them go through a series of stages with objects near them that evoke memories in the character (Butler 167-168). Butler’s “zone” (24) based exercises can also be applied to the concept of translanguaging, as the encouragement of entering a sensual writing space can empower a young writer in their own language and allow them to use it in their creative writing, which is what Colleen does with telling her students to think of a memory of someone or something that allowed them to be their true selves, motivating Eliza and even Avy to write heartfelt poems. I also used Butler’s seven stages exercise to become closer to Colleen’s specific wants and backstory, even inserting it into the story itself. With this exercise, Colleen’s mother became a driving force of motivation that then returned at the end of the story, circling back to her origins and why she so strongly believes in the pedagogies she teaches. I utilized a frame and a pen as my objects, and both make a return towards the story’s end, signifying Colleen’s yearning and tying loose ends between herself and other characters, such as Eliza. Although Butler’s approach to fiction can be discouraging, as he emphasizes early in his craft book that all the stories you’ve written thus far in the analytical mind may be “mortally flawed” (9), as they are not yet written sensually, his techniques cannot be denied their

influence on young writers. In writing through my senses and utilizing his prompts, I become closer to my creativity and the messages I want to write, bringing me closer to Colleen and her experiences as a female educator of color.

Overall, these works have made my story what it currently is. I wouldn't say the story is done, as it won't ever truly be finished, but these scholars have encouraged my ideas on empowering pedagogies like translanguaging and how they can be expressed through a fictional sphere. Dr. April-Baker Bell and bell hooks are two of the most established and profound scholars in their fields, and what we now know about Anti-racist pedagogies, incorporating black vernacular into academic spaces, the dynamics of diverse classrooms, and empowering students is largely through their influence. Butler's approach to fiction, as well as its links to translanguaging concepts, then allowed me to enter Colleen's motivations and fears, creatively expressing translanguaging pedagogies through a fictional story. Predominantly, these works, whether through Dr. April Baker-Bell's and bell hooks's inclusive pedagogies, Lin's defining concepts of translanguaging, or Butler's focus on sensual writing, all of them are fighting against the preconceived notions of what is expected in academic spaces. Translanguaging pedagogies declare that "improper language" can be used in English classrooms just as much as "professional language" can, and craft ideas like Butler's push that "sensual" writing is just as, if not more, valuable than "analytical" writing. This push to bring out one's identity through both their language and their writing proves that there needs to be a change in academic spaces in what is accepted in a classroom and what isn't, as students need opportunities to embrace their identities in school to effectively learn. Like I mentioned, this research and story won't ever be finished, but what I can continue to do with literature such as this is find even more that encourage translanguaging pedagogies and effective creative writing strategies that bridge the

gap felt in academic spaces such as English classrooms. In doing this, I am not only acknowledging my positionality, but I am acknowledging that there is far more work to be discovered, leaving Colleen's story as an effective work in progress.

Methods

After establishing my topics and how I wanted to approach them creatively, I began my qualitative research and application of the theories and pedagogies I studied in my writing studies courses, as well as my creative writing courses. This consisted of writing studies works and craft novels that I had become familiar with, which greatly influenced my knowledge of translanguaging, Anti-racist pedagogies, and writing effective fiction. This largely reflected the work of Dr. April Baker-Bell, bell hooks, and Robert Olen Butler, as discussed above in my literature review section. Regarding my qualitative research, I conducted two 30-minute to an hour-long Zoom interviews; one with a woman of color and the other with a retired woman of color educator to learn about their experiences in and outside the classroom. This allowed me to write Colleen's story with more knowledge of experiences outside my positionality.

However, before I could conduct my interviews, I was required to submit the topic of my study and interview questions to the Institutional Review Board. This process took several weeks, as I also had to become certified through CITI training, but it was necessary to validate my research and my data collection as ethical practices. Because I was conducting interviews with women outside of my positionality, it was very important for me to not only have my interview questions be ethical, but also allow my interviewees the choice to opt out of the interview or certain questions if they at any point felt uncomfortable or discouraged. To further this, I asked them if there was anything I could do to help them feel more comfortable during the interview process or an extra measure I could take to protect their privacy. Though neither of my interviewees showed great concern in this area, as I'm close with both of them, I did have one interviewee express to me that they would feel more comfortable in the interview if they had the

questions beforehand, to which I provided them the questions. The questions were written and asked as follows, with some being specific to the educator I interviewed:

Interview questions for both participants:

1. What was your experience in English classes growing up? Was there ever a time an educator took your voice or language away from you?
2. Do you feel that your identity was encouraged or discouraged by educators as a student? If either encouraged or discouraged, tell me more about that experience.
3. In school, was there ever a time you felt discriminated against by a teacher or student? If so, tell me more about that experience and how it made you feel.

Specifically for educator interview:

4. What have your experiences been like as an educator of color? Was there ever a time you felt discriminated against by either administration, a colleague, or one of your students?
5. Based on your teaching philosophies, what are your opinions on writing and identity concepts, such as creative writing and trans-language in academic spaces? Do you think they belong in a classroom?

Though these 5 questions covered my topics, in the process of my interviews, I asked more off-the-cuff questions regarding their answers, which were mostly elaborations on the life experiences they told me about. These elaborations were a part of the “tell me more” strategy, which allows your interviewees to feel more comfortable about the experiences and feelings they’re expressing. In conducting these interviews, my main concern was that they both felt comfortable or comfortable enough to tell me if they had concerns, as it is a sensitive subject matter. Thankfully, they both expressed comfort and confidence in answering my questions, and I am grateful to them for their willingness to be vulnerable in this project.

To come back to the IRB process, I also provided a consent form and an e-signature Google form to confirm and inform them of their acceptance to participate in my study. In addition, once the study is finalized, both interviewees will receive an audio and transcription

copy of their interview to ensure their privacy, and their interviews will be deleted once the three-year permit of my CITI training expires. Both interviewees have expressed to me that they also want copies of my final project, which I will provide them copies. In summary, my two interviews were substantial to the research of my study, as I wouldn't have been able to write Colleen's story without learning their experiences, and due to the IRB, I was able to practice my research ethically, ensuring the protection of my interviewees.

Results

My first interview took place about a week or so after my approval from the IRB, and was with a retired female educator of color who taught dance at a high school for 10 years of her life. She grew up in New York and lived there for most of her life, teaching in the Bronx. She identifies as half Black and half Puerto Rican and is a dear friend of mine, making our interview comfortable and relaxed. In our time together, she expressed a great amount of discrimination she faced when she was younger, and although she said it didn't specifically have to do with her experience in school, she said her time as a dancer was where she faced the most discrimination. She said she was always put in the back of the class and wasn't picked for solos, although she was just as talented as her fellow dancers, and felt that it was because she was "too loud" and didn't look like the other girls, saying, "You either look this way or you don't. And if you don't, you're put in the back and it doesn't matter how great you are, it doesn't matter" (Interview 1). She explained that this mostly happened in her ballet classes, which, as a past dancer myself, I understand, as ballet is not a very inclusive and accepting profession. She also said that she often felt like she was "less than" because of the ridicule she faced as a dancer of color, telling me that she was perceived by the way she "looked" and "sounded", and was judged before her teachers or fellow dancers could "even see [her] do a step" (Interview 1). None of the discrimination she faced stopped her from dancing, however, and she eventually found teachers who encouraged her talent, one even having her audition for LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, to which she was waitlisted and then was accepted.

Later in her life, when she became a dance teacher, she expressed that she did have difficulty with one member of the faculty, the artistic director, and evidently enough, the dance teacher who got her to audition for LaGuardia. She told me that it was a very "love-hate

relationship”, to which she thought my interviewee was talented, but disliked her because of a preconceived notion that she was “lazy” and too “social” (Interview 1). She also said that she saw ballet, her core teaching, as very “vanilla” and saw my interviewee as “too dark skinned” (Interview 1). My interviewee describes this further, saying;

She thought ballet was the sun, the moon, the stars, and there's no in between. There's no planets. There's no comets. There's no in between, and she's old school, and it looks a certain way. This is before dance became as commercial as it is now. And as diversified as it is now, this is way before that. You know what I mean? There's no dark skin (Interview 1).

I was deeply moved by what my friend said here, as even though she expressed this with quite a beautiful analogy, it doesn't lessen the meaning of her words. Even as a teacher, she faced discrimination from someone who seemed to encourage her and belittle her at the same time because of her race and extroverted personality. She also expressed an issue with a student she once had, as she believed the student was just trying to “coast” through her class and refused to listen to the things she told her (Interview 1). My interviewee then had to speak to the principal and the student's grandmother, who was raising the student, several different times, and the student eventually left the school. Other than that, however, my interviewee expressed great admiration for her time as a teacher, and even said that she is still in contact with many of her students. She told me that as a teacher, “when you make an impact, they let you know” (Interview 1), and I strongly agree with that sentiment.

As for my second interview, which took place about two weeks after the IRB approved my study, I interviewed another friend. Though she is not or was not an educator, she is a woman of color, identifying as Black, and originally is from South Carolina, but moved around due to

her mother's role in the military. During our time together, she told me that she did not face a great deal of discrimination growing up, and for the most part, loved her English classes. She said the most discrimination she faced was from other students, as she liked things, like Anime and rock music, and dressed differently than they did, causing other students to make fun of her. She said that because of her different interests, she would often switch between groups and who to hang out with, telling me, "You know my millie rock is good on every block, so I had friends in every class" (Interview 2). She then said that her group called her "Oreo" (Interview 2) because of her mingling between groups, which is a slur often used in Black language to describe someone who is half Black and half white. She also told me that there was one incident with a teacher when she was in middle school that led her to switch schools, as a teacher used a slur against the Black students in her class. She told me that she had no idea what the slur meant at the time, but came home that day and told her mom about what had happened. Her mother was then furious and went to the school to speak to the principal, but to the knowledge of my interviewee, the teacher received no disciplinary action, and my interviewee changed schools soon after. I was quite taken aback by this, as it is despicable to me that the teacher she talked about received no disciplinary action for her discriminatory behavior, but I admired her mother's strength in this situation, as it must have been a very nerve-wracking and difficult situation to address.

In talking about how creativity showed up in my interviewee's schooling, she talked about a teacher, an English teacher, whom she remembered by name, who had open mics every Friday and would allow her students to write poems or stories that they would then share in front of the class. She described one instance where she wrote a poem about a difficult time in her life when she was choosing whether or not to go to college, touching on subjects like mortality as

well. Her teacher loved the poem, and as said by my interviewee, “tried to get it put into the yearbook” of that year (Interview 2). Because of teachers like this, students can have the ability to not only express their identity, but also what they are going through at the time, creating confidence in students.

Coming back to Colleen, I took a great deal of experience shared from my interviewees and had them influence her situation as an educator of color trying to push for translanguaging and creativity in her classroom. For one thing, which is probably the most important aspect from my interviews and just by knowing these women, I knew Colleen needed to express a substantial amount of confidence and strength, no matter what she was faced with. From my first interviewee's resilience despite the discrimination she faced as a dancer and dance teacher, and through my second interviewee's strong parental figure and her willingness to present herself the way she wanted to be presented despite comments from classmates, I knew Colleen had to be resilient as well. This is represented in Colleen's scene with the principal and Avy's father, as well as conversations she has with Dean Chambers, as even in rooms where she should feel overwhelmingly intimidated, she decides to hold her ground instead. I also took inspiration from my first interviewee's issue with a student to articulate Colleen and Avy's relationship, as their rival dynamic is used to set up the beginning of the conflict in the story.

Additionally, both interviewees talked about feelings of being “othered” or “not belonging” in their time as students, whether it was because of what they sounded like, looked like, or acted like, which highly influenced Eliza's character in the story. Eliza even writes a poem about this very subject later in the piece, to which Colleen and the other students encourage and cheer on her work, obviously pulling from my second interviewee's experience with a weekly open mic day from an English teacher when she was in high school as well. Later

in the story, due to Colleen's influence, Eliza gains more confidence as she embraces her creativity, probably making her the most authentic student-character of the story.

Besides these large influences on the plot and characters of the story, I also sprinkled in some small details from my two interviews, such as Colleen's childhood bedroom description of having Anime posters on her walls, the dynamic between Colleen and her mother, and Colleen's poster of a ballet dancer on her classroom wall. These big and small details then make the story a combination of these two women's lives and experiences as women of color, making it closer to authenticity. Like I've mentioned, due to my positionality as a white woman, these experiences will never truly be known to me, as even one of my interviewees expressed, but I can sympathize and acknowledge their experiences, making Colleen's story a closer account of the experience of a female educator of color.

Discussion:

Not Here to Be Quiet: A Story of Anti-racist Pedagogy and Creativity

“So, you’re sayin’ I can write like this?”

“Yeah, you can.” Colleen smiles.

Eliza moves forward in her chair. “I can say *y’all*?”

“Yup.”

“And shorten my words? Like, you know, the way I talk at home?”

“Yes.”

“You’re lyin’.” Eliza leans back, arms crossed.

Colleen walks between a row of students. “I’m not.”

“You write like that?” Eliza points.

“Yeah, I do. It’s the way I talk at home, too.”

Eliza shakes her head. “I don’t believe you.”

Colleen shrugs. “Alright. I’ll show you then.”

Colleen walks over to her computer and screenshares one of her published stories for the class. A silence falls over them as they read Colleen’s writing, then collective gasps cascade across the room.

“How was this published?”

Eliza, now leaning at the front of her desk again, smirks at Ms. Davis. “You weren’t lyin’.”

Colleen walks to the center of the room. “Of course I-“

“You have to be kidding me.” Avy Miller interjects, shaking her head (Interview 1).

“Avy?” Colleen turns her attention to the front row, looking at Avy, the rest of the class following.

Avy throws one of her arms up. “This is absolutely ridiculous.”

“And why do you say that?” Colleen scrunches her face at Avy.

“This is an English class.” Avy crosses her arms over her desk, using them to gesture as she speaks. “We’re not supposed to write like that.”

Colleen widens her eyes at Avy. “Well, you’re not wrong in thinking like that, Avy, but since this is a creative writing class, I think-“

“Who cares.” Avy rolls her eyes. “No one should write or talk like that, no matter what you’re saying or writing.”

Colleen bites the inside of her cheek. “Why?”

“It’s gross!” Avy shutters, voice laced with venom. “It sounds like you grew up across the street from drug addicts and homeless people.”

Eliza shifts uncomfortably in her chair, gripping her uniformed skirt tightly, and lowers herself into her chair.

Colleen shifts her gaze to Eliza, then turns back towards Avy. “Avy. You have no place to be saying something like that.”

“So, I’m guessing you grew up like that, and probably her too?” Avy points to Eliza from her place in the second row.

Colleen grits her teeth. “That’s none of your business.”

Avy chuckles. “It is my business. You’re my teacher.”

Colleen strides over to Avy's desk and leans over her. "Exactly. I am your teacher, and if you say one more derogatory comment, I will have you removed from this class. Do I make myself clear?"

Avy, now leaning to the back of her chair, nods her head.

"I don't want students like you in my class anyway," Colleen mutters to herself as she turns away from Avy, heading back to the front of the classroom.

Avy yanks her book bag from under her desk, throwing it over her right shoulder, and swiftly leaves the classroom, the door left wide open.

Colleen quickly approaches the door as all of her students shift to look at her. She looks out, but Avy is already gone.

"That was brave, Ms. Davis, but you do know who her dad is, right?" Sarah from the second row speaks out.

Colleen, now closing the door, looks at Sarah. "No, who's her dad?"

~ . ~

Colleen, Principal Cavri, and Avy's father, Mathew Miller, are sitting in Principal Cavri's office. Its gray walls are decorated with Dr. Cavri's degrees and certifications, his dark wooden desk pristinely organized with a single white mug on its surface. The cleanliness of the office explains the pungent smell of lemon pledge. Colleen, sitting in one of the two leather seats, bounces one of her legs, causing the chair to squeak. She's looking down at her feet.

"This is absolutely unacceptable behavior, Ms. Davis. How could you say something like that?"

"I apologize, Dr. Cavri. It won't happen again."

“It sure as hell won’t, or I will see to it myself that you’re fired.” Mathew Miller crosses his arms.

Colleen stops bouncing her leg and looks up at Mathew with her eyebrows scrunched.

“You do know what your daughter said, right, Mr. Miller?”

Mr. Miller grips the side of his chair. “It doesn’t matter what she said. It’s what you said that caused the issue.”

Colleen nods her head. “Oh really? So you’re fine with your daughter making derogatory and racist comments?” (Interview 2)

Mr. Miller pulls back in his chair. “Racist? How the hell was what she said racist?”

Colleen fixes her posture and glares at Mr. Miller. “She was insinuating that an entire dialect of English was for individuals of lower incomes, and the student and I were speaking in Black vernacular, so yes, what she said was extremely discriminatory to not only me but my other student as well. Eliza is a new student, and she might never speak up again because of-”

“You’re new too, Ms. Davis.” Dr. Cavri glares. “And please, you’re making this worse.”

Colleen shakes her head and slams her fist down on the armrest of her chair. “No! Avy needs to be held accountable for her comments.”

Mr. Miller stands from his chair. “She didn’t do anything wrong! She said what she felt!”

Colleen crosses her arms and legs. “Well, I wonder where she gets it from then.”

“Ms. Davis! Please stop!” Principal Cavri slams his hands on his desk.

A silence falls over the three of them. Colleen sighs and uncrosses her body, hands resting in her lap. Mr. Miller sits back down and crosses his arms. Colleen looks at Mr. Miller, then Dr. Cavri. “I’m sorry for what I’ve said and the way I responded to Avy. I’ll take full responsibility for everything.”

“Fantastic. I’m glad it took you this long to realize that all of this was your doing.” Mr. Miller rises to his feet.

Dr. Cavri looks up at Mr. Miller while he stands. “Mr. Miller, thank you for coming, and I’m sorry for the trouble we’ve caused you.”

“She should be fired, John. I’m not giving my hard-earned money to a teacher like her.” Mr. Miller storms out of the office, leaving the door open. Dr. Cavri stands up from his desk and closes the door.

Colleen turns to face Dr. Cavri by the door. “John? God, everything makes sense now. He’s a donor to the school.”

Dr. Cavri walks back to his desk. “Yes, and you almost ruined everything. If you haven’t completely done it already.”

Colleen jolts in her seat. “You don’t believe me? Avy-“

“I don’t care what Avy Miller said or did, Ms. Davis. Frankly, it doesn’t matter.” Dr. Cavri sits while pulling his chair back up to his desk. “If we lose their money, we lose the majority of our funding, including your position.”

“But-“

Dr. Cavri raises his hand. “No, I don’t want to hear it. For the next week, a dean will be watching over your class so nothing like this happens again. And if it does, you will no longer have a job here. You can leave.” Dr. Cavri gestures towards the door and starts working on paperwork at his desk.

She stands, her chair squeaking, and opens the door. She turns back for a moment, opening her mouth and looking towards Dr. Cavri, but sighs instead. She turns back to the doorway and walks into the hall, closing the door behind her.

Colleen walks towards her classroom, passing by art and written works of past students, and turns right to reach the stairs to the second floor. Across the stairs, the glass front doors to the school brighten up the hallway with their welcome of the sun. Avy and her father are just outside the doors, Avy's father throwing his arms in front of her as muffled yells vibrate through the glass. Avy then notices Colleen through the glass, glaring, and turns away as her father takes her arm and drags them out of sight.

~ . ~

Colleen awakens from her polished wooden desk, mouth dry and eyes heavy. Her chair slides over as she pushes herself up, checking the time with her phone. It's 8 pm, and she's still in her classroom, lights too bright for her sensitive eyes. She has no new notifications, and it doesn't seem like anyone came into her classroom while she was asleep, as the grayed and battered door stop on the newly cleaned carpeted floor is still in the same position as when she came back from Dr. Cavri's office.

No one cares. Shocker.

She moves away from her desk and approaches a metal cabinet, opening one of the creaking doors. She grabs her purse and purple lunch bag, putting them over her shoulders, and starts to head for the door, fumbling with her things.

Damn. I don't have my keys.

Colleen heads back to her desk, opening and creaking drawers. She guides her hand across the desk and reorganizes some scattered papers. A frame falls, and the glass cracks with a subtle shatter as it hits the desk, a jolt coursing through her. She grabs the frame, some loose

glass falling as she does so, and gazes at the photo. It's her and her mother on her graduation day, a little over a year ago. The two are in a side hug, Colleen towering over her mother, both with pearly white grins. She sighs and grips the frame tighter, pricking her finger with the broken glass.

"Gosh, Ma, do we have to keep smiling like this?" Colleen grits her teeth.

There are hundreds of students outside the university. Loud chatter and yells from all over campus can be heard for miles away, as students dressed in black graduation robes and bright tassels hug their families.

"Stop whining. Who got you here? Do I need to remind you?" Colleen's mother, Rebecca, turns to her.

Colleen shakes her head, adjusting her cap. "No, God no. You tell me enough already."

"Then stop talking." Rebecca moves to face the camera again, removing a pen from behind Colleen's ear.

"Ma, I need that!" Colleen reaches to take the pen from her mother.

Rebecca guides her hand with the pen behind her back. "You don't need luck anymore, you earned it." She pauses, smiling at her daughter. "Now smile for the damn camera."

I sure need it now.

Colleen sets down the broken frame on her desk and reaches into the bun in her hair, removing her lucky pen.

The two are in Colleen's childhood bedroom, sitting on her small twin bed. Anime statues on side tables and dressers, and brightly colored posters cover the walls. Colleen has her braids in pink scrunchie pigtails and is wearing her favorite pink skirt (Interview 2).

"This was your grandmother's, and then it was mine, and now it's yours." Rebecca hands a 10-year-old Colleen a black and silver ballpoint pen, with the name "Davis" engraved on its side.

"Ma, I'm gonna lose it." Colleen fiddles with the pen.

Rebecca sighs. "No, you're not, Colleen. It's lucky, it can't ever be lost."

Colleen stops moving the pen in her hands and looks up at her mother. "How can a pen be lucky?"

"It gives you a voice, baby. A voice you'll need." Rebecca fixes her daughter's pigtails. "You like writing, don't you?"

Colleen nods. "Yeah, a lot."

"Then that's what it's for. You always write from in here." Rebecca sets her hand on top of Colleen's chest, her little heart beating steadily. "That's your voice."

Colleen places the pen behind her ear, just like she had seen her mom wear it. "How do I look?"

"Like the smartest girl in the world."

Why is it only Moms that think you can do anything?

Colleen shifts the pen between her fingers, hearing it click. She sits back down at her desk chair, brushing aside some of the shattered glass. She gazes at the rows of desks in her classroom and her students' work pinned to the walls, like Gabby's ballet storyboard (Interview 1) and Liam's classic horror poster. She sees each one of their faces, even Avy's. She can hear their loud laughter, see their smiling faces as they talk to one another, leaning over desks. Their whispers and giggles when she or someone else says something funny. She sees it all, and yet, she is at a loss for what she can do for them.

Maybe I'm not cut out for this.

Colleen sets her pen down on her desk.

You always write from in here. That's where your voice is.

Colleen places her pen in a writing position, setting her bags down and reaching for some lined note paper in one of her drawers, an idea beginning to circle.

I hope you're right, Ma. This might be my last chance to do any good.

~ . ~

"Alright, everyone, please take your seats," Colleen shouts over her students.

They all take their seats, shuffling with their belongings as the chatter between them starts to dwindle. Dean Chambers sits in the far right corner desk nearest to the door.

Colleen moves to the far right of the front of the classroom, gesturing towards Dean Chambers. "Everyone, this is Dean Chambers, whom I assume you know. She will be sitting in for the next week or so."

Dean Chambers looks at the students with a slight smile and wave, turns to Colleen with a scowl, then returns to the laptop sitting in front of her.

Colleen sighs and then faces the class. “Today, I wanted to do something a little bit different, if ya’ll don’t mind.” She moves to a barstool she has at the front of the classroom and sits in front of her projector. “I know we’ve been talking about fiction writers of color, and how their voices have created movements across this country, but last night, I had a thought come to my mind; I don’t know who y’all are besides who you are in my classroom. How can I teach you about writers who have embraced and fought for their identities, when I don’t know a thing about yours?” Colleen grabs her lucky pen from her bun. “Now, I know y’all know about my lucky pen.”

“Oh my God, here we go,” Avy mutters from the second row.

Colleen looks at her, then smiles. “Avy, do you have something or someone that brings out the real you, no matter what?”

Avy rolls her eyes. “What?”

“You know, like something or someone that knows the real you. Someone or something you don’t have to change for.” Colleen moves closer to Avy’s desk.

Avy sighs, then crosses her arms. “I don’t know. Maybe like my grandma.”

Colleen nods. “Okay, why your grandma?”

Avy breathes in. “She... just always knew what I wanted to say before I said it. We liked a lot of the same things.”

“And she always listened, huh? And believed in you even when you didn’t believe in yourself.”

“Yeah, she did.”

“My mom was the same way.” Colleen smiles at Avy. “I want you to write about your grandma today. A poem of a moment you shared that allowed you to embrace who you are, and this applies to everyone.” Colleen gestures towards the whole class, then steps off of the barstool, walking towards her grey cabinet. She pulls out a black mic stand and microphone, and walks back to the front of the class, pushing the barstool to the side and placing the microphone in its place.

Colleen smiles at the class, leaning an arm on the stand. “And after you write your poem, you will have the choice to share it with the class for an open mic” (Interview 2).

“So, wait, it can be an item or a person?” Gregory, a student from the third row, asks.

Colleen nods. “Yes. Or both, if you see them together.”

“And we don’t have to share, right?” Sam interjects.

“No, you don’t. I know something like this might be kind of nerve-wracking, but if you feel strongly about it, I encourage you to share it. It might be helpful to get it off your chest.”

Eliza then raises her hand, and Colleen calls on her. “And we can write it however we want? We don’t have to rhyme or anything?”

Colleen nods. “Yes. Anyway you want, and no, you don’t have to rhyme if you don’t want to.” She then gestures to the whole class again. “I will give you 45 minutes to write, and for the last 45 minutes, you will be able to share. Are we ready to start?”

Students shuffle through their bags for paper and pencils, clacks and swooshes sounding through the classroom as they hit their desks. A silence then follows as the students look toward Colleen. She then pulls her phone from her black dress pant pocket and opens a timer. “Alright. And time starts now.” She presses the timer, and the students begin their poems.

Colleen sits at her desk, grading papers, as she casually looks at her students every so often. She notices some beginning immediately, emotions and stories coursing through their hearts as soon as Colleen said the word “poem,” but others seem to be taking their time, fermenting ideas and examining their words. A few students seem to already be done, patiently sitting in the sound of rhythmed pencil scratchings from their peers.

Colleen checks her timer. It reads 3 more minutes. “Alright, everyone, you have less than 5 minutes left. I would suggest finishing up your last thoughts.”

The time passes, and the timer rings for the class to hear its chiming, bringing their attention to Colleen. She stands up from her desk and walks back to the front of the classroom, plugging in the microphone and checking its volume. She taps on the capsule, hearing its echo through the room. Some students are on the edge of their seats, while others slump in their chairs.

Colleen faces the class. “Ok! Who wants to go first?”

A male student from the front row, Marcus, shoots his hand up. “I’ll go!”

“Ok, Marcus, let's hear what you wrote.” Colleen sits on her barstool again, now towards the right side of the classroom.

~ . ~

A burst of laughter and then cheers erupt through the room, as Lily takes her seat in the third row, just having read a poem she wrote about her dog, Henry, whom she vents to about her life. More than half the class has shared their poems, even Avy, who wrote a poem about the time her grandmother made her a costume for a dance recital.

Colleen, still laughing at Lily's poem, checks her phone for the time. They have about 10 minutes left of class.

“Ok, everyone, so we only have about 10 minutes left. We can probably do one more if anyone would like to go who hasn't yet.” Colleen looks around the room and sees Eliza staring right at her. “Would you like to go, Eliza?”

Eliza shifts in her seat. “Uhhhh... I'm still kind of nervous.”

“It's ok, only if you're comfortable.” Colleen smiles while raising an eyebrow. “But I can tell you've got something to say.”

Eliza takes a deep breath, then stands. “Alright, I'll go.”

Colleen starts to snap, and the class follows, with a few hollers of encouragement from Eliza's friends, one being Lily. Eliza reaches the microphone, paper in hand, and looks to Colleen.

“Whenever you're ready.” Colleen smiles and nods at Eliza.

Eliza nods back, then takes another deep breath, holding her poem slightly below the top of the microphone. She begins to read:

Daddy comes home late,

Momma is making dinner,

I sit with a Barbie

at the kitchen table.

I don't look like her (Interview 1 and Interview 2)

My daddy greets my momma

in the kitchen

then sees me

and Barbie.

A tear slides down

my cheek

and lands

in her bright blonde hair.

He takes her away

and calls me beautiful,

fixing my dark, braided hair

in pink bows.

He wipes my tears away

and smiles.

That was the first time

I felt beautiful.

Eliza raises her head from her poem and is met with complete silence. Colleen stands from her barstool and claps for Eliza, tears welling in her eyes. The whole class stands up and begins cheering for Eliza, bright smiles on their faces. Eliza stays at the front of the class for a moment as the bell rings, butterflies filling her stomach.

“Please, everyone, be careful on your way home! And thank you so much for today! You all did such wonderful work!” Colleen holds her hands over her chest as her students slowly file out of the classroom. Dean Chambers then walks up to Colleen, her laptop case in hand.

“That was quite a spectacle, Ms. Davis.”

“Umm... thank you?” Colleen raises an eyebrow.

“I hope it wasn’t just because I was here.” Dean Chambers smiles, then quickly lets it fall.

Colleen squints her eyes and crosses her arms. “No, it wasn’t just because you were here.”

“Good.” Dean Chambers turns her back on Colleen, approaching the door. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then?”

Colleen groans lowly. *I guess so.*

~ . ~

The next morning, Colleen walks in through the front of the school, seeing students and teachers chatting amongst each other before the first bell. They all gaze and cheer for Colleen as she approaches the stairs to the second floor, causing Colleen to half smile and wave.

What is going on?

A fellow teacher, Mrs. Gull, walks with her up the stairs.

“Did you see it, Colleen?” Mrs. Gull sputters.

Colleen looks at her, shaking her head. “Uhhh, no, what are you talking about? Why’s everyone looking at me?”

“What you did yesterday! It’s all over social media!” Mrs. Gull waves her hands. “One of your students must have posted it!”

“What?” Colleen shakes her head again, eyebrows furrowing further and further.

“Look!” Mrs. Gull takes out her phone and shows the video to Colleen, showcasing the events of yesterday’s open mic in Colleen’s class.

“Oh my God!” Colleen takes Mrs. Grull’s phone, stopping in the upstairs hallway. “The original post is from a student named Lily Brooks, but you’re practically viral, Colleen! It’s so wonderful to see students this happy!”

Colleen hands Mrs. Grull her phone back with a smile. “It is wonderful, isn’t it?”

~ . ~

Colleen, sitting at her desk in a mostly empty classroom, notices Lily fidgeting with her bag near her desk. She walks over to her and leans over, as Lily firmly grabs her bag, standing up and facing her.

“Are you alright, Lily?”

Lily falls to her knees in a praying position. “Ms. Davis, I’m so sorry, I promise I won’t record anything ever again!”

“Dear God, Lily, stand up.” Colleen chuckles.

Lily stands back up, but keeps her hands pressed together. “Wait, you’re not mad?”

“No, I’m not mad. It seems to have done a lot of good, so please don’t worry about it.”

“Oh, thank God! I’m glad.” Lily picks up her book bag from off the floor, which fell off of her while on the ground, and heads for the door. She turns to face Colleen before opening it. “By the way, Mrs. Davis, I haven’t seen Eliza this happy since she got here. I hope you know how good of a teacher you are.” Lily smiles, then opens the door and leaves the classroom.

“That girl may need therapy.” Dean Chambers stands from her seat near the door, collecting her things.

Colleen turns to her, taking a seat at her desk. “She’s just a bit eccentric. She’s pretty funny to be completely honest.” She looks at the door. “And a great friend.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll see you tomorrow then.” Dean Chambers heads for the door.

Colleen moves her chair, scrunching her face. “Tomorrow? Has Dr. Cavri seen the video?”

Dean Chambers sighs. “I’m assuming he has. The entire school has.”

“Then, why would you have to come back?” Colleen tilts her head slightly. “Avy has been doing fine, and yesterday proved that.”

“I don’t know, Ms. Davis. I just do what I’m told.” Dean Chambers shrugs. “But you shouldn’t expect something like that to put you in the clear.”

With that, Dean Chambers leaves her classroom, and once again, Colleen is left feeling small, just like she did in the Principal’s office days before. She turns to her desk, gritting her teeth and attempting to reorganize some papers, when her cell phone begins to ring. She looks at the caller ID, reading the name “Christy Lancaster,” and picks up the call.

“Hello?”

“Hi! Is this Colleen Davis?”

“Yes, this is her.” Colleen scrunches her face.

“Oh, wonderful! My name is Dr. Christy Lancaster, and I’m the principal at Darcy Webb’s Performance Academy. I saw your video, as did a lot of my colleagues, and I don’t know if you’re looking for a new position or want to leave the one you’re in now, but we just started a creative writing program at our school and would love someone like you to come in for an interview.”

Colleen stays silent for a moment, hovering her hand over her mouth. “This is for a teaching position?”

“Yes, well, we need someone to run the program. It would probably be a lot of hours, and I’m not too sure about all the logistics, but we would love for you to come in.”

Colleen pulls the phone away from herself for a moment, her heart racing.

“Hello?”

“Sorry, yes. When would I be able to come in for an interview?”

~ . ~

Colleen, seated at her desk, turns to her class’s wide-eyed and gaping mouths. She leans back in her chair, with a slight corner smile on her face, tensing her body before they explode.

“I can’t believe this!”

“What? Ms. Davis, I thought you loved us!”

“Y'all, please!” Colleen rests her head in her hands. “What would you do in my situation?”

Eliza, who had remained quiet through Colleen's goodbye spiel, decides to speak up. "I would take the damn job, and any of you tryin' to act upset are hypocrites because you would too!"

A silence falls over the classroom as they take in Eliza's words. Colleen smiles, then moves from her desk to the front of the class, sitting on her stool.

"Y'all know I love you more than anything. It's not about any of you, and I hope none of you think that." Colleen looks to Avy, who is already looking at her, and smiles. "I just... my teaching style will be more accepted there, and instead of having to fight every day for what and how I teach, they'll let me do what I want."

"Yeah." Eliza nods. "And you won't have to deal with stupid deans watching you."

"You're lucky you didn't say that while she was here." Colleen chuckles, the whole class giggling. "But... in all seriousness, I'm so thankful for every single one of you. Even if I was upset with higher-ups for the majority of the time I was here, I was always so happy to see and teach all of you every day. You're the reason I would show up everyday, and I know this is a lot for me to say, especially since some of you might think I'm letting you down, but I encourage all of you to remember what I've taught you and what you've learned about yourselves while I've been here. The teacher that comes in here next might not teach like me, and that's ok, but never forget who you are and your voice. It is your strongest instrument, and never let anyone tell you otherwise."

Silence falls over the class. Eliza stands from her desk and walks to Colleen, hugging her tightly. "Thank you for everything, Ms. Davis."

Colleen hugs her back, holding back tears, as everyone jumps out of their seats and forms a group hug around her. Laughter and snuffles fill the classroom as she tries to embrace them all. The bell rings, and none of Colleen's students move a muscle.

"Alright ya'll, seriously I can't breathe."

They finally break away from Colleen, and she follows them to the door, holding it open while saying her final goodbyes. As Eliza walks past Colleen, she stops her, taking her lucky pen out of her hair.

"Eliza, I want you to have this." Colleen takes Eliza's hand and sets the pen in hers.

Eliza leaves her palm open, shaking her head. "What? No way, Ms. Davis. This is your lucky pen."

"I know, but I don't need it anymore, and trust me, my mamma wouldn't mind a brilliant writer like you having it." Colleen smiles and folds Eliza's hand into the pen.

Eliza's eyes fill with tears. "Thank you, Ms. Davis. I promise I'll treasure it."

~ . ~

Colleen, holding her breath, enters Dr. Cavri's office, her teaching badge in hand. Dr. Cavri looks up from his desk, sees Colleen, then looks back down, continuing his work. Colleen rolls her eyes, then walks in front of his desk, setting down her badge in front of him.

"I figured you would need this back."

Dr. Cavri looks up at her. "Not really. I can just give the new teacher a new one."

Colleen huffs. “Right. Well, I just wanted to say thank you.”

Dr. Cavri scrunches his eyebrows. “Thank you?”

“Yes. Although we’ve had our differences, I’m grateful you gave me a job here. I...
uhh... learned a lot about myself and, well, what I need from a teaching position, so, thank you.”

Colleen straightens her posture.

Dr. Cavri scoffs, setting down a pen he had in his hand. “You mean you learned a lot about what you don’t need, assumingly people like me.”

Colleen shrugs, tilting her head. “Well, since you said it, yes, people like you.” Colleen turns away from Dr. Cavri, heading for the door.

“You’ll never get by with the way you teach.” Dr. Cavri projects, just as Colleen pushes open the door.

She turns her head around. “Excuse me?”

“No matter what people offer you, or what your new bosses say, that kind of teaching won’t ever find its way into mainstream academics. It’s better you realize that now.” Dr. Cavri flashes a smile, then turns back to his work.

Colleen takes a deep breath. “You might be right, but the thing is, Dr. Cavri, I don’t really care about what you think. You never earned my respect, so why would I ever care about what you have to say?” Colleen leaves his office, not giving him a second glance.

She walks back down the hallway she came from, nearing the stairs to the second floor with a new lightness in her step. She smiles.

God, that felt good.

Colleen walks up the stairs towards her classroom. As she approaches her door, Avy sees Colleen from down the hall and rushes over to her, her backpack shifting as she speed walks.

“Ms. Davis?”

Colleen turns towards Avy, stopping her hand from turning the doorknob. “Avy?”

“I...uhhh.” Avy fidgets with her hands, abruptly sticking out her right hand in front of Colleen. Colleen looks down at her hand, then slightly smiles, shaking it. “I’m sorry about what I said before. I... I think you're a good teacher, and I wish you luck with everything.”

The two break their hands away, as Colleen rests her hand at her side. “Thank you, Avy. That means a lot.”

Avy nods with a soft smile, then walks past Colleen, approaching the stairs. Colleen shouts after her.

“Avy!” Avy turns back towards Colleen, as Colleen sighs. “You don’t have to be like your dad, you know. Just be you.”

Avy looks down at her feet, then looks to Colleen again. “I know. You helped me realize that the other day.”

The two smile at one another. Avy waves slightly, then turns and walks down the stairs. Colleen watches her until she can’t see her anymore, then places her hand on the doorknob of her classroom, opening the door and walking inside.

It's almost completely empty. Only a small cardboard box rests on her desk, as well as the mic stand from the other day in the corner. The walls are barren white, and her grey cabinet is open with nothing inside. She walks over to the mic stand and folds it swiftly, holding the microphone in one hand and the stand in the other. She places it inside the box on her desk and grabs the side handles, ready to leave. She scans her desk one last time, and sees the cracked frame of her and her mother on her graduation day. She grabs it, carefully not cutting her finger, and stares at the picture once more.

I did what you said, Momma. I hope it's all I want it to be.

Colleen places the frame in the box, then grabs its side handles, lifting it off the desk. She walks to the door, shifting her weight to open it, and leans against the doorway, taking one last glance at her classroom. She breathes in and smiles, walking out the door.

Limitations

Though I conducted two interviews with women of color, those women being friends of mine, I did initially want to do more, and by that, I mean a lot more. My first ideas on this project and what it could be really excited me when I first started the IRB process, but slowly, as my 16-week period began approaching its end, I found myself doubting what I originally set out to do. To give myself credit, this is a very ambitious project, and as an undergraduate student, I don't yet have the time frame or the tools to make it into what it could be. This is also a reason I have mentioned throughout the piece that Colleen's story is not finished and may never be finished, as this may be true not only because of my positionality, but because of the time constraints I faced when researching and drafting. Finding interviewees contributed to my difficulties as well, as I initially set out to interview at least 5 individuals in total, and was met with the two I spoke of above. My main concern with this was sounding inauthentic in my story, but no matter what, I will always sound inauthentic, as I am not a Black female educator and will never fully understand their experiences. With my two interviews, however, I realized that even if I did not accomplish the research I set out to do, I got to talk about two wonderful women in my life and integrate their stories into Colleen's, and that is something I am incredibly proud of.

Taking a step away from the actual research constraints of this project, in my first draft of my story, my mentor asked me about the authenticity of Colleen's personality. She mentioned to me that a female educator of color in some of the situations I put her in, such as the principal's office scene with Avy's father, may not act as fiercely or as confidently in a room with white male colleagues or students, as they may feel as though because of their positionality, they are more at risk of ridicule and punishment. I completely understood my mentor's concerns and looked back on my interviews, but truthfully, without even really knowing it, I realized I was

resembling both of the women I interviewed. Because of what they shared with me in their interviews and from knowing them in my personal life, I was right in making Colleen an empowering individual, as those women have never not stuck up for what they believed was right or what they thought they deserved. This, of course, may have changed if I had recruited more interviews, but for now, with the interviews I do have, Colleen's authenticity runs through them, making her more authentic to their specific experiences and personalities.

Conclusion

In truth, Colleen's story is still a work in progress, as this entire study is, but this does not lessen the meaning behind these topics. How translanguageing and creative writing bring out a student's identity should be included in every English classroom, but sadly, it isn't. I never had it growing up, and because of that, I didn't realize my strengths in writing until I went to college, which may not have happened either if not for the wonderful professors I've had in my time at Nevada State. Everything I talk about in this study, Dr. April Baker-Bell's work on Anti-racist pedagogies, bell hooks's detailed experience as an educator and how to then be an empowering educator, Angel M. Y. Lin's definition and history of translanguageing, Butler's ideas of strong fiction being told through the sensual and unconscious mind, and, most importantly, my two interviewees' experiences as women of color, all bridge a gap that needs to be seen in every English classroom in this country; that being a student's and teachers right to their own experiences no matter their identity, showing up in their language and their writing despite what is considered academic, just as Colleen fights for. When we are able to do this, if we are ever fully able to, every student and teacher, no matter their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, economic class, or language, will feel at home in who they are and will then have the ability to express themselves through their writing and fight against what is expected in English classrooms. As a future teacher myself, this is all I would ever want, and why Colleen didn't choose to be quiet either.

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