

## Mike Rose: Remediating Academia via Inclusive Pedagogy

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*Celebrating Mike Rose's contributions to the field of Composition and Rhetoric, this tribute recognizes Rose's examination of the harmful "remedial" label in writing studies, honors his call for prioritizing inclusive pedagogy over correctness, and demonstrates that his call for inclusion maintains its relevance today through PARS, an inclusive pedagogical approach.*

*"[I]f we can just do x or y, the problem [remedial education] will be solved—in five years, ten years, or a generation—and higher education will be able to return to its real work." (Rose 599)*

Mike Rose illuminates the stigma enveloping multiple marginalized students enrolled in remedial writing courses. In "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University," Rose addresses the disturbing notion of writing as a skill to be mastered, when he discusses the problematic label of remedial. He supplies readers with the following definition of remedial: "To remediate seems to mean to correct errors or fill in gaps in a person's knowledge. The implication is that the material being studied should have been learned during prior education but was not" (593). The definition, infused with the assumption that all students have the same educational background, communicates that students have failed to learn the skills or information needed to succeed. With a diverse student population, it is impossible to make such assumptions. Rose reminds readers of the "dynamic and fluid nature of the educational system" (600). Influenced by race, class, economics, and region, each student's educational background is unique in terms of the high school they attended and the required curriculum in place during a specific time period.

Rose adds to this definition as he makes connections between remedial classes and medical terminology, for students are tested, diagnosed, and treated (595). While being treated, remedial students, set apart from curriculum students, appear as a drain on educational institutions' resources or a distraction that keeps them from focusing solely on research and graduate programs. In most cases, physically separated from their peers to be treated, remedial students resume their prescribed treatment. If cured of their writing ailments, students move forward, but those with untreatable cases often disappear from the academy.

By utilizing a medical metaphor for remedial education, Rose attends to exclusion and erasure. Universities and community colleges' entrance exams and placement tests put ESL students' native tongues, students of color's dialects, and first-generation students' struggles to adapt at odds with higher education's standards. Successful treatment, or eradicating problematic writing, aligns with replacing students' languages with the academy's language. Recognizing academia's exclusion, Rose calls for an inclusive pedagogy by reimagining the function and place of writing studies within the academy: "Consider, though, the message that would be sent to the schools and to the society at large if the university embraced—not just financially but conceptually—the teaching of writing: if we gave it full status, championed its rich relationship with inquiry, insisted on the importance of craft and grace, incorporated it into the heart of our curriculum" (602). Along with moving writing away from the margins of the academy, Rose prioritizes inquiry instead of correctness.

Rose's 1985 call for inclusion maintains its relevance today as I work alongside my rhetoric and composition colleagues to interrogate racist and sexist practices to remediate academia, as opposed to students, and enact an inclusive pedagogy. Questions related to race, gender, class, and accessibility have prompted me over the years to move toward an inclusive model of pedagogy hinged on accessibility as opposed to correctness. I utilize Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle's PARS approach in *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*. Although Borgman and McArdle focus on online instruction, their PARS approach also applies to face-to-face, hybrid, and hyflex classrooms.

Below I illustrate my use of PARS as an inclusive approach to teaching. Due to space limitations, I focus on accessibility in the PARS approach while drawing on my experience with teaching first-year college students who are often diverse students in terms of age, race, gender, and social class. Borgman and McArdle expand the definition of accessibility beyond providing accessible, ADA compliant materials by stating, "Accessible instruction is about more than setting expectations and making you and your course materials accessible to your students, it's also about creating a community of inclusion in your course and inviting students with all levels of ability to interact with you in a way that works for them" (40). Borgman and McArdle's emphasis on building an inclusive community containing students of "all levels of ability" aligns with Rose's rejection of isolation and remediation for students lacking skills or knowledge in their prior education (40). As illustrated in my example below, accessibility plays an important role in helping first-generation college students who often lack

experience decoding the language of academia, utilizing technology, and adjusting to their new roles as college students.

Applying Borgman and McArdle's definition above, I will point to a brief example of accessibility. Prior to using PARS, I simply listed a brief description of the writing center's services along with a link to the appointment form on my course syllabus. I soon discovered during one-on-one conferences with students that the brief description left many students with more questions than answers. When I attempted to uncover some of my students' reluctance to visit the writing center, students shared with me their thoughts. Associating tutoring with expensive SAT prep and professional for-profit tutoring centers, one student mentioned that he could not afford their services while another student equated the writing center's services to their previous after-school experience in high school involving test or paper corrections and extra credit assignments for failing students in their English class. Students' past experiences shaped their attitudes toward my tutoring recommendations as well as exemplified financial barriers and systemic racism in education. First-generation students, often nonwhite and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, frequently attend underfunded high schools that lack essential tutoring services. Such barriers contribute to their potential continued struggles in college.

My conversations with students prompted me to apply a PARS approach. Revising my syllabus, I provided links to a Q&A as well as demonstrated through a video the process of making an appointment online. For synchronous and face-to-face classes, I invited writing center tutors as guest speakers to supply students with further details about their services. For asynchronous online classes, I created a recording of these details to post. The instructional video allowed students to hear my voice as well as see the process of navigating through multiple areas of the writing center's website. This approach took into account students' learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.), as well as differing levels of writing center knowledge and technology experience when introducing them to the writing center.

After implementing changes in my approach to making accessible materials, I noticed students' comprehension of the writing center's services changed in their understanding of the writing center as a space for dialogue and learning. Some alluded to their sense of belonging through preferences in working with specific tutors and their plans for future tutoring sessions. Personal conferences in addition to surveys and informal Zoom polls functioned as a means for me to continue gauging students' success in accessing services and allowing them to communicate their needs.

As I reflect on this example from my own teaching utilizing PARS, Rose's call for methods of support and inclusion rather than exclusion and

remediation continues to resonate. Rose continues to influence today's scholars by shifting educators' interpretations of students' needs. Instead of students' needs being a source of deficiency, their needs are a foundation for building a network of support through accessible resources, peers, tutors, educators, and college services.

#### WORKS CITED

Borgman, Jessie, and Casey McArdle. *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*. WAC Clearinghouse, 2019.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*. edited by Susan Miller, W.W. Norton & Company, 2009, pp. 586-604.

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