

Book Reviews

(Inter-)Cultural Literacies: Towards Inclusive Writing Pedagogies and Practices

Bordered Writers: Latinx Identities and Literacy Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, edited by Isabel Baca, Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa, and Susan Wolff Murphy. SUNY P, 2019. 268 pp.

Writing Across Cultures, by Robert Eddy and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar. UP of Colorado, 2017. 246 pp.

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In March 2019, compositionists met in Pittsburgh for the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. In his Chair's Address that year titled, "How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, or, What Do We Do about White Language Supremacy?" Asao B. Inoue addressed the "steel cage of [w]hite supremacy" that determines what happens in classrooms, connecting metaphorical bars to the metal and concrete cells that claim the lives of many BIPOC¹ (353). By upholding white supremacist values disguised as the elevation of Standard Written English (SWE) and promoting grading practices based on SWE-only bias, he argued, we contribute to white language supremacy in the teaching of writing, rhetoric, communication, even English itself. So long as we continue to accept these biases, "We ain't just internally colonized, we're internally jailed," even and perhaps especially when we aim to disrupt or subvert racist norms (353). We are teaching students that the only way to succeed or be somebody is to adopt and internalize these often-implicit disciplinary mechanisms, with "disciplinary" here referring to the academic subject, bodily regulation, and the deleterious manner in which the former results in the latter.

In the days after the Address, colleagues in the discipline made known their discontent on a variety of platforms. Some did not appreciate Inoue saying that they had been "bribed" into accepting their white privilege or had helped construct that cage of white language supremacy in which we are all

1. Here I use *BIPOC* ("Black, Indigenous, and People of Color") a term meant to express solidarity among members of diverse yet sometimes overlapping ethnoracial communities to evoke how whistream structures harm all minoritized communities. However, it's important to note that some Indigenous and Black people prefer not to use this acronym, believing it elides the specific violences that target Black and Indigenous people.

forced to exist, some of us paying with our lives. Many of us who are BIPOC scholars were disappointed but not surprised by the negative reactions. It can be difficult to be called out if you're not used to it, and to be frank, many white peers are not. As Inoue stated in urging for a "tough compassion" for our white colleagues, "They don't have the years of anti-White language supremacy training we do" (356). In other words, they must seldom engage the many different literacies required to navigate and survive in spaces never meant for us and bodyminds² like ours. Yet, this knowledge is required if we are to work together to make schooling and everyday life more habitable for everyone.

As educators aware of the power of language, we can make vital interventions through our teaching and social interactions, perhaps most importantly by *listening* to our students and colleagues who know through lived experience, to stories that go unheard in favor of the "real" teaching and learning of writing. We must practice a "deep listening" that deprioritizes our own habituated expectations and allows others to speak for themselves (Inoue 363). Two books that can help attune our attention and teaching to this powerful kind of listening are *Bordered Writers: Latinx Identities and Literacy Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions*, an edited collection by Isabel Baca, Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa, and Susan Wolff Murphy, and *Writing Across Cultures*, by Robert Eddy and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar. These books approach the issue of critical listening in different ways: the former looks at the diverse lives and praxes of writers from a minoritized population, while the latter provides a framework (and lessons) for teaching students to appreciate discursive and cultural differences. Taken together, these works highlight each other's strengths while extending the conversation that each alone cannot fully encapsulate.

Bordered Writers is a rare volume for our discipline that centers the voices, practices, and experiences of Latinx educators teaching at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). A school can apply for HSI designation if their student enrollment is at least 25% full-time Latinx (3); as an HSI, the school is eligible for a variety of government grants. However, as those of us who teach at HSIs and/or are members of the Latinx community say, there's a big difference between a Hispanic-Enrolling Institution and a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Having the numbers is not enough. Teachers and administrators determine through their actions whether Latinx faculty and students are actually served. In

2. By "bodymind," I refer to what Margaret Price defines as "a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience" (271). As used in disability studies, *bodymind* deliberately challenges the Cartesian split that stigmatizes the body, denies its impact on everyday life and critical thinking, and therefore overlooks how embodied phenomena like disability and race prove epistemological architectonics.

the Foreword, co-editor of the preceding book, *Teaching Writing with Latinola Students*, Cristina Kirklighter, explains that the individualistic approaches driving whitestream pedagogies run counter to Latinx *familismo*, exacerbating the “Latinx academic challenges of isolationism and nonbelonging” (x). Familismo exacts a promise to one’s students and classmates that access and success for some will not be bought at the expense of others (xv). In this spirit, the editors confront the violence of monolingual instruction and rigid genres by including a mix of traditional academic articles and testimonios, like Steve Alvarez’s *pocho* story depicting schools as “sites of hope, fear, and pressure” (16). This choice to include testimonios matters because these narratives allows marginalized people to speak, that is, theorize and claim rhetorical space of one’s own. Readers from similar backgrounds should find these stories familiar while others will find them illuminating.

The essays in Part One (Developmental English and Bridge Programs) invite readers to consider what makes a learning space culturally accessible. Lucas Corcoran and Caroline Wilkinson examine New Jersey City University’s “progressive” Accelerated Learning Program to argue that its monolingualism affirms “proper grammar” as the default core of writing instruction and privileges generic forms at the expense of rhetorical contextualization. Drawing on the experiences of two students, Alicia and José, they suggest how instructors may highlight rhetorical awareness while honoring students’ multilingual knowledges. Erin Doran writes about the Ascender program, which includes writing- and reading-intensive courses, concentrated mentoring, and personnel training in two key concepts, *familia* and *cariño* (family and affection). Doran analyzes interviews with two-year college developmental writing faculty across Texas to show how valuing diversity and students’ backgrounds can aid in Latinx student retention. Next, Jens Lloyd focuses on the experiences of a summer transition student to find that access to learning spaces can be hampered even at an “involving college,” where students are encouraged to go out and get involved (60-61). Lloyd suggests that rhetorical training can help students plot “geographies of access” and make better choices regarding curricular and cocurricular activities (64). Given my own experiences as a Latina student and now a professor at an HSI, I understand the value of teaching students to traverse these geographies since this knowledge allows students, particularly first-generation college students, to locate vital resources and sustain networks of support. However, such training must incorporate the familismo and attention to multilingualism that Doran and Corcoran and Wilkinson discuss lest this instruction re-center whitestream perspectives regarding successful navigation of academic spaces. Illustrating the importance of these factors, a testimonio by Christine Garcia describes her leaving “not often progressive” yet multilingual West Texas only to encounter white supremacist curricula in

graduate school (70). Together, these essays show why creating culturally accessible learning spaces requires interrogating the social, scholastic, and personal attitudes that cohere in “the discursive, bodily, and performative ways we use and judge language” (Inoue 357).

Part Two (First Year Writing) provides critical models for making vital interventions in the teaching of writing. Using a combination of theory and testimonio, Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa and Candace de León-Zepeda draw on their experiences as multiple-identity students, writers, teachers, and researchers to explain how bodies are shaped by geographic and rhetorical locations. They provide two pedagogical tools based in the Chicana feminism of thinkers like Emma Pérez and Gloria Anzaldúa, *reclamation* and *reimagination*, which provide means for writers to contest historical, discursive, and bodily erasure. Yemin Sánchez, Nicole Nicholson, and Marcela Hebbard follow by advancing *familismo teaching*, a culturally relevant and responsive form of pedagogy that supports students through the introduction of class families and holistic conferences. Class families provide a consistent draw and support system intended to balance the demands of life beyond the classroom. This essay proves an effective complement to previous chapters by Doran and Lloyd, demonstrating how supportive social networks can boost success. Beatrice Mendez Newman and Romeo García add to this rhetorical toolbox by highlighting the inventive potential of borderlands translanguaging. As the authors make clear, it is “*not* code switching, is *not* error, is *not* interlanguage, is *not* code meshing,” nor is it symptomatic of ignorance (128). Instead, translanguaging reshapes genres, styles, and epistemologies in ways precluded by monolingualism and even bilingualism. As someone born and raised on the border, I concur with the definition provided by Mendez Newman and García, recognizing through lived experience how this sociopolitical cultural location cultivates a radical communicative potential white language supremacy would deny. Notably, Heather Lang’s testimonio about teaching at New Mexico State University closes this section by suggesting that we learn to “embrace the untranslatable, the unassessable, the conflicting, and the shifting” aspects of meaning-making (153). As Anzaldúa famously states in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, we are our language. Therefore, we must resist racist narratives that frame Latinx language practices as deficient.

White language supremacy creates this impression of the Other’s rhetorical deficiency by assuming the seemingly neutral position of the status quo. For that reason, Kendall Leon and Aydé Enríquez-Loya deploy translation as a trope for contemplating writers’ relationships to spaces and/in language. They advance a writing program model based in Huatong Sun’s work on “invention as articulation,” proposing ways to render classroom-community connections transparent and contestable in writing so that they may be identified, analyzed,

and reconstructed purposefully (161). Laura Gonzales then explains how she created a technical writing course that highlighted translation and technology, with students producing bilingual documents that addressed specific rhetorical contexts. Gonzales wants to show how working with borderlands technical writing students reveals new ways to gauge technological and cross-cultural literacies; her research and teaching reveal that the “non-standard” experiences of Latinx students can complicate and expand on traditional notions of “accessible language and designs” while problematizing static impressions of identity, language and culture (184). Isabel Baca’s concluding testimonio depicts her schooling on los dos lados, her relationships with English and Spanish, and her determination to ensure her son was bilingual to show that each of us determines our own individual relationship to language. As a result, this section of the book makes clear that linguistic objectivity proves impossible because we are always writing from “somewhere.”

Lastly, due to a focus on personal embodied experience, part four (Writing Centers and Mentored Writing) may be the section that most tangibly illustrates that complex web of language, power, and identity that constrains our cultural and institutional praxes. Sadly, too many Latinx instructors will find Nancy Alvarez’s opening narrative familiar. Alvarez describes being told that she is “sitting in the wrong place” while waiting for her conference panel to begin (196). She is often mistaken for a patron of the St. John’s University writing center rather than recognized as a tutor, even by her own classmates. Her research aims to show that Latinxs are not anomalies in higher ed, especially as our population and presence in academia continue to grow. Yet Latinx readers may also identify with the anxieties expressed by the tutors she speaks to regarding their complicated relationships to Spanish and English. Then, Heather M. Falconer shares a case from a study of the Program for Research Initiatives in Science and Math (PRISM) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice to reveal the potential success of mentored writing in undergraduate STEM courses. Emphasizing the effects of “discourse, economics, competing demands” and other kinds of borders on students at HSIs (227), this chapter attests to the ideological and political dimensions of writing and discursive access. Finally, a testimonio by Kaylee Cruz, a first-generation Latina student and tutor, closes *Bordered Writers* on a poignant note, evoking the proverbial rock and hard place that constrain many Latinx students and scholars. We enter academia only to find that we do not fit its whitely constructed spaces and still grow increasingly unfamiliar to those we love, leaving us to wonder whether we have bought into the academy’s whitestream linguistic and habitual hegemony.

Given that teaching students to write ethically on their own terms is one vital means of “cutting the steel bars” of the white language supremacy cage (Inoue 364), I now turn to *Writing Across Cultures* by Robert Eddy and

Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar, a work that asks students to identify and confront their own cultural biases. This book distills many of the same insights offered by *Bordered Writers* to provide practical pedagogical support. The authors' target audience are early career educators who must learn to teach increasingly diverse student populations without replicating Standard American English (SAE) attitudes and practices that sustain white privilege. Nevertheless, *Writing Across Cultures* can assist more advanced educators wishing to help "reinvent our country, reinvent our universities, and reinvent our discipline to end all unearned group privileges of race, gender, sexuality, and culture" (xvii-xviii). Teachers at all career stages can certainly take advantage of the assignment prompts and student samples provided.

To get students "writing across cultures," Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar present the Eddy Model of Intercultural Experience, which acclimates students to thinking about culture so they can become "polycultural." Students can then decide whether to assimilate into or isolate themselves from the dominant culture, participate in active resistance, or work across "lines of difference" (16-17). The book outlines the model's six stages, and the process is further clarified by the ongoing detailed treatment of a writing assignment that asks students to think critically about their cultural assumptions and those sustaining the space(s) they wish to enter. The six stages include the Preliminary Stage, which involves prewriting and context-building activities; the Spectator Stage, which requires that students dialogue with their classmates to find evidence of "monocultural provincialism" in their own writing (81); the Increasing-Participation Stage, during which students come to understand writing as a collaborative activity; the Shock Stage, wherein students contend with the dissonance between their "old" and "new" writerly selves and question whether they must renounce aspects of their identities in order to succeed (134); the Adaptation Stage, when students begin to view themselves as responsible to their communities and find points of connection between different cultural spaces; and the Reentry Stage, in which students realize that writing is recursive and that they have changed as a result of their learning (194). By working through writing assignments using the Eddy model, students should find "a way into linguistic agency and independence" (202), realizing that every choice is rhetorical, political, and rife with consequences.

Consequently, readers should appreciate how central rapport and care are to the Eddy model. For instance, the authors explain that they often share stories or samples of their own writing with students to reveal the dissonances they themselves experience during attempts at effective cross-cultural communication. I find this point crucial, believing that instructors should be willing to evince some of the same vulnerability that we expect from our students; only in this way can we build communities of trust. Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar

may not use the term “familismo,” but a similar spirit informs their efforts to teach students to embody “center[s] of communal responsibility” (172). Like the authors in *Bordered Writers*, they demonstrate an awareness that borders are rhetorically constructed, “distinguishing those who do and do not ‘belong’” and “materializ[ing] the boundaries of belonging” (Cisneros 7). They aim to undermine those boundaries so that every student—every human being—can be a subject rather than an object of writing. To effect this change, it is important to remember that “[o]ur writing is never really about us, but about those... whose stories we carry with us away from home and bring back in transformed forms” (Moraga 5-6). Sometimes that home happens to be a classroom and our peers are the family to whom we owe a debt of “communal responsibility.”

Another feature that will make this book appealing to readers is the authors’ disagreement regarding translanguaging. Deeming Edited American English (EAE) the “de facto language of white power” (154), the authors’ ideas complement those found in *Bordered Writers* that denounce the hegemonic violence of linguistic shaming (e.g., Hinojosa and de León-Zepeda). They refuse to equate EAE with absolute correctness or establish EAE as the only code to be embraced. However, while both believe that students have a right to choose what works best, Espinosa-Aguilar argues that code-switching permits first-generation and BIPOC students the ability to navigate new spaces, while Eddy champions code meshing as a mode of resistance. Readers can thus understand that the Eddy Model accommodates diverse approaches to teaching. I do wonder, though, if this discussion, threaded throughout the book, might not inadvertently reinforce for readers some of the binary views of language that Mendez Newman and García aim to challenge in *Bordered Writers*. Binary thinking is a hallmark of white language supremacy, marking discourses and practices as either acceptable or objectionable and barring the possibility of engaging alternatives still unclassified by the academy. It would be interesting to see how the authors and other educators reframe this debate in light of CCCC’s recent call for Black Linguistic Justice, which demands that teachers stop pushing students to code-switch and instead teach students about linguistic racism. Still, Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar’s work seems quite useful for drawing students’ attention to the “assumptions we make about ourselves and our relationship to the world and how those assumptions guide our actions” (38). Their model provides a valuable example for those wishing to “leave space” for classroom and cross-cultural dialogues where white language supremacy can be contested.

On that note, I want to conclude this review by returning briefly to Inoue’s address, to the question of “So how do we language so people stop killing each other?” (358). The logical leap required to connect language norms to people killing each other may have seemed considerable to some of those people sitting

in the room that day. Fast forward one year and the nation is experiencing mass unrest prompted by the latest epidemic of state killings of Black people and other forms of violence targeting minoritized populations. From this vantage point, those once mystified connections between language and power emerge ever more clearly against the brutal consequences of dehumanizing political discourses. To people from marginalized communities, the deployment of language as a weapon of racialized violence is nothing new, and we know it goes beyond the events presented on the evening news. White language supremacy empowers the racial/izing stereotypes that make profiling possible, transforming impoverished neighborhoods into “cash cows” for local governments and for-profit prisons (Ortiz 180). Yet, at academic institutions a similar process translates the presence of minoritized students into increased government funding, with the added “bonus” that said students are forced to accept and acculturate to dominant whitestream norms. A cage is a cage is a cage.

What *Bordered Writers: Latinx Identities and Literacy Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions* and *Writing Across Cultures* underscore is that the failure to engage deep listening as basic respect for others’ humanity authorizes serious harm. This harm does not bear out in a theoretical way on theoretical people in theoretical locations; it takes tangible forms in our classrooms and beyond, negatively affecting our students, colleagues, and even ourselves. These books encourage all of us to do our part to promote respectful communal forms of dialogue, remaining ever aware that education can change minds and lives. Ultimately, I’m hopeful that we may yet interrupt white language supremacy’s violent designs.

Houston, Texas (Traditional Karankawa and Akokisa territories)

Works Cited

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