

The Push for the 1974 Statement . . . Once Again

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*Pues . . . ¿qué te puedo decir?*² Even as a Chicano full professor at a major university, I experience more racism in one day than most people do in their entire lives. That said, I often think how awesome it would be to live in a world where everyone is treated equally. Who would not want that . . . besides the people who have power? It would be so nice to attend a school where people (administrators, teachers, students, et al.) did not judge people because of the color of their skin, ethnicity, nationality, or the language they spoke. Attending a school that treated everyone equitably would be a dream come true. In this utopian school, the curriculum and pedagogy would represent all students' voices. Students would read material from all perspectives, and ethnicities, and the curriculum and teachers would encourage students to be open minded. Schools would encourage and accept all dialects and languages that students speak in their home environments. All this would be so nice. But hold on a minute. These hopes sound exactly like the "Students' Rights to their own Language" statement that was printed in *College Composition and Communication* back in 1974. It read:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. <<https://prod-ncte-cdn.azureedge.net/nctefiles/groups/cccc/newsrtol.pdf>>

Since this statement was made in 1974, thirty-seven years ago, one would hope that all universities, guided by their Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) have had enough time to implement this policy. And although I understand that in some cases WPAs have done an exceptional job creating a writing program at their OWN university, this has not been the case across the nation. Unfortunately, there are still many university writing programs across the nation that, either purposely or not, continue to

oppress people of color and other marginalized groups. Currently, and with the strong support of the Black Lives Matter Movement, there is once again a strong interest for pushing universities and their WPAs to create an Anti-racist/Black Lives Matter curriculum (EAB, 2020; Love, 2020).

My 1974

*Mi hijo . . . mi hijo. Ya levántate. Ya es tiempo para ir a trabajar.*² I was 7 years old, 1974, my hard working family were all farm workers. It was the peach picking season (late June to early September) and we were living in Marysville, California. I know that because I use to hate this season. Not only was the daily temperature over 100 degrees, but there was always an abundance of pesticides on the peaches that made my skin itch and get huge welts. It was plain torture. Mom was always the first person up at 3 am. The four of us lived in a tiny house, not more than 600 square feet. Despite mom trying to be as quiet as possible, she almost always waked us up while making our daily food *para el jalé*.³

At seven years old I was not officially given a *costal*⁴ to pick fruit. The *patrones*⁵ thought I was too young. So, what I did was picked peaches from the ground and took them to our bin. When lucky, I would find an old, torn-up *costal*, that an adult field worker had discarded. When I found these *costales*, I thought I was grown up. I thought now I can really help *mi familia*⁶ fill the peach bin, which would pay us \$3.75. On a good day, between 2 adults and 2 kids, we would fill 9 bins and get paid \$33.75.

Both my parents having to work so much, and me having to go to work with them, caused me to miss a lot of school. The school did not care that there was no one that could take me to school, so therefore I could not attend. The only thing they cared about was that I missed school, and as a result, the state of California was not paying them my daily student fees. For this reason—the schools were always mad at my family.

CONSEQUENCES OF MY 1974

When I entered high school, my counselor looked at my grades and classes and told me that I was not college material. She told me to find a profession where I could use my hands and not my brain. As a result, for my freshman year in high school, she enrolled me in “welding,” “metal shop,” and a Future Farmers of America (FFA) science class. Not knowing better, I did not object.

Four years later, as a special admit, *via* the Education Opportunity Program (EOP) office, I was admitted to California State University, Chico. Unfortunately, since I did not have a strong academic background, I was

forced to enroll in one year of remedial classes, which I struggled with. Luckily I met a Dr. Tom Fox, an Assistant Professor at Chico State at that point, who cared a lot about making the first year composition curriculum a lot more accepting to diverse students. Considering this was back in 1986, I have no doubt that Dr. Tom Fox was a pioneer in his attempts to make the first year writing experience a lot more inclusive to ethnically diverse students. After graduating with my bachelor's degree, the rest was just routine because I had gained the confidence to excel academically. Soon after graduating with my bachelor's degree, I graduated with my Master's, and then my PhD. Once Texas State University hired me, I flew through the ranks. Six years after I was hired by Texas State University, I was tenured and promoted. Five years after, I was promoted to Full Professor. Ya . . . the once labeled special education student was now a "FULL PROFE".⁷

Antiracist/Black Lives Matter Movement

Flash forward to 2020 (BGSU, 2020), and there is a strong interest in creating an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter curriculum across the university, and especially in writing programs, which are often housed in Departments of English. It is important to note that scholars of color and allies have been advocating for these changes for many years—even before 1974. But because this problem had not been given the national attention that it is now getting, thanks to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the push for an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter curriculum was often not supported by the masses. But now, since being an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter Movement is trending, many scholars are now supporting this movement while also claiming their expertise in systematic racism. To those of us who have lived through these experiences, and have been writing about systematic racism for 20+ years (mostly scholars of color), and have been ignored at best, we are a bit frustrated because it was not until these "new" scholars (mostly white European American scholars) started to pay attention because this movement made national news.

The point that I am getting at is that although it is important to create an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter curriculum across universities, and especially in writing programs, it is more important to have the right people leading these programs. Universities need individuals who are truly invested into making these changes. That said, universities need people who have experienced painful discriminatory incidents that fuel the need for the curricular/pedagogical transformation. What the writing field does not need are people who simply want to help create an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter curriculum because it will further their career opportunities. I understand that some people who have not experienced this pain may have

the understanding and motivation to make these changes, but those individuals are the anomaly and not the norm.

Unfortunately, the majority of writing programs across the nation are being led by scholars, although great people and fine colleagues, who truly do not understand the need to push an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter Curriculum. These writing program administrators have read many books and theories that tell them that this need is very important, but unfortunately the majority of them have not had the experiences that can really fuel this interest. I understand that in most cases, these WPAs are doing the job to the best of their ability. But that is the concern—"their ability." I also understand that in many cases a university/program may have to hire an individual who may be book smart, but does not have actual experience in dealing with issues of race and ethnicity. In these cases, I suggest that the WPA seeks partnerships with people who do have experience dealing with issues of racism. Although I 100% support an Antiracist/Black Lives Matter Curriculum, I also push the need to have the right people leading these efforts. Without a doubt, there are many scholars of color who would excel in running these programs, but for some reason, universities often have a difficult time hiring them. I am hopeful this will change.

NOTES

1. Well . . . what can I tell you.
2. Son . . . Son . . . wake up. It is time to go to work.
3. For the job
4. Fruit picking bag
5. bosses
6. My family
7. Full professor

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