Advocating for Antiracist Approaches to Writing in the Canadian Postsecondary Context: A Roundtable Discussion

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Introduction

On Tuesday May 3, 2022, over 70 writing centre professionals, tutors, and students attended a virtual session, *Advocating for Antiracist Approaches to Writing in the Canadian Post-secondary Context*, to learn from and uplift six colleagues who have extensive experience doing antiracist advocacy work. Insights from a seventh colleague who was unable to attend the session are included here.

As writing centre professionals, tutors, and students working in Canadian schools, colleges, and universities, we contribute to a colonial education system embedded with systemic racism and white supremacy. Academic writing and the English language have historically been—and continue to be—used to oppress and exclude Black, Brown, Indigenous, racialized, queer, trans, poor, and disabled peoples. At the same time, writing and language can be—and is being—leveraged for anti-oppressive means and ends. How can we, working from and within our respective writing centre contexts, use our engagement in this critical conversation about antiracist writing to create liberatory change? How can we engage in meaningful advocacy with faculty, administrators, and other key players to make a difference to the ways that writing and language are taken up across academic institutions? In our panel discussion, the panelists shared their stories, goals, specific actions they have taken and advice provided for advocacy to address these questions.

Writing Reflection: Session Pre-Work for Participants

As a way of actively engaging the registered participants in the discussion, Marci Prescott-Brown (a member of the organizing team as well as a session panelist) created and shared the following writing prompts in an email in advance of the session:

Often, when we consider how to engage with antiracist and decolonial approaches to writing instruction, concerns quickly rise. For example, these concerns can involve our own racial, national, or ethnic background/experiences and how they relate to the students we serve; practices that seem to achieve the desired effect on student writing but are steeped in prejudicial approaches to language/linguistic varieties; how to make space for antiracist and decolonial approaches in institutions that insist on conventional approaches to Academic Englishes—and so on. We can call these things rocks—they are heavy and sometimes challenging to work with, but as we consider these questions/concerns/experiences, there are oppor-

tunities here, too. Often, we can build something into our writing instruction practices as a result of grappling with these rocks.

Before we meet at the panel, please spend some time identifying your rocks. Set a timer for two to five minutes. (If timers make you anxious, you can just estimate the time in another way that seems useful).

Consider asking yourself the following:

- What rocks are you holding today? (Two or more rocks is fine.)
- What thoughts come to mind as you think about your rocks?
- Do you have a physical reaction to various rocks or not? Why might this be the case?
- Are these rocks the same ones you were holding a year ago? Two years ago?
    - If yes, what do you think this symbolizes? What are some key things (discussion/resources/support, et cetera) that you think you need to build more effectively with your rocks in your writing instruction practice?
    - If not, do you feel like this shift over time has been positive? What things do you think you need to grow? What questions do you think will help you build more effectively in the future?

Land Acknowledgment

The panel discussion opened with a welcome from the past-president of the CWCA/ACCR, followed by this land acknowledgment, given by Julia Lane (a member of the organizing team and the roundtable moderator):

Hello. Bonjour. Hola. Tansi. Aaniin. Ta néwyap.

My name is Julia Lane. I am a white settler who has the tremendous privilege to be joining this gathering today from the unceded and occupied lands that continue to be tended with love by the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Kwikwetlem Peoples. The place where I join from today has many names. The ones most commonly used today celebrate the legacy of white male colonizers. But this place has older names too. One of those names comes

from the Squamish language, and it is *Lhukw'lhukw'áyten*. That name celebrates the ever-peeling arbutus tree and speaks to the existence of this place as a shared territory—one where people from many nations have long come together to harvest from the land to meet their needs, and to give thanks for the ability to thrive in this place.

I was recently listening to the podcast, *This Place* (Deerchild, 2021), (itself an adaptation from the 2019 graphic novel) with my seven-year-old son. He said, "What is good about this podcast is that it reminds us that this is an Indigenous place." He was, of course, right, and his words have stayed with me. I recognize the tendency, in myself and in others, to think of "the virtual world" as a contemporary form of *terra nullius*—as an unoccupied and apolitical place. This tendency is reflected in the language we use to speak of things that exist in virtual space. They are "in the cloud"—floating and amorphous and disconnected from the Earth. But that way of thinking is an extension of the colonial logic that has always been used to justify the displacement and erasure of Indigenous peoples from their lands. As we join together today, I ask us all to remember that we are connecting from Indigenous places, and that the infrastructure that has allowed us to share this time together is built on Indigenous lands. After all, the reality of "the cloud" is one of massive servers located in even more massive buildings all of which are created in ways that bear the unmistakable mark of colonial extraction and environmental racism.

In two days' time, on May 5th, we will mark Red Dress Day (Edwards, 2023). This is a national day of mourning and of remembrance. It is an opportunity to remember the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, 2-spirit, and gender-diverse peoples and to acknowledge that the extreme violence and erasure enacted through settler colonialism is ongoing. It is a day to read or reread the National Inquiries' 231 Calls for Justice Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019) and to find our own ways, even small ways, to take action. It is a day, like all days, to take care of ourselves and those around us, give thanks to the land for sustaining us, and to recommit ourselves to dismantling the violence, extraction, displacement, and erasure

inherent to settler colonialism. If you or someone you know needs support as we approach this day of mourning, please reach out to support resources. Here are a few options: Crisis Services Canada: **1.833.456.4566**, Text **45645**, Canadian Mental Health Association resources page; Indian Residential School Survivors and Family: 1-800-721-0066). These realities are heavy, and you are worthy of love and help.

As we transition now to welcoming today's speakers, let's take a breath and give ourselves a moment to feel our feet on the ground and the air on our skin. Let's bring our attention to the water in our bodies and to an awareness that the land, the air, and the water all connect us to those who have come before and to those who are coming after. Let's give our collective thanks for the tremendous privilege it is to continue to thrive in these Indigenous places.

Thank you, merci, gracias, migwetch, huy chexw.

Roundtable Discussion

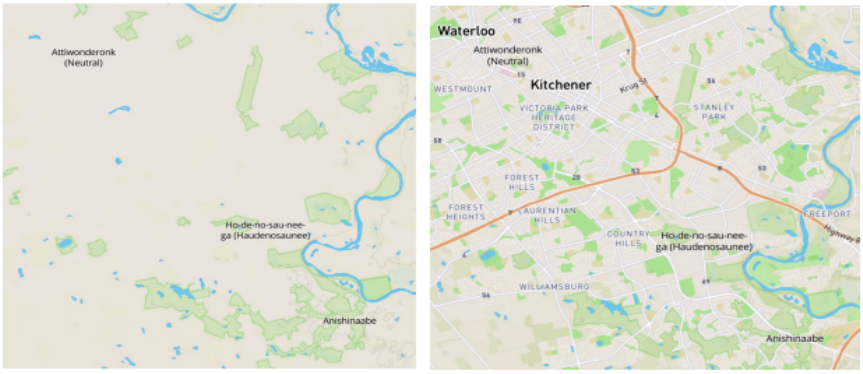
Question 1: Who are You, and What's Your Story?

MAŠA TORBICA

Hello everyone, my name is Maša, and I use the pronouns she/her. I am located on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Author's location, from presentation slide.

Current Location



(Native-Land.ca)

The image of the map on the left gives you a sense of what this territory might have looked like without the markers of settler-colonial land development. The image of the map on the right depicts the present-day topography, including settler place names like Waterloo and Kitchener.

I will briefly tell you about how I came to live here in this country that we now call Canada because the circumstances of my arrival have shaped every aspect of my life since, including my approach to learning, teaching, and advocacy.

I was born in the former Yugoslavia, which was a multiethnic state in Eastern Europe for the better part of the twentieth century. In the early 1990s, there was a violent disintergration of this multiethnic state through a series of civil wars. Consequently, my family and thousands of other families were displaced and forced into mass migrations. After two difficult years of internal displacement within the former Yugoslavia, my family was accepted for immigration to Canada. I am sharing these biographical details because I'd like to draw connections to this content throughout the upcoming questions.

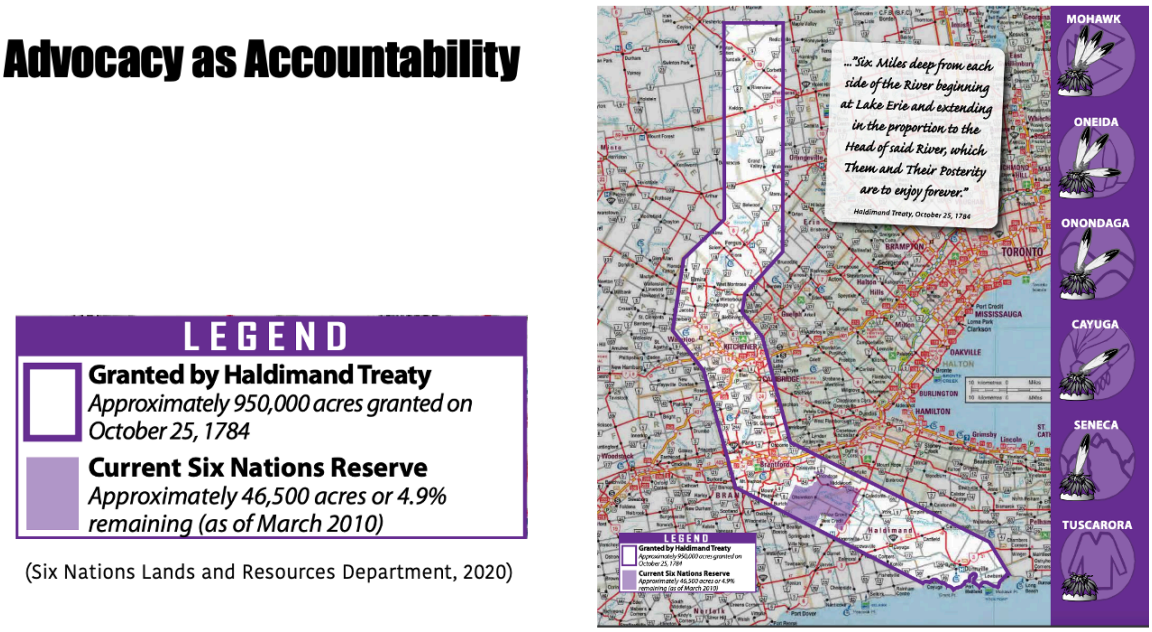
Within my first few months in Canada, I quicky realized that because English was vital for my family's wellbeing, I couldn't rely solely on the available programs for language learn-

ing. Since my school didn't have English language learning programming on site, a few times a week I boarded a bus with other immigrant children from nearby schools to attend a centralized ESL program. As an adult, I can understand that this arrangement likely reflected resource constraints, but, at the time, it made me feel very self-conscious of my status as an English language learner and fueled worries that I would struggle to catch up to my peers who stayed in the regular classroom. Similarly, I can now appreciate why my ESL program featured age-appropriate instructional content, like Dr. Seuss books, but, at the time, I was frustrated by the vast gulf between those learning materials and the various practical applications of English I was trying to grasp outside of school to help my family. Since my parents had to prioritize work over language learning to ensure our immediate survival, I felt responsible for learning English as quickly as possible so that we could navigate our new society. These formative experiences of the dynamics between English language proficiency and the daily logistics of survival continue to inform my pedagogical approach in many ways.

My commitment to antiracist and decolonial pedagogies is also shaped by my awareness of the material connections between my family's arrival in Canada and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples. As Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu summarize, "the Canadian settler state's capacity to grant political asylum to refugees—and assert its sovereign power—is contingent on its centuries-long colonial suppression of Indigenous sovereignty over land, natural resources, and people" (2021, p. 11). I am currently located on lands covered by the Haldimand Treaty of October 25, 1784. Through this treaty, Fredrick Haldimand, on behalf of the Kingdom of Great Britain, recognized the Mohawk nation as British allies during the American Revolution and decreed that the "Mohawk Nation and such others of the Six Nations" were to "take possession of and settle upon the Banks of the River commonly called Ours [Ouse] or Grand River, running into Lake Erie [...] six miles deep from each side of the river" (Six Nations Lands and Resources Department, 2020, p. 4). While these treaty terms encompass nearly one million acres, Six Nations of the Grand River lands currently constitute less than 5% of the

treaty terms (Six Nations Lands and Resources Department, 2020, p. 4) (See Fig. 2). In this context, despite the traumas of my family's displacement from our ancestral land, our continued presence on stolen land is inextricably linked to the violence of settler colonialism and implicated in the ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples and communities from their own lands. For me, interrogating the implications of this lived experience highlights the stakes of discussions about advocacy and accountability, ensuring that material realities are not diluted into abstractions.

Figure 2. Author's presentation slide: Haldimand Treaty and Six Nations land.



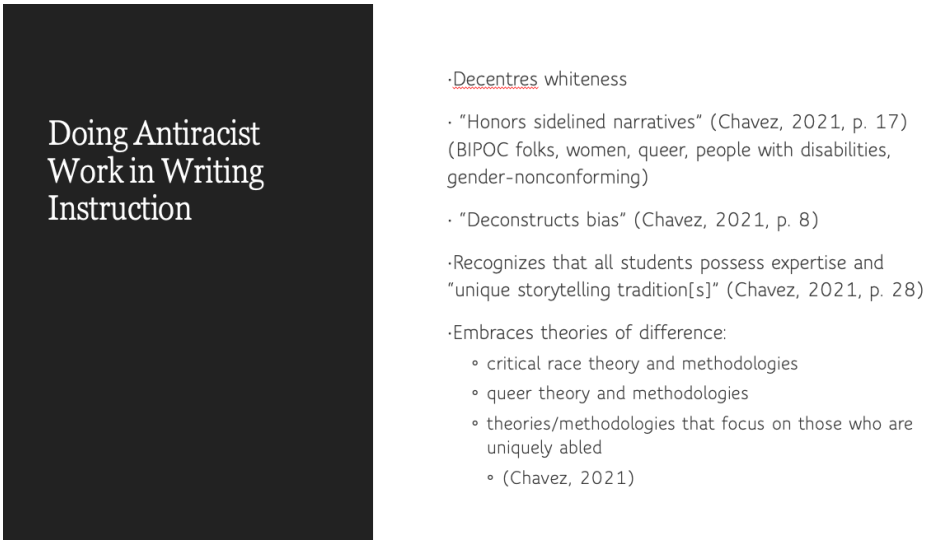
MARCI PRESCOTT-BROWN

Hi. My name is Marci Prescott-Brown; my pronouns are she/her. When I was in high school, I started tutoring other students, mostly Black Caribbean-Canadians like myself, in writing. I found that many were experiencing challenges that I seldom faced, because they did not feel supported by their teachers or welcomed in their classrooms. They found writing very difficult. Thus, part of tutoring these students was helping them process how they could respond to both writing assignments and the emotional components of writing in sometimes hostile and unwelcoming environments.

Something about facilitating people's unpacking of challenging experiences so that they could choose to either funnel the results of this process into their writing or choose to explore these complex pieces in order to move forward with their writing felt important, and still does.

It never occurred to me to ask people to simply put aside these complex experiences and just "focus on the writing," so I never did. These experiences for these students were always part of their writing. Being open to the messiness and the importance of these moments was a key part of the facilitating writing moments for them. Many wanted to go on to postsecondary education and found that experiences of discrimination made it challenging to both strengthen their writing and pursue their future goals.

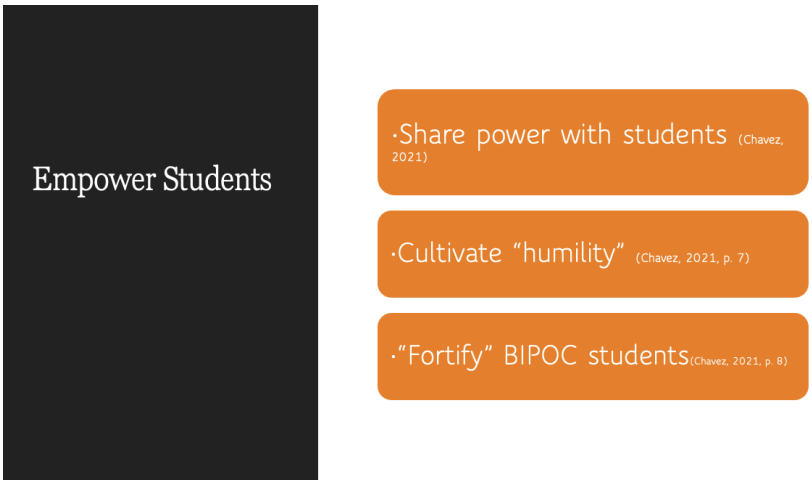
Figure 3. Author's presentation slide: Doing antiracist work in writing instruction.



(Chavez, 2021)

As Felicia Chavez highlights: antiracist work in writing instruction "honors sidelined narratives" (BIPOC folks, women, queer, the differently abled, gender-nonconforming) (Chavez, 2021, p. 17), decentres whiteness (Chavez, 2021), and deconstructs bias (Chavez, 2021, p. 8) (See Fig. 3). In this work we also recognize that all students possess expertise and "unique story-telling traditions" (Chavez, 2021, p. 28) and embrace a variety of theories of difference.

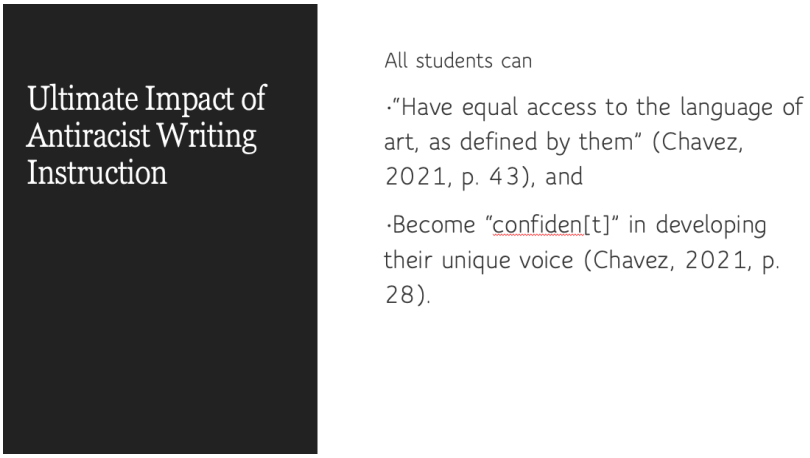
Figure 4. Author's presentation slide: Empower students.



(Chavez, 2021)

Ultimately, I come to antiracist advocacy work as someone wanting to listen, willing to hold sometimes uncomfortable spaces, facilitating clients' linguistic experiences in the writing process, and always striving towards writing instructor practices that open doors (See Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Author's presentation slide: Ultimate impact of antiracist writing instruction.



(Chavez, 2021)

EFFIE SAPURIDIS

My name is Effie, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm located in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapéewak peoples.

I was not supposed to be your panelist today. The former coordinator of our writing services centre, Mandy Penney, was supposed to be here with you today to engage in this conversation but unfortunately couldn't make it, so I stepped in at the very last minute. I will share a bit about Mandy's journey to this moment in her unlearning and relearning, as well as my own. In our conversations, Mandy pinpointed a social location workshop in 2016 from CWCA/ACCR that started that journey for her towards intersectionality. And eventually, we crossed paths at Huron's Writing Service.

For me, it begins with my mom and my dad coming here as immigrants from Greece and spending most of my life not telling me about their struggles with language until I got involved in tutoring work and in writing and language centres and started to tell them about the difficulties I was seeing among my students. In particular, I used to be a SAT/ACT test prep tutor, and that's a very rigid form of learning that the students have to engage in so that they can do well on the standardized tests. I found it really difficult to help my students through this process of achieving high grades in the reading and writing sections of those tests, in particular, while also acknowledging and engaging with their own positionalities, their own Englishes, and their own languages.

Recently, my mother revealed to me that her first memory of being in Canada as a 10-year-old was sitting on the front steps of their new apartment complex and watching all the kids on the street playing. She did not understand a word that they were saying, and she just had this thought to herself: "Am I always going to be wondering what everyone else around me is saying? Am I ever going to be able to be part of this community?"

And so that coalesced with meeting Mandy and starting to work at the Huron Writing Centre and taking on the work of unlearning a lot of things, relearning, and engaging in particular antiracism work within the writing centre. I'm still very much in the early stages of the process, personally.

SRIVIDYA NATARAJAN

My name is Vidya, my pronouns are she/her. I am going to say good afternoon, bonjour, and vanakkam—that last greeting was in my mother tongue, Tamil. I'm a multilingual, first generation, cis-gender immigrant, and settler in Canada. As far back as I can remember, I have been enraged by inequality and injustice. So, I am temperamentally inclined to advocacy. When I was at university in India, in the 1990s, I became involved in struggles for caste and gender justice. As a woman in academia, I was in a disadvantaged position from the point of view of

gender and advocated for myself and for other women. But I was also caste-privileged and spent many years learning or trying to be an adequate ally to caste-oppressed people.

In the years following my arrival in Canada in 2002, I channeled my activism into creative writing, and ended up writing a couple of satirical novels (Natarajan, 2006; Natarajan, 2018), and co-authored two graphic novels (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011; Natarajan et al., 2013). I did this for many reasons: first, because there is a kind of psychological inclination on the part of new immigrants to feel uncritical gratitude towards their new country, and I felt that. A second reason was that writing creatively was a safer option than outright public resistance during a period of financial struggle and precarious employment in my life. And a third reason was that, as a racialized woman, I wanted to talk about race, but every time I opened my mouth to protest something, I was politely but unmistakably dismissed. After all, there is no racism in Canada.

Five years ago, when I took over the coordinatorship of the writing program King's University College, a Catholic-affiliated college on the lands of the Anishnaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapéewak, and Chononton Peoples, I rediscovered a version of my old militancy. I brought about several changes in my own unit and began to advocate for changes in approaches to student writing across the institution, especially in relation to race. In the last couple of years, because of the power of BLM, Land Back, Idle No More, and other grassroots movements, there is a much more receptive audience, as we all know, for advocacy in all our institutions, and King's is no exception. Last year, an antiracism working group I co-led presented a report on the campus racial climate at my institution and made several urgent recommendations to bring about racial equity.

EMILIE BRANCATO

My name is Emilie Brancato, and my pronouns are she/her, and I'm the Manager of English Language Learning at OCAD University. I am a mixed-race settler in Toronto. I come to this work through academic and personal experiences. My original discipline was medieval

studies, an incredibly traditional field which is only beginning to reckon with entrenched racism and Eurocentrism. In order to undertake my work, I had to demonstrate proficiency in Modern Languages (German, French) as well as Latin, Middle English, Middle French, and others. The interdisciplinarity of medieval studies gave me an opportunity to discover linguistics and to build on my love of learning and teaching languages. Because of this academic background, a colleague introduced me to writing centre work, first as a writing TA and then as someone specifically supporting language learners.

However, it wasn't until I did a TESOL certification that I began to realize how deeply our personal, lived experiences, pieces of our stories that are not usually welcome or centered in academic spaces are, in fact, central to our language and writing pedagogies. My mother's experiences of racism and accentism in social and academic spaces impacted what she taught me about language and writing. Before I encountered critical approaches within linguistics, my own lived experiences of racism made me vividly aware that I and others had to intentionally and consciously learn how to sound "right," how to perform "professional," how to perform "academic," how to perform "Whiteness." Sociolinguistics gave me a vocabulary and framework for understanding my personal and academic experiences as inseparable.

Timed Write

After reading the reflections from the panelists in response to the first question, we invite you (as we invited those who attended the panel discussion live) to spend some time (at least 5 minutes) reflecting and writing your own answers to these questions:

- What brings you to the work of antiracist advocacy?
- What is your long-term goal or vision for antiracist work?

Question 2: Share at Least One Example of Advocacy Work that You're Doing or that You Have Done that You Feel is Making a Difference.

EMILIE BRANCATO

The description for the roundtable highlighted external advocacy. And I just want to trouble that a little bit because I think in some ways we're starting with the wrong question when we start externally. We first need to address the issues within our field and within our own pedagogies, right? This work is active, it's iterative, it's personal. I continue to unlearn and relearn; while I've been advocating for strategies that are necessary in order for us to do anti-racist practice or decolonizing practice, it's only in the past few years that I would talk about my practice as potentially antiracist or decolonizing.

You can see an example of this in how I'm considering shifting the language we use in promotional materials to communicate with students (including language learners) who may wish to come to the writing centre. The current descriptions clearly assume that students bring a variety of linguistic competencies and need to continue to acquire language and communication conventions specific to their new contexts and levels of study. For example, statements like: if you're a student who speaks a first language other than English, we can support you with acquiring disciplinary vocabulary, the new communication skills you are encountering in university: writing and speaking using the conventions and customs of your discipline. Now, I'm considering adding language that explicitly names power structures and hierarchies that inform disciplinary conventions and customs as well as students' agency in navigating these, if they so desire: "ELL student programming strives to empower students to recognize, negotiate, and even challenge, dominant linguistic practices." I had previously been focused on avoiding deficit approaches to language learning, but while that shift in understanding was a necessary step, it was not in and of itself sufficient for ensuring pedagogy that troubles, pedagogy that advocates and enables others to do so as well.

Our field(s)—writing studies, linguistics, rhetoric—are only starting to broadly engage with the types of critique and self-reflection that enable antiracist praxis. But to enable this disciplinary shift, meaningful advocacy has to start within our personal pedagogical practices. We have to acknowledge our lived experience, our current positionality, and how these affect

our assumptions about writing and communication and our investments in specific types of writing and communication. We have to acknowledge the possibility that written and spoken accent might affect the ways in which we interact with people and assess student work. Do I privilege Standard English? Do I privilege the grammar of Standard English even in situations where it's not necessary or appropriate to the context such as in emails, Teams, Zoom chat, discussion forums? Do I consider disciplinary conventions and vocabulary to be neutral? Do I privilege *how* someone says something over *what* they say?

We need to have these conversations with our communities, but first, we must confront these questions and possibilities meaningfully in ourselves. These are challenging questions. At OCADU, external advocacy occurs in a variety of small ways: in tutor training, faculty and student consultations and workshops, and other kinds of programming, but, today, I want to talk about an advocacy mechanism that has been effective at OCADU, providing opportunities for faculty colleagues to engage deeply with the kinds of translingual approaches and acknowledgement of raciolinguistic ideologies that many of us are speaking to today. We undertake collaborative inquiry—research projects—in which a writing and language specialist works with a content specialist faculty on a course they are teaching. We identify shared research questions and then explore them by collaborating on assignment and assessment design, collecting student samples, faculty and writing/language specialist reflections and demographic data. If you have heard me speaking about OCADU's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Initiative, you have probably heard me speak about this model. It is particularly valuable for antiracist, decolonizing work because of the collaborative approach: both the writing/language specialist and the faculty member are learning together; this openness and close work engenders trust with one another. It is in these spaces of trust and inquiry that we can ask tough questions about our pedagogy. It's a space like this where I can look at how somebody has assessed two pieces of student writing and ask, "Why did these pieces get such different marks? You know, these pieces are saying similar things, they have similar content. They both

do everything you have asked in the assignment, and yet they get such different marks." I may learn that effective descriptions of process are more important than following a conventional rhetorical structure. I may learn something about conventions within the discipline; for instance, that clean and clear design is valued. I can ask, is this a culturally situated value—visual language just like spoken language, just like written language, is culturally situated. So, are we implicitly imposing a Western assumption about good design on students? (I'm only speaking to my own questions and exploration here so as not to speak for my art and design colleagues.)

The final step of these research projects is for the research teams to present on them both externally at conferences but also internally within the university. It is powerful to have an interdisciplinary team speak to their own learning and their own unlearning, to unpack how a relational approach enables mutual respect and understanding.

SRIVIDYA NATARAJAN

I don't think advocacy can or should be confined to specific initiatives. I advocate in the classroom, in the hallway, in meetings, in writing, through committee work and reports to supervisors, among friends, through letters of reference, through presentations, through poetry, through satire, through social media, through scholarly work and research, through syllabi and curricula, through everyday practices and tutoring policies, through calling in and calling out, through arguing and fighting and complaining, through supporting and admiring, through cooking and feeding people. This is perhaps not a particularly useful description of my advocacy, but I'm held back from describing a single effective project because I'm so conscious of all the work that still needs to be done, as opposed to successes achieved.

When I look at the actual projects I'm doing at my institution, I have a lot to say that is very similar to what Emilie just outlined, both with regard to writing as a discipline and a set of competencies, and also beyond it. I advocate for antiracist and anticolonial curricula and pedagogy, flexible assessment practices, inclusive academic spaces—including academic writ-

ing centres—and active hiring for diversity. I have to say that that last point is one of the most sticky and contentious things that I argue for: hiring for diversity.

As coordinator of the writing program at my institution, I had to begin by convincing my own colleagues to see academic literacies as directly connected to equity. I have held meetings and organized departmental colloquia to discuss how we might move away from a deficit model of students whose linguistic repertoire does not already include Standard Academic English, from an unproductive amount of attention to mechanics and surface correctness, from racist stereotypes about who plagiarizes and who does not, and from punitive assessment practices.

In order to lay the groundwork for advocacy outside my department, I sought a seat on various committees. I do an inordinate amount of service work because that is where I can get people to listen to me. I have repeatedly explained the relationship between writing skills, standard language ideology, white supremacy, and raciolinguistic exclusions and inequities to my colleagues and to others beyond my circle.

Some program chairs in my institution engaged with my arguments and contacted me to find out how I could support writing in their units. This, in turn, has led to a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at King's, without my even really planning it. To create opportunities for advocacy involving colleagues across the disciplines, I often proactively offer my labour in building something for their program, in return for their allyship in furthering racial and linguistic justice. For instance, I created writing instruction modules for courses in the Social Justice and Peace Studies and English programs in my institution. These modules were not just concerned with generic writing skills but were very tightly tied to the textbooks the instructors were using and the assignments they had already designed. Emilie just discussed how she intervenes in the creation of assignments; that module creation process gave me a similar opportunity to also gently critique the assignments in these courses and help remodel them, so that they were better scaffolded and not punitive in their design.

I used modelling as part of the pedagogy in these courses. The modules addressed a list of writing-in-the-disciplines literacies that were required by the instructors, but in creating model essays, I chose topics that foregrounded critiques of racism, thus finding an opportunity for antiracist advocacy. So, in the English program for example, I created a model critique of the racism of *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad's novella (2019), and in the Social Justice program, I created a model essay on the ethical breaches that led to the disbanding of the police board in Thunder Bay, Ontario (see, for instance, "Thunder Bay police services board," 2018), because of racism against Indigenous people there, and counterposed this racism to perspectives offered in Gregory Younging's (2018) work.

Another example of what I have just been doing: I have just finished teaching a course called Writing and Disability Studies which both introduces students to intersectional scholarship and key critiques in this area and weaves in advocacy for disability justice. At the same time, the course trains undergraduate teaching assistants (UTAs) for the first-year Disability Studies course at King's, and in helping with this training, it brings the Disability Studies and Writing programs together.

Since last year I have been in the happy position of being able to advocate for antiracism and antilinguicism in writing centres, shoulder-to-shoulder with my colleagues and friends in CWCA/ACCR's BIPOC caucus. If you are in CWCA/ACCR and identify as BIPOC, please do join this very strongly motivated group.

EFFIE SAPURIDIS

I focus on an antiracism statement that we worked on for two years at Huron's Writing Services under Mandy Penney, while she was there with us as our Coordinator. If you follow **this link**, you can see the process that we went through to create the statement. It was a two-year-long process, and it's still not complete [as of writing]. We began with about six to eight months of training on intersectionality, social location, positionality, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, white-language supremacy, and colonial work within tutor-

ing and writing centres. So, there was a lot of internal work that we did. It was me, four other tutors, and Mandy. And we all came at it from a very, I think, vulnerable and open and trusting space. Our weekly meetings were a very safe space for us. And that was one of the areas where I learned the most. Being able to engage in that through my work as a tutor at the writing centre has defined a lot of the work that I've done since then and has definitely shaped me as a scholar. So, for those of you who are leading writing centres, and if you aren't already doing it, I would highly encourage engaging your tutors in this way because it has really changed a lot for me.

Then, the next step that we engaged in was developing the racial justice statement itself. This was, as you can imagine, a very complex process: a lot of drafts, a lot of reading, of course, and a lot of keeping ourselves engaged in the conversations, even when we weren't actively working on the statement. It's always about being engaged and not walking away from it. It's not a task that you just put away, as you all know. And that was really important as part of the learning process as a new PhD student, as somebody who is newly working in this area. There were certain things that were really important to us that we came to an agreement about as a group and that was explicitly naming the structures in the university—the white supremacist, colonialist, racist, ableist structures in the university, not just in the past, but also in the current moment.

Huron is an Anglican institution that still is still very much a colonial, patriarchal, and racist institution in its structures. It was very important for us to explicitly name that and to acknowledge our own complicity in this system. We engaged in a lot of consultation across campus from students, faculty, and staff. This was really crucial to ensuring that this statement, though it was coming out of the writing centre and was going to represent the writing centre, also had a finger on the pulse of our whole community. We wanted to make sure that everybody, as much as possible, had some input into what we were saying because, as far as

we know, there were no other statements coming out of Huron in any other spaces. So, we wanted this to be representative of as many people as possible in our community.

I'll just briefly touch on some successes and challenges that we had through this process. Our successes include not only our thinking through the process and the commitment that we received from not just our smaller team, but the larger team and the larger library, and the consultation processes. All of these things we would say are huge successes. As I mentioned, personally, the work has absolutely shaped who I am as a scholar. Since getting involved in this work with Mandy, I have taken on a lot of committee-based work—because that's what you do in academia (laughing)—as a graduate student to bring these lessons into other spaces and to try to change from within as much as possible this massive institution that moves very slowly.

We, unfortunately, recently have hit some challenges, including resistance from within the institution when we brought it through a formal committee review process for public release. And that's where we're currently sitting with our statement. That has been our biggest challenge to date, it was also unexpected, perhaps naïvely, on my own part, but it was a little unexpected that we would hit such resistance from within the institution, considering the public-facing position of the institution and the fact that they were aware that we were working on this. Part of the resistance has to do with our acknowledging and calling out the origins of our institution, which are very much tied to residential school systems.

MARCI PRESCOTT-BROWN

Currently I work in the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto as a Writing and Academic Skills Centre (WASC) Instructor and Multi-Language Learning Specialist. The Transitional Year Programme is an access program for students who desire to go on to postsecondary education but have not completed high school. As a WASC instructor, I lead writing workshops, create promotional materials, and hold weekly writing café hours as well as provide one-on-one writing support sessions to students. In this role, there are three main,

interrelated components of my antiracist advocacy: cheerleading for students, helping them identify tools, and helping to empower students. As a cheerleader, I recognize that the students in this program have faced many obstacles thus far in their journeys. Many of them question their ability to really achieve their dream of going on to postsecondary education. At these times, they are reassured that I believe in them; I constantly remind WASC clients that all of us had to learn these skills, and that I know they can, too. One reason I know my students can succeed is that the life experiences that made it so difficult for them to accomplish some of their goals, are, in fact, great repositories of knowledge that can help them in their writing tasks.

Students don't have to share anything that they don't wish to, but if they do want to draw on the richness of the knowledges that they bring with them from all different contexts and various identities into the writing process, I'm always happy to support this in our sessions. I signal this by saying this directly and working that into our process.

Figure 6. Author's presentation slide: Decolonist writing practice.

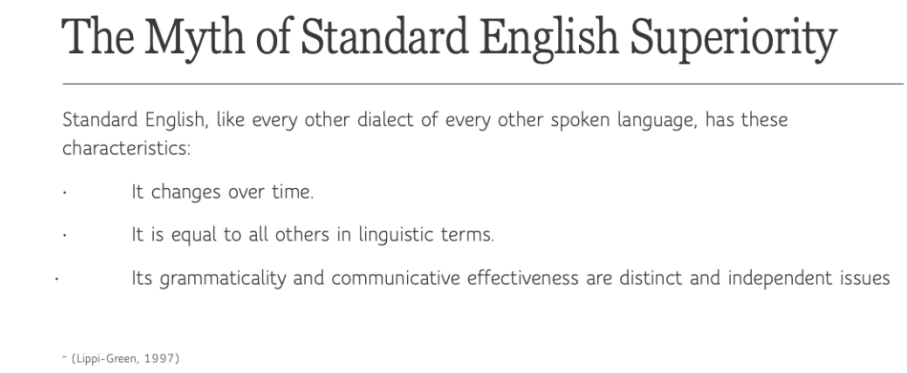
> *Decolonist writing practice "draw[s] on students' histories and knowledges to understand how oppression and the dynamics of power work in societies" and teaches them to integrate these insights into their analysis (Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 126).*

(Iseke-Barnes, 2008)

As Judy Iseke-Barnes explains, "decolonist writing practice draws on students' history and knowledges to understand how oppression and the dynamics of power work in societies," and

teaches them to integrate these insights into their own analysis (See Fig. 6). Thus, I con-sider explaining to students the variety of ways that they can integrate insights from these contexts into their analysis a really important part of my work. Likewise, the languages and dialects students speak at home that are considered by some as inappropriate for academic settings are actually an asset. Some professors have very rigid understandings of what academic Englishes are acceptable and believe that standard English is fixed. Some even believe that Standard English, or what they believe is "Standard English," is superior to other languages and varieties of English for use in students' work (See Fig. 7). Rosina Lippi-Green's work is useful for understanding the challenges of this approach, as is Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan's work that challenges these assumptions with focus on writing centre contexts.

Figure 7. Author's presentation slide: The myth of Standard English superiority.

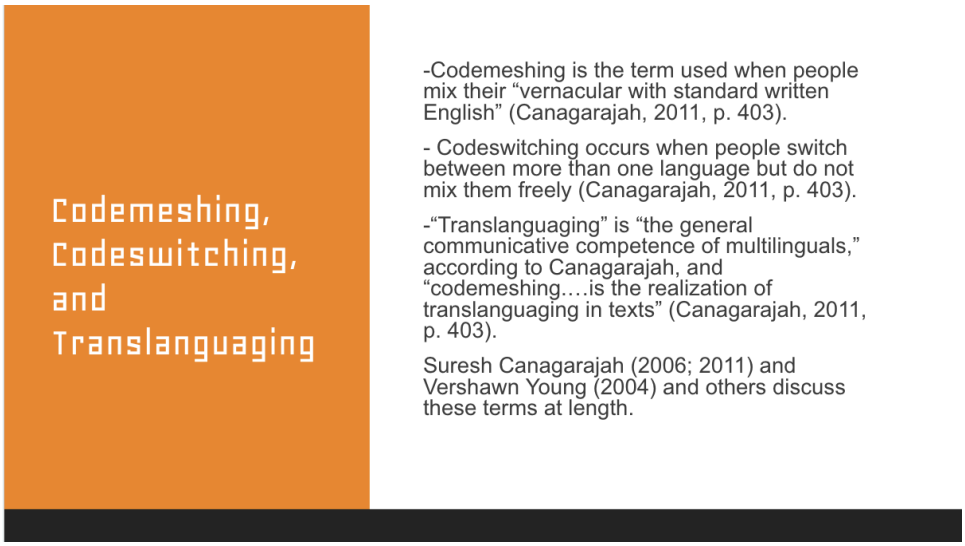


(Lippi-Gree, 1997)

For these professors, students may use resources such as code-meshing and translanguaging in earlier parts of the writing process and translate their work into a variety preferred by the professor for the final draft.

Code-switching. I realize this is a hot-button issue. I have a different view than April Baker-Bell articulates in her book, *Linguistic Justice*, on the issue of code-switching (See Fig. 8). I'm quite comfortable with it, and I think there is a way to frame it productively.

Figure 8. Author's presentation slide: Codemeshing, codeswitching, and translanguaging.



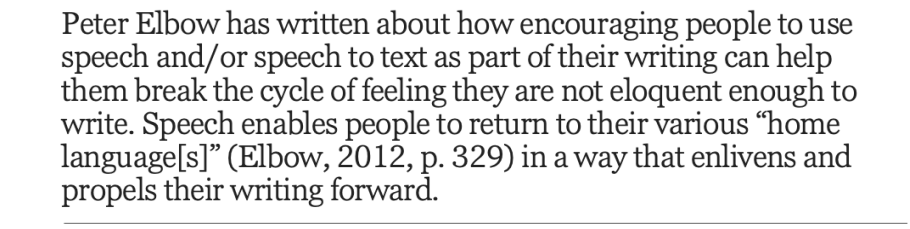
(Canagarajah 2006; 2011 and Young, 2004)

Often, multilingual students assume that a writing support session is implicitly an English-only space. I encourage students to use their home languages as part of their writing processes.

This is especially important because when I was growing up, when I would break into Patois, my mom would have fun with me, and then, eventually, she would say, "Be careful about saying that in public. Be careful about using Patois in public. It's not going to be good for your career advancement." So, I know I am not the only student who has access to varieties of language that has to navigate the tensions and sometimes the various voices and position-alities—often coming from a place of love and concern—of trying to integrate all of that as one is writing. I also point out that even students whose home language is "Standard English," as

it's called, have to navigate various academic Englishes, as they write across the curriculum as well as deploy various registers in English, so this is not something exclusively experienced by those who draw on home languages, as Peter Elbow calls them (See Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Author's presentation slide: Peter Elbow.



(Elbow, 2012)

Making it clear that there isn't a hierarchy of writing tools where some are taboo and others are celebrated really helps students to see their options. Often empowerment, which is what I feel a lot of my advocacy is about, is as much about what comes out of the student from their own contexts and experiences, as it is about the supports and the tools in place to help them achieve their writing goals.

Here is another example of how I help students find the tools that they need: many have been told that they have to prewrite in specified ways. In one-on-one meetings, I help them identify alternatives such as drawing or colouring mind maps or clustering. I encourage them to use textisms, text messages, phone notes, and emails to themselves or to a friend (See Figs. 10 & 11).

Figure 10. Author's presentation slide: Textisms, text speak, texting.

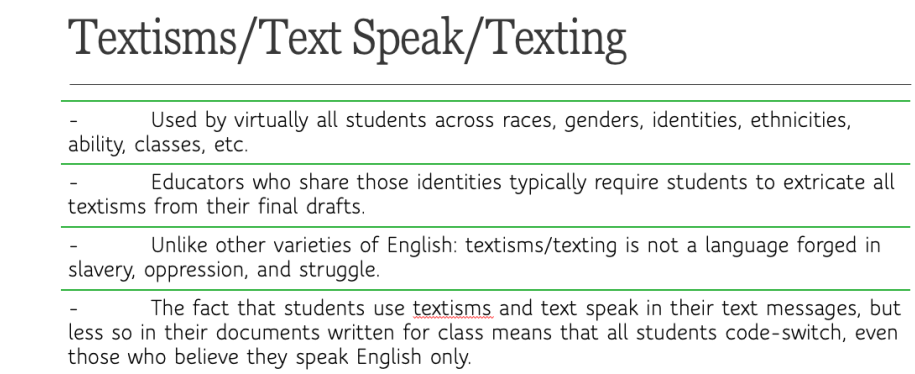
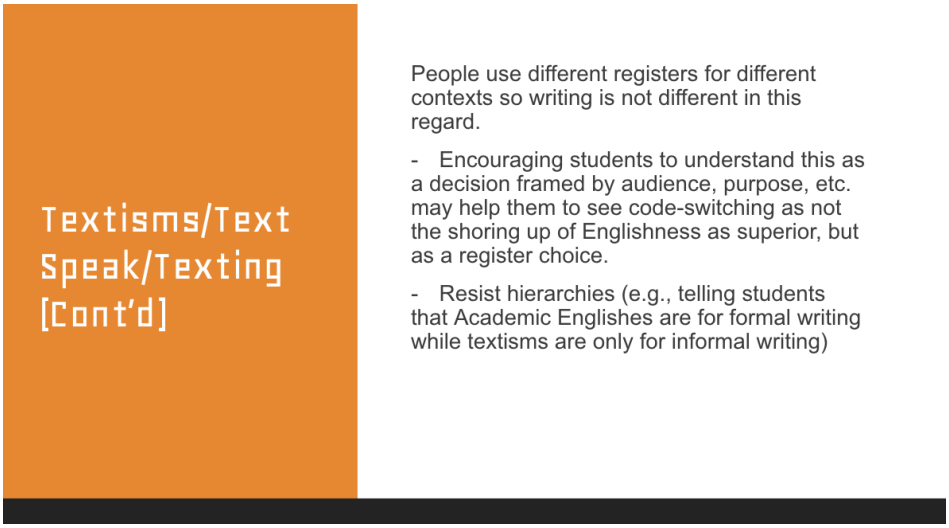


Figure 11. Author's presentation slide: Textisms, text speak, texting, cont'd.

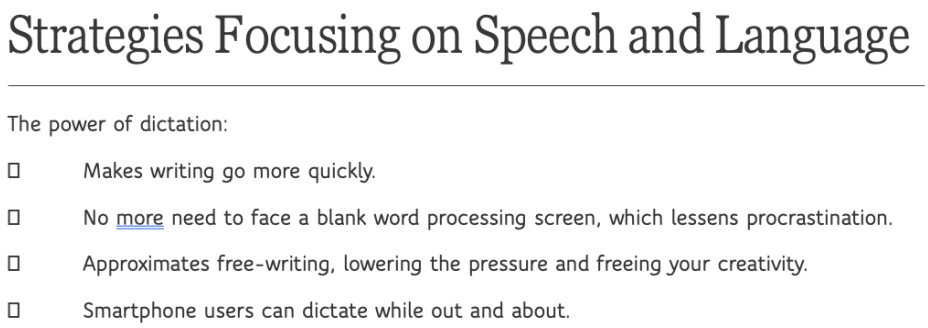


So that's kind of one way I try to open up the space to allow students to see the options that will really be supportive and work well with their various home languages.

I have shared with some students that when I feel stuck in my own writing, I often start writing a dialogue in Patois that helps me figure out what I'm missing, why I'm stuck, and how to dissolve that challenging moment. They know that I often dictate portions of my writing, as

well, so that I'm really flexible and comfortable with different ways of doing things (See Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Author's presentation slide: Strategies focusing on speech and language.



The point is not that they have to do the same as me. The point is that they see that even people who have been writing a long time still have to navigate writing spaces, linguistic contexts, and resources to keep writing. I find that this kind of flattening of hierarchies excites students and helps them see the real possibilities that they have in the writing spaces that they navigate. I am also part of the CWCA/ACCR BIPOC Caucus, and so, in a very practical way, I'm trying to be part of that voice to help to bring various changes in the writing instructor realm—I am really passionate about that.

I also teach at Algoma University (Brampton Campus), and most of my students are from India—over 90%—and most have just arrived in Canada when they come to my class. That's a very exciting experience because once I say to students, "Yes, you can do this in my class," (after initially being surprised that this is "allowed"), they're all in. It's very exciting for me to witness, be part of, and help facilitate this.

MAŠA TORBICA

For me, the most challenging element of this discussion is navigating the tensions between what is necessary and what is feasible within the current systems of power. It is difficult to meaningfully address colonial and racial biases in isolation, through discrete seminars,

events, or workshops. Since these issues are rooted throughout the current structures of higher education, solutions will inherently require a deep and thorough integration throughout every stage of the curriculum and across numerous campus spaces and systems. Constrains like insufficient administrative commitment and lack of resources lead to a relative dearth of top-down support, which leads to a deeply dysfunctional dynamic where the bulk of responsibility for addressing these systemic issues falls upon individuals who work directly with students. Individuals who may have extremely limited (if any) influence over the institutional structures and policies that have been built to promote and accommodate colonial sociopolitical ideologies that violently oppress other epistemic, linguistic, and cultural traditions. Thus, it is often the case that those of us who are tasked with directly supporting language equity and inclusion in higher education are also among those least positioned to address the root causes of this systemic oppression within the institution.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge how my colleagues at the Writing and Communication Centre (WCC) at the University of Waterloo have prioritized these conversations about these issues and barriers. I was a peer tutor for the first few years of my work at the WCC, and I only recently stepped into a full-time role. I am very excited about this new capacity to contribute meaningfully to the development of resources, strategies, and internal policies promoting language equity and diversity, with a specific focus on decolonization initiatives. Most recently, I've worked with my manager to provide integral training for our peer tutor program, drawing upon Indigenous knowledges and perspectives to work towards decolonizing discussions around writing and communication in a way that doesn't *start* by placing the burden on Indigenous folks on our campus to come in and educate our team (See Fig. 13).

Figure 13. Author's presentation slide: Decolonizing communication.

Maša Torbica (she/her), University of Waterloo

With any discussion of decolonization within higher education, I find it vital to foreground the broader realities of systemic oppression and important underlying concepts like cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2016). One useful resource for understanding different possibilities for decolonizing education in Canada is the article by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), *Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization*. In their analysis of different institutional efforts in recent years, Gaudry and Lorenz demonstrate how many initiatives can be understood as efforts to retrofit rather than dismantle existing power structures. Genuinely transformative work will almost invariably be met with institutional resistance. But that is the work that needs to be done.

Embodied Breathing Exercise

Antiracist advocacy is embodied work; thus, the Antiracism Advocacy Roundtable included a "breath break," facilitated by Sheila Batacharya. Sheila framed breathing exercises as a part of a conversation about wellbeing and antiracist advocacy in writing centres by referencing the work of Felicia Rose Chavez (2021) and Sarah Ahmed (2004). The slides are below (Figs. 14, 15, & 16).

Figure 14. Author's presentation slide: The anti-racist writing workshop.

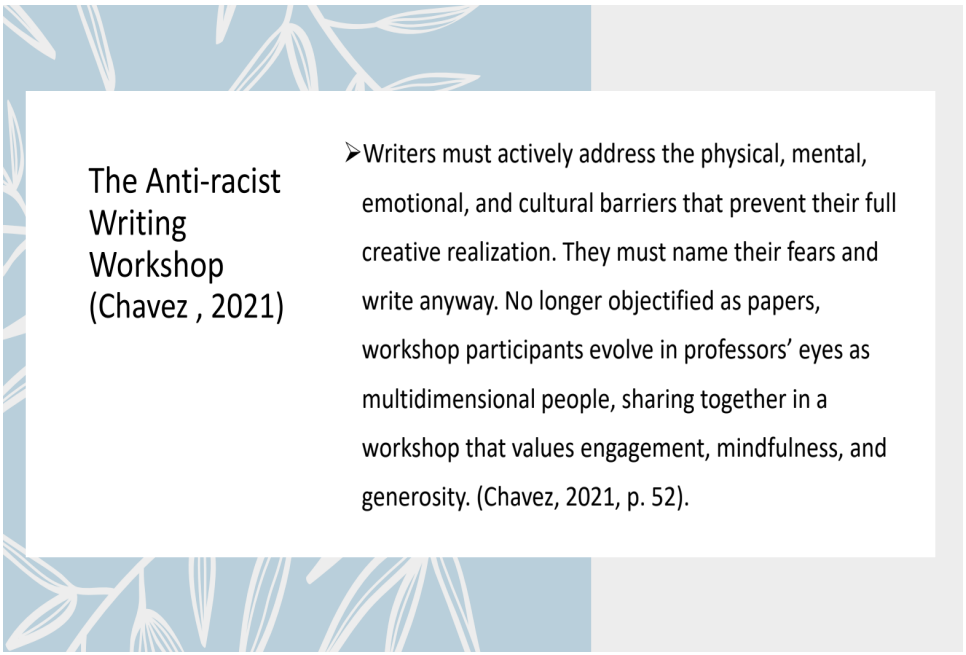


Figure 15. Author's presentation slide: The cultural politics of emotion.

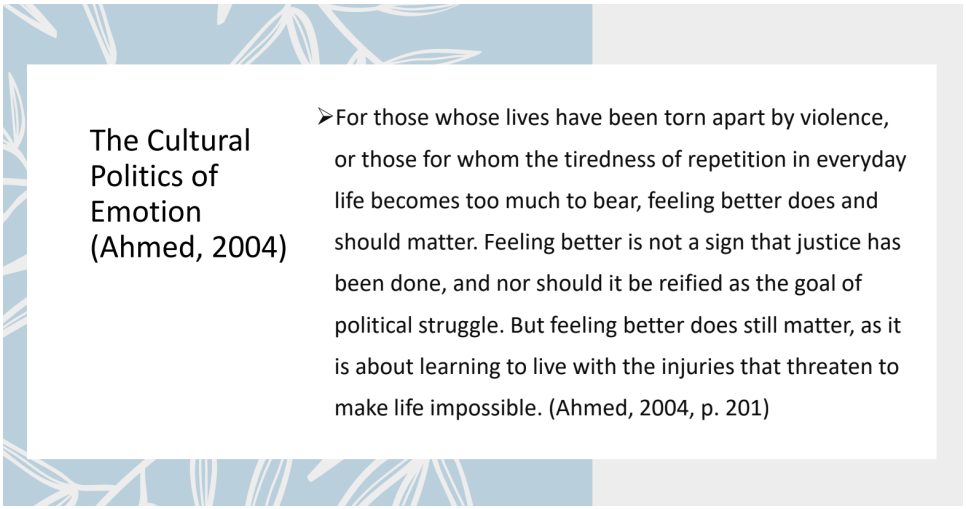
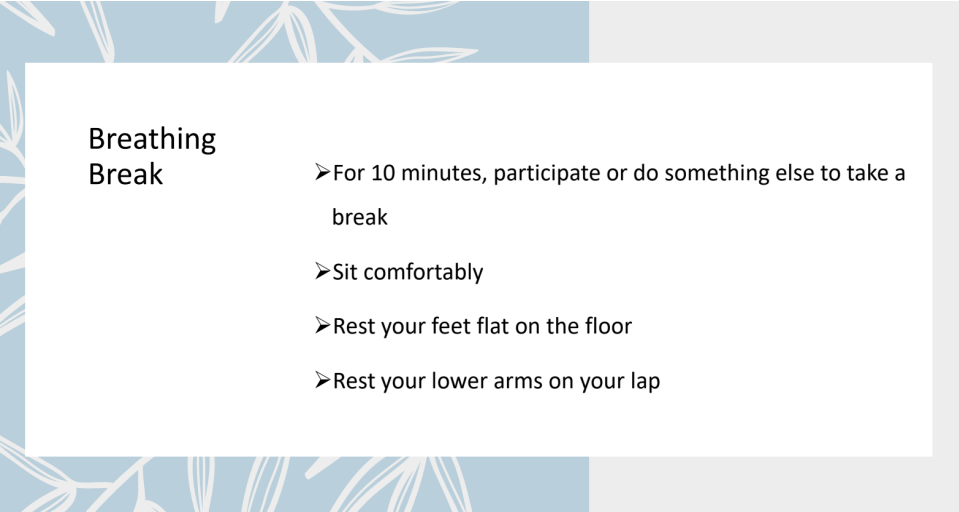


Figure 16. Author's presentation slide: Breathing break.



Question 3: Lessons Learned & Words of Wisdom/Caution/Encouragement from Your Advocacy Experience

MAŠA TORBICA

I'd like to share words of wisdom from two voices outside of writing studies. The first insight is from the Iranian-American poet, Kaveh Akbar (See Fig. 17). In a 2019 interview with the *New Yorker* poetry editor and poet Kevin Young, Akbar noted: "My medium is the English language, maybe the most violent colonial weapon ever invented. What are the writer's responsibilities when working in such a brutal medium? How to not become habituated to, or complicit with, the language's histories?" I keep these lines pinned above my desk to constantly remind me of the stakes involved in our work. The English language, as codified within educational institutions, has been deployed (often deliberately) as a tool of oppression. Many aspects of contemporary approaches to English instruction and assessment in higher education are still rooted in that history of violence. In this sense, harm prevention becomes a critical dimension of writing studies, and part of how we should conceptualize the role and responsibilities of those who work with English language learners.

Figure 17. Author's presentation slide: Kaveh Akbar.

Photograph by Mai Schotz

"My medium is the English language, maybe the most violent colonial weapon ever invented.

What are the writer's responsibilities when working in such a brutal medium?

How to not become habituated to, or complicit with, the language's histories?"

Kaveh Akbar

(Young, 2019)

The second insight is from Sto:lo writer and activist, Lee Maracle (See Fig. 18). In the poem, "Ka-Nata," from her poetry collection, *Bent Box*, Maracle reminds us, "Academic theories are but the leaky summations of human stories" (2000, p. 107). Communication is an expression of humanity. Theory cannot be divorced from the human experience, and the same is true for English language learning. Writing and communication in English should not be conceptualized as static, abstract standards that students must learn and adhere to, irrespective of their background and identity.

Figure 18. Author's presentation slide: Lee Maracle.

Photo credit, Columpa Bobb

"Academic theories

are but the leaky summations

of human stories."

Lee Maracle

(2000, p. 107)

Together, these quotes encourage us to think of English not as merely a tool, or a set of grammatical rules and conventions, but rather as *space* of contact and connection between human beings. Insofar as communication is a shared experience between the writer/speaker and the listener/reader, there is value in considering how both parties share responsibility for comprehension. As a speaker/writer, I am responsible for expressing my thoughts maximally clearly, for making myself understood. Similarly, as a listener/reader, it is my responsibility to engage actively and put in the work necessary to better understand the speaker/writer. In my experience, advocating for wider acceptance of this "dual responsibility" mindset has the potential to promote more inclusive and empowering approaches to how folks conceptualize and teach writing and communication across different learning environments on campus.

EFFIE SAPURIDIS

Personally, the key lessons for me over the last two years have been grounded in collaboration and community when doing this work and a willingness and a need to be open to critique and revision, especially for those of us who are white settlers aiming to do accomplice work. And doing the work even when it's scary, even when you're doing it imperfectly in a room full of people who have a level of expertise that you might not. And the willingness, where possible, if possible, to accept the social and professional risks that come with advocating for equity and racial justice.

MARCI PRESCOTT-BROWN

Listening is still a big deal for this kind of work. If we listen with openness, we often get a lot of the tools that we need to meaningfully facilitate the writing moment for students, so that is always—especially if you are starting but even if you are in it—important.

Second, when students bring assignments to the writing centre, that's a really good moment to consider if there are places in the assignment that invite the ways of knowing that students bring with them because of their backgrounds. You can look at the assignment they were given and start thinking about that.

Third, realize that code-meshing, code-switching and translanguaging, and textisms are not inferior to academic Englishes, so you can really have discussions with your students about how they can assess audience and purpose and context to get a sense of which registers they want to use and deploy, and develop that flexibility (See Fig. 19). And you can always be willing to think about how you want to invite various languages, dialects, creoles, or whatever into the writing process.

Figure 19. Author's presentation slide: Welcoming linguistic varieties.

And also remember that some professors may only celebrate that final draft, but we—as writing instructors—get to celebrate the whole process. So please be encouraged to do that, especially if it's a case where the student is writing for a professor where that final draft has got to be in academic Englishes; we can celebrate all of the other stages, truly all of the labour that students do, and that's definitely something Asao Inoue stresses (2015, 2022, etc.) (See Fig. 20). So just keeping that in mind, we can have that celebration—that party—for students.

Figure 20. Author's presentation slide: Asao Inoue.

> *Resist the impulse to celebrate only one dimension of writing (the final draft), and instead, empower students to "consider and work from the idea that words are action, language is action, and reflection is action, which makes language and the assessment of it both the means of cultural production (base) and the explaining of that production (superstructure) in assessment activities."*
>
> (INOUE, 2015, P. 118).

(Inoue, 2015)

EMILIE BRANCATO

I want to highlight that this work takes time and patience. And, I think, we've heard it in some of the things that my fellow panelists have said that, if you're racialized, there's a significant amount of emotional labour. There are going to sometimes be days where you have consultations with faculty, and you feel that nothing happened. And that's not true. If we keep having these conversations, and we keep explicitly calling attention to these questions and asking them as questions, change does happen. We just can't always see it or feel it given how much time it takes to re-examine bias, especially since the bias is built into our pedagogy and our curriculum, not just ourselves.

The other thing is that this work is not undertaken alone. Connect and collaborate with others: Indigenous colleagues engaged in decolonizing work; linguists and TESL-trained people who are engaged in advocating for linguistic justice; faculty and staff engaged in antiracist and decolonizing initiatives across other disciplines and programs. Everyone is engaged in shifting the conversation across the institution. The collaborative work that we do for one another does make it easier to have these conversations easier and easier. So, we don't engage in this alone.

There are four key lessons that I have learned: Firstly, I need, and will always need, to do the intrapersonal work of self-education and preserving humility, on the one hand, and of building my own resilience, on the other. I always want to be cautious and consultative about the wishes of those for whom I advocate. For example, I want to advocate for students' right to their own language, but I also want to acknowledge how a more linguistically assimilative approach may benefit, and may be desired by, international and multilingual students.

Secondly, I have pushed myself to do the interpersonal work of building relationships and collectivities, which are the launching pads of effective advocacy. Advocacy works very differently depending on the skin you are in and when you do it. If you're white, you are read as altruistic and objective. If you are racialized, you are sometimes read as merely self-interested and biased towards your own group, and resentment or open complaints soon follow. As a racialized person, I have to admit that I have felt frustrated with disappointing, uncommitted, fragile, performative, or actively hostile colleagues. I have felt that the only colleagues I can trust are racialized ones—that there is this chasm between white worlds and my world that can't be bridged. So, I experience this internal tussle between embracing racial identity politics at its "separatist" extreme—that is to say, if you are racialized, then we belong together, otherwise not—and persisting in relationship building with all those who want to be involved in pursuit of the common goal of linguistic and academic justice. Acknowledging my own flaws when I tried to be an ally to caste-oppressed, gender-diverse, and disabled people and acknowledging Derrick Bell's (1980) very valid point about interest convergence, I have made a commitment, in the long run, to an ethic of collaboration in antiracist advocacy.

Thirdly, I know I must be attentive to intersectionality and to the complexity of oppression. While I don't want to set up a hierarchy of oppressions, I feel deep solidarity with my Black and Indigenous students and colleagues. The exclusions and discriminations they face are much worse than anything I face, and I want to be careful not to eat up their political

space. I also see the politics of disability, queerness, and gender diversity as closely bound up with the politics of race, and I feel I must advocate on all these different fronts at the same time wherever possible.

Finally, I know I can only rely on myself and my racialized colleagues to sustain the work of antiracism. When antiracism is no longer flavour of the month, I will be still doing this work, and I know many others around me will have gone on to the next interesting thing. I know this is a negative note to end on, but I say it without rancour. It's natural that this should happen. But I also feel that thought should be given in the long run, by both racialized and white antiracism advocates, to *sustaining* this work, not just to getting involved in it and launching it. The moment of launching antiracist initiatives can be accompanied by great enthusiasm and a feeling, even, of achievement. But I feel that self-gratulation is premature. I echo the other panelists in saying that this is a slow, cumulative, accretive process, and if we don't pay enough attention to sustaining it, it will fizzle out in no time at all.

Advocacy Heuristic: Session Post-Work

As Vidya emphasized in her closing remarks, this work is never finished. To support ongoing engagement in antiracist advocacy work, Vidya created and shared an Advocacy Heuristic Brainstorming document, which you can access **here**.

This heuristic is intended to support you as you map your own writing centre advocacy for antiracism. Please engage with it actively. There is enough work here for all of us.

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