



Title: Community, Voice, Identity: The Principles of Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogies

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Community, Voice, Identity: The Principles of Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogies

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Moderated by Ana Milena Ribero

Introduction

By Ana Milena Ribero

All teaching is political. Whether you teach English, economics, or photography, all teaching is invested in maintaining and/or challenging structures of power. For those of us who teach rhetoric and composition, this maxim is even more apparent. What and how we teach about writing and meaning-making have clear and direct material effects on people—privileging dominant populations and harming those who are already on the margins. As cultural rhetorics scholars and pedagogues in the US, we research and teach in institutions that were built to reproduce white supremacy. The land where our universities sit was stolen from indigenous peoples. The curricula that we are expected to teach are often blatantly anti-Black. The forms of writing and languaging we are expected to perform and teach ignore the value of BIPOC languages, rhetorics, and epistemologies.

As an educator, I take these ideas to heart. The power of teaching—to liberate as well as to oppress—is ever present in my mind, in my course planning, interactions with students, and assessment practices. But this wasn't always so. My introduction to teaching was in 2004 when I returned to my city of origin, Bogotá, Colombia, and taught high school English in an all-girls Catholic school. Although my formative years had been spent in Colombia, my high school and college education were from the US. When I was hired as a teacher, I was not qualified or prepared to teach a subject that I didn't know (English literature and TESOL test prep) in a cultural context that, although I was familiar with personally, had not been the cultural context for my own high school education. I was frustrated that these students did not write, read, or behave like, well, like US Americans. We read George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and I became annoyed when the students did not understand the political implications of those narratives. I

assigned five-paragraph essays, which had been the main genre in my US education thus far, that my Colombian students had no idea about. I did not realize that my teaching was a practice of neocolonialism—an attempt to interject US dominance via literature, writing genres, and white English grammar. When I returned to the US and enrolled in a master’s program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse at DePaul University, I learned about bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jonathan Kozol, and other pedagogues who taught me that teaching is always already political.

Since then, I’ve devoted my time to the study and practice of pedagogies that decenter the instructor’s power, that take into account BIPOC epistemologies, cultural practices, and languages, and that seek to disrupt the preponderance of whiteness. Cultural rhetorics pedagogies are such practices. Cultural rhetorics pedagogies seek to intervene in the ways university classrooms reproduce white dominance in the US. This conversation, the third in our “Principles in Cultural Rhetorics” series featuring our editorial board, is preceded by a [Scholarship](#) and a [Methodologies](#) conversation. We pick up where Price, et al. left off in their 2018 [conversation](#) about the why and how of cultural rhetorics pedagogies. Here three members of the *constellations* editorial team—Kim Wieser, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, and Brandon M. Erby—discuss how they practice cultural rhetorics pedagogies and the challenges and opportunities that cultural rhetorics affords in the classroom.

Three important themes arose during our conversation that encapsulate what’s at the heart of cultural rhetorics pedagogies. First, the cultural rhetorics classroom brings marginalized voices and world views to the forefront. Andrea writes, “In all my classes, I want students to see themselves in the materials I assign and to reflect on texts/stories that are not primarily for them but another community. I think it offers us an opportunity to think about relational accountability, community care, and privilege in important ways.” Second, cultural rhetorics pedagogies place utmost importance on practice, relationality, and community. In this way, the cultural rhetorics classroom not only works to *create* community, but also to *engage* with communities outside of the university. As Brandon writes, “Cultural rhetorics broadened my perspective about the types of texts that are worth examining and showed me that scholarship and pedagogy should reflect the concerns of local communities and not just the academy at large.” And finally, cultural rhetorics pedagogies demand creativity and innovation. Cultural rhetorics pedagogues often need to look outside mainstream teaching practices, creating our own ways of doing an activity or accomplishing a learning outcome—from “reading” alternative

genres (e.g., podcasts, poetry), to writing non-dominant texts (see, for example, Andrea's assignment of proposals for land repatriation).

The risks of doing this work are great—from student pushback, to not being able to translate these practices for promotion and tenure, to having colleagues devalue our expertise, just to name a few. As Kim writes, “If you don’t have a supportive chair while you are working toward tenure, using cultural rhetorics pedagogies... can be risky.” Yet, as this conversation shows, this valuable work empowers students who are not usually engaged by normativized teaching practices. Importantly, cultural rhetorics pedagogies can also open up the world for white, cisgender, middle class students who benefit from seeing different ways of being in the world; so, even those of us who teach at predominantly white institutions can adopt cultural rhetorics pedagogies in our classrooms. I hope that as you read, you understand some of the basic premises of cultural rhetorics pedagogies so that you too can continue to make your teaching practice more inclusive and disruptive of hegemony.

In the previous two conversations in the Principles of Cultural Rhetorics series, we started each conversation by asking about how each participant arrived at the field of cultural rhetorics. I’d love to hear about your individual origin stories in the field.

Brandon M. Erby: My origin story began in the spring of 2015 at Penn State. This was the second semester of my first year in the MA/PhD rhetoric and composition program. During this semester, I took a course on African American rhetoric with Keith Gilyard. I was not very familiar with cultural rhetorics as a field or African American rhetoric as a subfield prior to taking this course, but I found the course stimulating because it had shifted my views about Black people and their identities, literacies, and cultures. Once we started discussing the work of scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, Carmen Kynard, Adam Banks, and Vorriss Nunley, I was hooked. At the center of these texts was the idea that Black people (and their various forms of rhetorical expression) are knowledge creators.

Kim Wieser: Brandon, I think for so many of us, finding this field allowed us to be ourselves while we are busy being scholars. Rejecting that old false dichotomy of the academic studying the world as though they have no relation to it and the faux objectivity that scholars are supposed to have by doing this is both honest and liberating.



Participants of the 2019 RSA Summer Institute Seminar on African American Rhetorical and Pedagogical Traditions for Social Justice: Nicole Wilson, Elaine Richardson, Megan McCool, Fiona (Freddie) Harris-Ramsby, Alexis (Lexi) McGee, Laura Tetreault, Brandon Erby, Jennifer Courtney, Khirsten Scott, Tamika Carey, Francesca Gentile, Aaron Zamora, Matt Farmer, D'Angelo Bridges, Earl Brooks.

Brandon M. Erby: Kim, it was so refreshing to see how these authors and their works represented the voices and experiences of everyday Black folk. That was eye-opening for me. For the longest time I thought that only the works of famous writers and speakers were worthy of academic study. Cultural rhetorics taught me that this wasn't the case.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Brandon, yes! I have also had this moment of being in a classroom and finally, finally reading and connecting with a text that is affirming. Jacqueline Jones Royster "Traces of a Stream" was crucial to my own dissertation

writing. She writes that she doesn't want to be a defender of African American women's experiences, but rather an interrogator. It was this shift of how we think about the framework we use to create and share knowledge that helped me understand the struggles I was having in my own dissertation writing.

Kim Wieser: I went to Baylor for grad school from 1995-2002, where they trained us as generalists. When I reached the last semester of my coursework (Spring '99) and was taking the one rhetoric and composition seminar offered as well as the required Colonial American literature seminar, I had become savvy enough to make my seminars meet *my* needs. I used a rhetorical approach inclusive of Native perspectives I knew from lived experience in community to analyze the work of Samson Occom. As I began researching for both courses, I found that a few non-Native scholars had been writing on American Indian rhetorics: George Kennedy, Patricia Bizzell, and Bruce Ballenger. Malea Powell and Scott Lyons were beginning to publish, but though I presented on American Indian rhetorics at five conferences in 1999, I was pretty much working in a vacuum, unaware of Powell's and Lyons' work as I hadn't yet attended CCCC.

But I did know Malea Powell from Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers and through a shared "sister," Kimberli Lee. I found myself attending with them the Denver March Powwow and the CCCC conference held there at the same time in 2001, where I first went to a meeting of the Caucus for American Indian Scholars and Scholarship, what would later become American Indian Caucus (AIC).

While I took positions teaching American Indian Literature and Native Studies when I left McLennan Community College (Waco, Texas), I couldn't seem to motivate myself to do a monograph in literature. My book *Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and Literacies in American Indian Studies* ended up being a rhetoric volume—and my work has been mostly in rhetoric since its 2017 publication. While researching and writing *Back to the Blanket*, "[Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics](#)" came out, and I began to notice and trace the emergence of cultural rhetorics as a field. I missed my relatives in the American Indian Caucus. I have many there with whom I have relationships outside of the academy, and I also missed the atmosphere of family that once was present in many conferences and organizations in Native Studies that was still strong in that space. These were people who walked their talk when it came to values.

I returned to AIC and 4Cs in 2018, and by 2019, I joined Lisa King and Andrea Riley-Mukavetz as the third co-chair when the last original caucus chair, Resa Crane

Bizzaro, stepped down. I started to attend RSA as well, and before I knew it, I had joined the editorial staff for *constellations*.



Kimberly Wieser (far right) with Qwo-Li Driskill, Kimberli Lee, Malea Powell, Angela Haas, and other academic relatives at RTG 2008 at Michigan State University.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Kim, I remember meeting you at Returning the Gift, a conference/festival for Indigenous writers, storytellers, and artists when it was in Oklahoma! I remember you saying to me, "I'm your auntie!" For me, acknowledging our scholarly relations and honoring those relations as a starting point for actual relationships within our discipline is so central to cultural rhetorics. I've been so grateful for your support, mentorship, and collaboration.

To answer the question, I need to share part of my writing history. I have always written poetry. I often think in poems. I was writing a poem before this discussion about eating watermelon, but it wasn't actually about eating watermelon. I have two creative writing degrees, but I did not love the field of creative writing and it did not love me. Yet, it taught me so much about storying.

For me, my love of writing and storytelling, as well as the collaborative and communal attributes of these practices, shaped how I practice story as methodology in my research and teaching. What led me to cultural rhetorics was a constant displeasure with the academic fields I was in before—Creative Writing, English Studies, American Studies—all of which were just too rigid. I wanted to blend and blur. I wanted to tell stories and integrate poetry. I wanted to be able to do research and bring that research into my poetry.

Being in higher education, I have had so many experiences of being told I can't or shouldn't do something. Or that I was a bad writer, have bad grammar, or needed to assimilate to a particular kind of writing. I still have memories of looking up words from the feedback provided by instructors to understand what they were trying to say to me. I felt this deep chasm between myself and most people in higher education. But I also knew of those Indigenous intellectuals who wrote about and practiced moving from critique/deconstruction to building and reimagining. For me, that is how I came to build and contribute to cultural rhetorics. I knew and experienced the harm of academia. I felt both out of place and a deep need to create while also wanting to imagine additional possibilities.

I stay in and seek to grow cultural rhetorics because it's a space that allows me new possibilities/new options. I want others to build as well. I want us to stop having to share these stories of pain or feeling left out.

Kim Wieser: Andrea, I really like your response here. I too have a problem with the boundaries of genres. A poem can be analysis. Gloria Anzaldúa certainly proved that. I like to read mixed-genre scholarship that is grounded in the scholar's identity. It's always so much richer and rewarding than the usual dry, boring academic articles that are presented as what "real" scholarship should look like.

Brandon M. Erby: Andrea, I too have an English studies background and prior to joining rhet/comp—most of my training was in literary studies. While I did enjoy reading literature, the analysis part, I agree, was very rigid. Cultural rhetorics broadened my perspective about the types of texts that are worth examining and showed me that scholarship and pedagogy should reflect the concerns of local communities and not just institutions of higher education.



Black rhetoric scholars with ties to Penn State at the 2016 CCCC: Brandon Erby, David Green, Mudiwa Pettus, Damon Cagnolatti, Phyllisa Deroze, Keith Gilyard, Elaine Richardson, Ersula Ore, Adam Banks, Earl Brooks.

In 2018, Margaret Price (former constellations' Pedagogy Blog editor) hosted a virtual roundtable titled "Listening to Stories: Practicing Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogy," in which participants discussed some of the main themes of cultural rhetorics pedagogy: story, community, relationships, and land. With these principles in mind, what are some specific ways in which you enact cultural rhetorics pedagogies in your classroom? What else would you add to this list?

Kim Wieser: I base my classroom practice on the real world and on doing things "in a good way," according to the lived practices of my adopted Cheyenne family, the Blackbears, my husband's Comanche family, and those of our Native American Church relatives. Those just happen to—I don't think coincidentally—align with those of Cultural Rhetorics. I want to make sure we all treat each other with respect, that we acknowledge our relationships to the material and to each other,

that we give reciprocally to each other, that we make knowledge, not just take it. I center story in my class structure and not just in my lessons themselves. I consciously use a model of visiting (which I write about in *Decolonial Possibilities: Indigenously-Rooted Practices in Rhetoric and Writing*, edited by Andrea, Resa Crane Bizzaro, and Lisa King) that includes story and dialogue as well as making. I make sure my students can write in a variety of genres that aren't all the typical "academic" ones. I also make sure my students cite people with lived experience with their topic. For instance, if one of them is writing on American Indian or Indigenous subject matter, I want to see American Indian and/or Indigenous scholars being referenced.



WMEAC IDEAL Committee Members come to Andrea Riley Mukavetz's Wicked Problems of Sustainability Class to discuss EJ in Grand Rapids.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Kim, I love this model of visiting. I think it completely shifts the possibilities of our classrooms, and I think it offers a specificity to what we say when we talk about "classroom communities."

Brandon M. Erby: Kim, it's so important to incorporate a variety of writing genres for students to compose in. I'm a big proponent of encouraging students to take risks and to develop projects that are enjoyable to create and could be useful for various audiences and stakeholders.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: It was a wonderful experience being a part of that roundtable. Margaret curated such a great discussion. I want to talk about a project I did in a class I taught a few years ago called "Wicked Problems of Sustainability." It is a course focused on environmental concepts and practices and has a service-learning component, which means I work with a community partner. If it isn't clear from my own scholarship, I have a lot of concerns around service-learning in higher education. I was really nervous to work with a community partner because I tend to be protective of students and of communities in different ways. I'm, well, too aware of how higher ed exploits these kinds of relationships. I ended up working with WMEAC (West Michigan Environmental Action Council) because we already had a pre-existing relationship. Before the semester started, they asked me if I would be willing to help them decolonize their White Paper, which was the organization's set of beliefs and guiding principles. I thought that this class would be a great space to do that work together because most of my students want to work with organizations like WMEAC. I designed the course to examine the concepts of sustainability and environmental justice through Indigenous, decolonial, and grassroots frameworks and to also understand the critiques, challenges, and possibilities of community-based collaborations.

We looked at examples from all kinds of communities who theorized and practiced sustainability and environmental justice through their community practice/context. We studied how communities were let down by government officials, their own communities, and communities they should be in solidarity with. Throughout the semester, WMEAC came in and gave talks about their organization, including projects they did and wanted to do. Students got to know them and ask them questions. I explained that relationships take time to build, and that if we were going to do community collaboration work, we needed to get to know each other, build trust, and discuss accountability and reciprocity. We spent the entire semester learning about the goals, plans, challenges, and critiques of WMEAC. Students asked them hard questions. I created a tool kit on settler harm reduction for the organization to use and share with their board. At the end of the semester, students provided written and verbal feedback to WMEAC regarding their white paper. They used their own experiences doing environmental justice organizing,

experiences in their communities, and the readings to offer this feedback. Whew, they struggled.

Doing collaborative writing is hard. I had them decide how they wanted to organize themselves, hold each other accountable, and value labor. These were good and hard discussions. At the end of the semester, they organized an event where they invited faculty, staff, and WMEAC and presented their feedback. They even got money to order coffee and cookies. WMEAC had no idea what they were going to get. They even admitted that since they were working with students, they didn't expect the kind of high-level feedback they received. But I acted as both project manager and expert. The students consulted with me, and the entire class had to come to consensus on the feedback before it was presented. They asked WMEAC to do some hard things and even told them they weren't ready to do decolonial work yet. They had work to do before the work. After the students presented, they created time for discussion and clarification, because they didn't want to just offer feedback in a hierarchical way, but instead serve as resources and support. This summer, WMEAC is headed into strategic planning. Students from that class went on to intern there to support this project. I continue to act as a consultant. For me, this kind of experience reflects my approach to cultural rhetorics pedagogy: rooted in land-based practices, invested in constellated cultural communities' experiences, and relational and long-term.



Cultural Rhetorics Consortium at CRCON18 (from far left left) Phil Bratta, Gwen Pough, Alexandra Hidalgo, Malea Powell, Jill McKay, Andrea Riley Mukavetz, Raul Sanchez, Marilee Brooks-Gillies.

Kim Wieser: I am always so envious of those of you who got to study with Malea or with those who studied with her. You have so much of a bigger toolkit than I do. I planned some real-world, community-engaged, collaborative projects last fall with my undergraduates that I did the legwork for beforehand, but with the pandemic and Zoom, it all became too much. I am glad to learn about your work in this conversation. It inspires me to try again and trust that my instincts are right, even if my graduate education didn't prepare me for this.

Brandon M. Erby: I think storytelling and creating community are key components of what I try to prioritize in the classroom. At this point in my career, I have taught mostly first-year writing classes, and I think it's important for students to come into these courses knowing that their vernacular identities and voices are respected and wanted in the space. To do this, I have to cultivate a learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing who they are outside a traditional academic setting. Telling them to present stories about themselves and acknowledging that this is an academic and professional undertaking creates a discourse community within the classroom, and it also disrupts archaic ideas about what counts as an "academic" or "knowledge-making" activity.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Yes, Brandon! I am here for this. I do this as well. Lee Maracle's "On Oratory" helps me create this space, because to create a community knowledge making space then, we need to begin by being real about the kinds of knowledge and language we deem intellectual or have been trained to identify as intellectual and what that then says about our relationships with each other.

Kim Wieser: It all starts with story. Brandon, you are doing important work centering this for your students. It's not that easy to do that as a graduate student or as an early-career scholar. So often the powers-that-be prevent our teaching outside of the box. Even when we have permission—or beg forgiveness when we don't seek permission first—most of us have only had a mainstream model in the classes we took as students. Putting Cultural Rhetorics into action takes initiative, courage, and inventiveness. Doing all that during the pandemic is more than admirable.

CR pedagogies seek to "challenge authorized theories" and texts. What types of multimodal texts, genres, and resources do you include in your classes that help you challenge disciplinary canons and dominant knowledges? How do nontraditional texts allow you to reach diverse students?



Kimberly Wieser proudly hooding Kasey Jones-Matrona at graduation 2021.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: I continue to teach Ames Hawkins’s [“Exhuming Trans Genre Ties.”](#) I love this piece because of how Ames is thinking about scholarly practice, writing, identity, and space.

I also love teaching [Debora Miranda’s “Bad Indians”](#)—a memoir that begins by saying “California is a story.” Miranda brings in family photos, transcriptions of recordings from her grandfather, and collages that address cultural appropriation and erasure of Indigenous people in the educational system. It’s one of the most powerful things I’ve ever read or taught.

In all my classes, I want students to see themselves in the materials I assign and to reflect on texts/stories that are not primarily for them but another community. I think it offers us an opportunity to think about relational accountability, community

care, and privilege in important ways. When thinking, generally, about the texts that challenge authorized theories, I like to assign broadly texts that discuss just this. So, Patricia Williams' book [Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor](#) is not multimodal, but it's a memoir that explains and theorizes critical legal theory. It's presented through story. By assigning texts that use story as a methodology and show students how to engage with them, I think we empower all students to understand that there are multiple traditions of knowledge making they can and should use.

Brandon M. Erby: That is such a great idea, Andrea—having students engage in texts that are not primarily for or about them but for or about another community or audience. I see this as a type of literacy narrative exercise for students because it helps them learn about a group of people and become familiar with their ways of being in the world. Sometimes students only learn and know what we introduce to them, so it's important for us to offer them opportunities to interact with texts and ideas that are not always seen, heard, or considered.

Kim Wieser: I teach mostly courses with American Indian/Indigenous focuses, so I just don't teach European or Euro-American canonical texts at all, and I really like books that challenge expected structures. Like Andrea, I love Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians*, for much the same reasons. Another book with a completely unexpected structure that also challenges what it means to be "Indian" is Elissa Washuta's [My Body is a Book of Rules](#), a memoir in which Washuta recounts her traumatic experiences in college dealing with her mental health challenges that were compounded by losing her virginity in date-rape by her boyfriend, beginning to drink heavily, further sexual trauma, and the search for psychiatric prescriptions that she could take without unwanted (and sometimes dangerous) side effects. One chapter is a list of the meds they tried on her and what each did. Another is a side-by-side comparison of the Ten Commandments (she was a Catholic school girl) and what she learned from sneaking reads of her mother's *Cosmopolitan* magazines about what she "had to do" in order for a man to find her worthy of "love." Yes, the text requires heavy content-warnings, but the issues it covers are ones that affect many of our students. Washuta didn't grow up in her community and is not necessarily that phenotypically American Indian, but college female freshmen are the only other women with statistics that approach those facing American Indian women in regard to sexual violence. American Indian and Indigenous writing—from Leslie Silko's nonlinear novel [Ceremony](#) to Tommy Orange's [There There](#), Terese Mailhot's [Heartberries](#), and Kelli Jo Ford's [Crooked Hallelujah](#)—just doesn't have the same kind of structures as mainstream writing.



A flyer Kimberly Wieser made for a Ire'ne Lara Silva's visit to OU.

I have always taught texts by Indigenous people who are both enrolled and not enrolled. Silko's book above has been more widely taught than any other piece of Native American Literature, and she's not enrolled because she is from a matrilineal tribe and her father is her Laguna Pueblo parent. I have also always been inclusive of Indigenous Latinx texts. ire'ne lara silva is my favorite writer. However, I need to do better to be inclusive of Black Indigenous texts beyond Rebecca Roanhorse. I also need to teach some Creole texts like Rain Prud'homme Cranford's poetry again, too. I teach M tis texts regularly; why not teach Creole texts? In other words, when I taught more lower division courses at the community college, I, like Andrea, tried to make sure my students all had representation in the texts I chose. I should also strive to do that now that I teach at the University of Oklahoma. American Indian and Indigenous people *are* diverse. Between the US and Canada alone, there are at least 1193 recognized tribes and bands, 574 in the US, 619 in Canada. This is

without recognizing the indigeneity of people who are not enrolled in the US or do not have status in Canada for various reasons—being descended from Black “Freedmen,” men and women who were actually chattel slaves of some tribes; diaspora and assimilation; having Indigenous Latinx ancestry; having too low a “blood quantum,” despite descendancy; being adopted out as a child and having sealed adoption records... many reasons. And American Indian people who are enrolled have intermarried with people from around the world, even though they are legally and culturally Indian. Indigenous people have many professions and lifestyles. That still makes for a lot of diversity, despite Hollywood stereotypes.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Kim, I love how you address the complexity of enrollment with students. I think it’s another layer of addressing “authorization” and “canon” that might not translate for folks outside of American Indian Studies. I think it reveals how we, as cultural rhetorics scholars, need to be aware of the complicated expectations and beliefs of the disciplines and fields we draw from to create our own scholarly practices.

Brandon M. Erby: Over the last few years, I have started to reimagine how students learn in my courses and how they show knowledge proficiency. My background in English has often dictated that the way to show competence is through writing an academic essay. But I think this is a disciplinary requirement that isn’t always effective in teaching students, and I also think that it can limit the ways that students interact with course content. And considering new advances in technology and the different ways students engage with the world digitally, I think we can be more creative and innovative in how we bring information to our students and assess learning outcomes.

One genre that I really love and have been including in my classes more is podcasting. I like to use podcasts both to teach and to assign because I think they narrate particular stories about people and/or events, can be wonderful sources of information for a particular topic, and demonstrate that legitimate knowledge exists in diverse places and does not always have to be packaged in books or articles. There are some great podcasts out there being created and narrated by individuals from marginalized communities and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color that cover issues of importance to these individuals and their communities. For example, I’m a big fan of the podcast [Ear Hustle](#), which highlights the stories and experiences of men incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison in California. [Pedagogue](#), which focuses on “teachers talking writing” and features the voices and experiences of underrepresented scholars in rhet/comp, is also very good. And if you evaluate how podcasts are composed, they actually follow a

similar structure that we teach when writing an essay. So, using podcasts in the classroom still enables us to talk about stuff like building arguments, using evidence, and all of the compositional work that we value without being confined to a traditional paper.



Andrea Riley Mukavetz's mom and aunts when they were in their teens and 20s sitting on a couch in fabulous 1980s fashion.

Kim Wieser: Brandon, you are giving me some great ideas here! I really think I want to incorporate podcasts into my assignments. We're blessed with a library that has sound studios that students and faculty can reserve for use. I really need to take advantage of the technology at our disposal. Now what can I have them do with that 3-D printer over there?

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Brandon, I love this assignment. I like to assign "Stories from the Land" in my own classes. Kim, I have had students do podcasts before. I'm still learning how to do this well but it's been a really fun assignment. I am trying, more and more, to assign different kinds of composing and knowledge making.

What are the larger challenges of enacting CR pedagogies? How do institutions, our own discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, and other systems make cultural rhetorics pedagogies challenging/laborious to do?

Kim Wieser: I was just thinking about all of this above when I was admiring Brandon's use of cultural rhetorics pedagogy in his classroom. With tenure, I feel secure about using the approaches I do. In today's atmosphere of cookie-cutter legislation attempting to ban Critical Race Theory, I imagine any culturally-based academic practice that a conservative student took issue with could draw unwanted administrative attention in some places. I had a chair once who believed that all academic approaches that were culturally-based were "substandard." She even openly challenged one of my colleagues after a presentation he did on Post-Colonial Science Fiction because she didn't consider his cultural knowledge to be "science." She continually devalued my work, his work, and the work of another colleague who is an accomplished and well-known Indigenous rhetorics scholar while we were pre-tenure. That last colleague is now unfortunately a former colleague because of how my former chair treated (or rather mistreated) them. If you don't have a supportive chair while you are working toward tenure, using cultural rhetorics pedagogies (or the methodologies we talked about in our [Ethically Working Within Communities: Cultural Rhetorics Methodologies Principles](#) conversation in this series or the kinds of scholarship we described in the [Constellating Stories and Counterstories: Cultural Rhetorics Scholarship Principles](#) conversation) can be risky.

Also, as the Associate Chair, I do the assessment for our department. I can't believe I am saying this, but I am lucky. I can't imagine that everyone has someone doing assessment who can evaluate cultural rhetorics pedagogies and scholarship. I imagine that almost everyone doing cultural rhetorics has *plenty* of service on their CV every year, as I imagine they also get asked to represent on committees the way I have been over the years, and I bet most are as bad at saying "no" as I was for so long. I still struggle with that.

Brandon M. Erby: Risk is a big part of this, Kim. There can be a disconnect between what we value and find important as CR scholars and teachers and the type of work and assignments our institutions believe we should be teaching. I also know that the perspectives I want to highlight and introduce in my classes won't be accepted by all of my students. Because cultural rhetorics pedagogies are about bringing out the voices and worldviews of marginalized communities and decolonizing epistemologies, some students, I'm sure, will be resistant to my classroom vision. But we have to take the risks and continue to challenge racist power structures and social inequities that undergird knowledge production and circulation in the academy, right?



Brandon M. Erby teaching creative writing to incarcerated students inside a Pennsylvania state prison in 2018.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: Kim, I hear you! Michigan is about to go through this debate on Critical Race Theory, and I am horrified and scared. I am grateful for tenured scholars in my own department and discipline who are invested in making sure pre-tenure, NTTF, and graduate students can do this kind of work.

Kim Wieser: You're absolutely right, Brandon. And you, as well, Andrea. Good mentors and advocates who have more privilege should use it to help pre-tenure, faculty in positions that don't offer tenure, and graduate students, just as good allies should do for BIPOC.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz: One of my struggles is to explain what the hard work of my classes looks like both to students who take the courses and to my institution. I mentioned earlier that I am trying to assign less traditional kinds of writing and making space for different kinds of composing and knowledge making. Yet, no matter how much work I try to reimagine my teaching, how much I consider

accommodations or additional options for students, or how flexible I become, some students continue to describe my classes as “too much work.” I am the kind of teacher who takes these comments seriously because I want to create a space where students don’t feel resentful or bogged down. If I want to engage in consensual, liberatory learning and teaching, I can’t have students in pain for completing a discussion board or writing assignment, especially if they are grieving or healing. I’ve been thinking about this a lot, especially since during Covid my institution has prompted us to consider workload. We are to be rigorous but the institution acknowledges that rigor has roots in white supremacy.

My classes are a lot of work because I ask students to show up and be present. I ask them to hold themselves and each other accountable; to engage in ongoing practice; to reflect on their lived experiences, their power, and the work they are doing in the class. I ask them to do things like write proposals for land repatriation or work with community partners. That’s hard work and I know it’s what students mean when they talk about the challenges the course poses for them. And, for the most part, students really, really enjoy my classes and reflect on its benefits.

But my challenge has always been “what do I do with that as I explain this during institutional expectations at a teaching institution invested in excellence of teaching?” There’s an expertise needed to hold and sustain that space and model reflection and practice. I want my institution to understand that and acknowledge it beyond being “nurturing.” How do we explain our expertise to our colleagues not in our discipline? I am asking these as “how” questions even though I am well-practiced in doing that needed explanation. I think what I am challenged by is the constant explanation—the constant request for understanding and patience. But maybe, this is what it looks like, from my perspective, to do community-engaged teaching—to genuinely collaborate with students.

Cultural rhetorics pedagogies are challenging because they ask students and faculty to be their whole selves in a space that was not designed for most of us. Cultural rhetorics pedagogies are challenging because, Kim, as you referenced earlier with Leslie Marmon Silko, we need to be careful about the stories we tell and ask each other and our students to tell.

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