COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT MOTIVATION, RETENTION, AND

ENGAGEMENT IN A CULTURALLY RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING

CLASS

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As an Assistant Professor at Northeast Riverside Community College, I planned this action research project in order to seek solutions for the persistent problems of low retention and achievement faced by students designated to multiple semesters of basic literacy coursework. Writing 60 is the first developmental writing course of a two-course sequence required for students with significant skill gaps. Students are identified as appropriate for Writing 60 based on their college placement test scores. In my redesigned Writing 60 course, I maintained adherence to the college identified course objectives listed on the master course syllabus, but altered my former approaches to lessons, materials, reading selections and writing tasks with careful consideration of culturally relevant pedagogy and the critical language approach. Twenty-seven students registered for two sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course that ran in the fall semester of 2016. In order to assess the influence of culturally relevant pedagogy and the critical language approach upon course outcomes, I utilized a mixed methods design, and collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Attendance data, student persistence, and passing rates, were collected from the two sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course and from 12 sections of the previous Writing 60 course that I also taught from spring of 2014 through

spring of 2016. Additional data was gathered from students enrolled in the redesigned Writing 60 course that included pre- and post- student motivation surveys, pre- and post- assessments of academic writing, field notes I collected throughout the semester, student completed checklists of major assignments, and two focus groups that I audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. The implications of the data I analyzed suggested correlation between the modifications of the course and improved attendance, retention, and passing rates.

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PREFACE

I did not become a teacher through traditional means. Professionally, as a treatment specialist, the first classrooms that I entered were located inside of a youth detention facility. From there, I worked in an approved private school (APS) for students diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed. As part of my work at the APS, I team-taught in a classroom set aside for students identified as conduct disorder, labeled too violent even for the other violent classrooms. In that setting, I learned what it meant to be an educator from the very students that were considered far too dangerous to be maintained by, or returned to, conventional public schools of the late 1990's. My students were predominately male, African American, and described as underserved, poor, often fatherless, and by much of the other deficit terminology of the times. Despite these representations, my students quickly showed me that they desired grade-level instruction, particularly when the instruction involved subject matter that interested them. Across the course of nine years, I helped my students identify and practice skills by which they managed their anger and they, in turn, taught me how to teach. Together, we thrived.

Eventually, I went on to teach English in urban high schools and on community college campuses. In every academic environment where I have been employed, I encountered students in classrooms where their lack of achievement became normalized. I defiantly refused, and will continue to resist, the acceptance of failure as a matter of course. That is why I enrolled in this doctoral program and chose to embark upon my study of Community College Student

I focus on improvements in education and increased justice in the world. My soul overflows with love for all of you.

My father, Angelo Michael Gaito, Sr., was the son of an immigrant family and came of age in an era when access to education was denied to many. Although he, himself, was not able to attend or complete high school, he read voraciously, believed deeply in education and democracy, and engaged in lengthy discussions with me about books, politics, and the state of the world, all this from the age of my earliest memories. My mother, Margaret Gaito, also the daughter of immigrants, herself left motherless at a very young age and in extremely harsh circumstance, was likewise unable to have access to adequate education or to complete high school. I did not learn until she was well into her older years that she had once dreamed of teaching English. I should not have been surprised. Throughout my life, she journaled, wrote stories, read romance magazines. When I was growing up, she had long been enthralled with pronunciations and language structures, song lyrics, word rhythms, and dramatic speech. Unsurprisingly, I wrote poetry and stories even as a very young child and ended up teaching English in adulthood. My long-time friend and sister-in-law, Michele Lagnese, started college but was unable to finish for her own reasons. She also wanted nothing more than for her talented son, Aaron Lagnese, to have the chance to graduate from a university, an act he is presently pursuing in her honor. Like my parents, Michele also believed in education and all the promises it held.

My father died in January, 2004, not long after I had earned my M.F.A. and had just begun teaching adjunct classes at the community college where I now teach fulltime. I know the pride he would feel if he were here to see his daughter earn this degree. My mother, prior to her death in April, 2016, told everyone she met that her daughter was working on her doctorate. My

sister-in-law who passed unexpectedly in December, 2016, is the reason I remained in this program; each and every time I wanted to quit, she adamantly refused to allow me to give up. I dedicate this dissertation with deepest love and gratitude to Angelo M. Gaito, Sr., Margaret M. Gaito, and Michele L. Lagnese, my three angels in heaven.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

According to 2013 data from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, community colleges provided access to higher education for approximately 40% of all undergraduate students in the United States (p. 2). Additionally, as a result of open access admissions, community colleges served a significant portion of nontraditional students with a wide range of skills sets, prior academic experiences, and varied college preparations. Furthermore, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (2016) community colleges provided the pathway for postsecondary education for many students of color, students from lower income statuses, and first-generation college students. Also, since 1985, women accounted for more than half of the community college population (American Association of Community Colleges 2016).

Additionally, according to the Department of Education, an estimated 42% of students enrolled in community college "were not sufficiently prepared for college level courses" and were required to register for at least one developmental course (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013, p. 1). In the case of the community college that is the focus of this study, Northeast Riverside Community College (NRCC), a pseudonym, the majority of entering freshman arrived in need of writing, reading, and/or math skill development (Chute, 2014). In fact, the high school graduating class of 2014 arrived at NRCC with 78% of students in need of in at least one developmental class (Chute) and 90% of students from the largest local school district, City Schools, also a pseudonym, in need of required developmental classes.

Demonstrated another way, of the 1,752 students who entered NRCC in 2014, a total of 1,355 needed to take at least one developmental class (Chute, 2014).

Developmental coursework, as explained by Baily, Jeong, & Cho (2008) is designed for students with significant academic skill needs. As the result of a single college placement test, these students are often relegated to a sequence of two or more courses designed to prepare them "in a step-by-step fashion for the first college-level course." (3). In Writing 60, the first tier of developmental writing available at NRCC, the course objectives are focused primarily on identifying and controlling common grammatical and mechanical errors and practicing sentence to paragraph construction. In Writing 90, the second tier of the two-course developmental writing sequence, the skills from Writing 60 are reviewed and students then learn to turn paragraphs into basic essays. After completion of Writing 60 *and* Writing 90 with grades of at least C, students may then enroll in the first of two required college-level writing classes.

According to data from 2010 and 2013, of the 42% of students enrolled in developmental classes across the United States, less than 25% of registered students actually persisted through college-level courses and attained the degree or certificate for which they originally enrolled (Hern, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). At NRCC, only 25% of the students who started in both developmental writing and developmental reading in 2007 successfully completed English 101 within three years (Lowe, 2015).

Furthermore, according to NRCC's public data sets, 2,730 incoming first-time freshmen enrolled in 2011 seeking an associate's degree or program certificate designed to be completed in less than two years (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015). From this cohort, only 54 students, or less than 2 percent, completed within 150% of normal time (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015). Also from this cohort, 233 students, or 8 percent, completed

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programs designed for at least two years—but no longer than four years— within 150% of normal time (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015). Additionally, 657 students, or 24 percent, transferred to other postsecondary institutions within three years of initial enrollment (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015). It appears, then, that of the initial cohort, only 944 students, or 34% of the original 2,730, had completed or transferred within 150% of normal time.

In addition to extending the time required to obtain a degree or certificate at NRCC, developmental classes do not accrue degree-bearing credits, yet students paid the same college-credit prices (Chute, 2015). Moreover, the time spent in developmental courses extended the time that students were enrolled in college overall, thus costs of potential income must also be considered. For example, imagine a student who enrolls in college for the purpose of becoming a nurse. If this student must spend two additional years in developmental coursework, and if a nurse can expect to earn an average annual starting salary of $40,000, one could argue that the cost of two additional college years due to developmental classes costs the student $80,000 (Complete College America, 2015). Thus, the loss of income combined with the cost of multiple semesters of additional tuition proves very expensive— especially in consideration of the dismal completion rates associated with the current incarnation of developmental course requirements.

In my role as Assistant Professor of English at NRCC, I teach several sections of Writing 60 every semester and have done so for seven years. A typical Writing 60 course begins with 10-18 registered students. Some students appear on the roster, but never physically appear in the classroom. Approximately 20% of the original students attend the first week or weeks of the college semester and then simply disappear. By midterms, approximately 50% of students remain, but not all will pass the course with the required grade of C or better. Typically, at this

urban campus, African Americans are overrepresented in Writing 60 courses, along with women, single parents, graduates of struggling public school systems, students of low economic status, first generation college students, and students with health concerns and additional learning challenges. Increasingly, students who speak English as an additional language are also frequently students in developmental classrooms. As I also teach college-level English courses, it may be important to note that the student demographics do not remain consistent as students ascend into higher level courses. For example, in my spring 2016 English 101 class, the first required college-level English course at NRCC, I had one student of color and one woman; the remainder of the class was made up by white men. In my spring 2016 English 102 class, the second and final required level of college English, 9 of my 26 registered students were students of color and 8 out of 26 were women. In both college level courses, the racial and gender demographics were dramatically different from the racial and gender demographics of the Writing 60 classes.

Also, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2013) of community college students across the nation, approximately 50% of part time students worked full time and 52% of full time students worked part time. According to data from 2015, at NRCC, 65% of our students attended college part time (NRCC, 2015). In addition to employment and other life responsibilities and challenges, it remains fairly common for my Writing 60 students to have histories of emotional disruptions, placements in special education classes or alternative school environments, addictions and/or homelessness, joblessness, and/or involvement with the criminal justice systems. Moreover, it also remains fairly common for students to enroll in Writing 60 courses and re-enroll for multiple semesters before finally passing or giving up.

There are numerous reasons for the low completion rate in Writing 60. Students in my classes have expressed that they struggle with time management and prioritizing skills. Additionally, they have voiced that they feel unprepared for the rigor, demands, and self-motivation necessary for success in college. Thus, the purpose of this study was to implement and examine a redesign of Writing 60 that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Hull & Rose, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Moje et al., 2004; Paris, 2014, Shor, 1997) and Critical Language Approach (Delpit, 2001, Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988).

1.1   INQUIRY SETTING

According to data from 2015, Northeast Riverside Community College served 44,599 students per year with 27,430 enrolled in credit-bearing classes, across four campuses and several off-campus centers (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015). Data from the 2014-15 school year indicated that 58% of students were women, 42% men. Of the total student population, 65% attended part-time, 28% were from groups that have experienced historical and institutionalized discrimination, and 101 students were identified as international (Northeast Riverside Community College, 2015).

My classes at NRCC, similar to community colleges across the nation, are often the initial access point to higher education for students that are first-generation college students (Hern, 2010). Additionally, students required to enroll in developmental courses are more likely to have had poor previous educational experiences and have not yet mastered the task of balancing college with the additional responsibilities of employment and family (Harrill & Bush, 2011). As many of the students are first-generation college students, they may also face

additional obstacles in discovering how to successfully navigate the college environment (Edgecomb, 2011).

To add a further challenge, many of my students in the previous and redesigned Writing 60 courses had minimal exposure, if any, to college-level reading, writing, and critical thinking expectations. Many expressed that they had not enjoyed reading and writing through their pre-college education, though they understood its importance. Some students verbalized that they did not come from homes where reading was done for pleasure and had not regularly engaged in discussion of books or articles as part of their reading habits. Additionally, they had limited experience with academic texts, in particular. Almost all of the students in Writing 60 spoke or wrote in English vernaculars that remain distinct from academic English.

1.2   FALL 2017, REDESIGNED WRITING 60 COURSE: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The redesigned Writing 60 course that was the focus of this study ran as two sections of regular 16 week classes during the fall 2016 semester. The semester began on August 22, 2016 and concluded on December 12, 2016. The classes met three days a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for 50 minute time periods.

The morning class began with 10 students initially enrolled and 7 students who continued to attend regularly through the entire semester. Two students stopped attending for unknown reasons after the third week of class, and a third student remained until midterms, but then dropped due to a conflict between work and school. As the third student described the situation,

she had to make a choice between keeping her job and going to her classes. She explained, as an independent adult, there was only one real choice: she had to work.

Thus, of the students who persisted, the morning class was made up of 5 women and 2 men (1 of whom was a transgender biological woman presenting as a man). In this class of 7 students, 6 students were African American and 1 of the 7 students was a recent immigrant from Nepal. All students were between the ages of 18 and 20 years old. One student had children, and 5 of the 7 students arrived from the same school district. Of this same group, 1 of the 7 students was involved in the criminal justice system, 4 of the 7 students were employed at least part time, and 1 of the 7 students was involved in a mentorship program.

The afternoon class began with 17 students. One student withdrew from the class in early September, 3 students stopped attending in October for unknown reasons; however, the work submitted by 1 of the 3 students suggested that she was writing at a low elementary school skill level. Another student stopped attending near the end of the term because of numerous health and family concerns.

In regard to the afternoon class, then, 12 students consistently attended. Of this group, 4 students were women and 8 were men. All students were between the ages of 18 and 20 and represented 5 different school districts. In this class, 4 of the 12 students were registered with Special Services, the college department that provides additional supports for students with disabilities. None of the students in this section of Writing 60 had children. At least 4 of the 12 students in this class had other family responsibilities and/or worked to contribute to the family income, and 1 of the 12 was involved in a mentorship program. Additionally, another 1 of the 12 students had experienced significant poverty, lived in a community known for high violent crime rates, attended a high school for students with emotional disturbances, and had been diagnosed

with a significant physical health concern. During the fall 2016 semester, this student's health problem briefly became medically unmanageable. Shortly after her health situation resolved, her father passed away. It is important to say here that this specific student was incredibly responsible, determined, and inquisitive throughout the semester. So concerned was she with her completion of the class, she even sent me electronic messages as she sat at her dying father's hospital bedside to confirm assignment directions for her last required essay. Despite the fact that I offered her several options to allow her time to grieve without concern for writing a final English paper, this student drove directly from her father's funeral in another state to NRCC campus in order to ensure on-time submission of her final essay.

1.3   STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

Numerous stakeholders will be affected by whatever changes ultimately occur to developmental education at NRCC. In addition to students who are rightfully concerned about inadequate achievement rates and academic funding, other stakeholders include Urban Commitment, a pseudonym for a scholarship organization that provides $7,500 per student/per year across a period of four years for students from the city school district. Representatives for Urban Commitment and the students who receive the scholarship money have both expressed concerns that, while enrolled in high school, students have earned grades, test scores, and diplomas that suggest attainment of college-readiness skills, yet as previously identified, 75% - 90% of these same students from the class of 2014 were required to take developmental coursework at NRCC (Chute, 2015).

Other stakeholders include fulltime and adjunct faculty, support staff, deans, college campus presidents, and regional employers. Moreover, as a result of former President Obama's call for 50% increase in college completion rates over the next decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) it is possible that the federal and state funding that colleges rely upon for their overall budgets may eventually be tied to improvements in achievement rates. Additionally, also as a result of former President Obama's appeal for increased college accountability, the possibility of performance-based funding looms on the horizon (Complete College America, 2015). In response to the push for greater completion and achievement, in 2015, NRCC applied for, and received, a Lumina grant that supported a partnership between the community college system and the Complete College America (CCA) organization, thus CCA became another member on this growing list of stakeholders.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

My redesign of Writing 60 was based on a number of theories and findings from literacy research. The first draws from theories of tracking and remediation in college writing. Many literacy scholars have raised questions about whether the overreliance on a single placement test score results in the overwhelming representation of students from historically marginalized populations in basic writing classrooms, instead of college level classes (Sanchez & Paulson, 2008, Shor, 1997). In fact, Shor (1997) argued that the limitations faced by students placed into developmental writing classrooms on college and university campuses was an intentional denial of access to higher learning, akin to the historic teaching of ABCs to slaves in the name of education (p. 94). Instead of continued ineffective deficit remediation, the redesign of Writing 60 was grounded in literacy scholarship on teacher-guided, student-centered, mutually engaging academic collaborations in writing classrooms (Freire, 1970; Grubb et al., 2011; Hartland, 2003; Hooks, 1994; Shaughnessy, 1977; Shor, 1997). Students' cultural backgrounds were valued and utilized in the construction of new and relevant learning experiences in the redesigned Writing 60 classes (Foster, 1989; Hull, et al., 1990; Jordan, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2005, Paris, 2012; Shaughnessy, 1977). Furthermore, critical examination of nonstandard vernacular dialects and academic English were expected to provide addition fertile ground for explorations of the relationship between language, justice, and power (Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan 1988; Sanchez & Paulson, 2008; Shor, 1997). The redesign of the writing class drew from scholarship

on culturally relevant pedagogy, an instructional approach that aims to increase students' academic outcomes by building on the cultural contributions of students' cultural knowledge and backgrounds. Through a dynamic definition of culture and replacement of historical falsehoods with more accurate depictions of cultural experiences, attitudes and truths, CRP seeks to excite curiosity and engender student investment in the learning process (Foster, 1989; Jordan, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014).

If education is genuinely practiced in service of an improved democracy and lessons are designed to move students beyond academic skills into meaningful intellectual discourse, then a culture of mutual respect, inquisitiveness, and celebration of all cultures and backgrounds is demanded (Hull & Rose, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). Unfortunately, many basic writing courses as they are currently designed operate in such a way that language and literature are used to maintain the unequal power structure of the longstanding dominant group (Shor, 1997). In fact, as conveyed by Shor, basic writing is yet another manifestation of education used to contain and control. As remedy, Paris (2012) argues, the use of culturally sustaining pedagogy honors the languages and literacies of all cultures and, in the process, promotes a world in which social justice is not only possible, but probable.

2.1   CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

As discussed by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014), culturally relevant pedagogy is committed to collective empowerment by building upon the experiences, histories, and perspectives of students. Although much of Ladson-Billings' research involved teaching children and adolescents, her theory is equally applicable to the adult developmental writing classrooms on

college campuses. Her central proposition revolves around the premise that students must experience academic success, develop cultural competence, and challenge the ready acceptance of an unjust social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These remain the goals for student success in community colleges. Furthermore, as Ladson-Billings (2014) has continued to refine and evolve her theoretical stance of culturally relevant, culturally sustaining pedagogy, she has also applied the tenets to her professional work with teacher preparation courses that she taught on a university campus. It cannot be emphasized enough that the practices aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy that serve children in urban schools, college students in developmental writing classrooms, and pre-service teachers in university courses are the same practices that serve the needs and demands of a healthy society: attention to— and respect for— diverse skillsets, beliefs, histories, and needs.

As witnessed in historic and present societies, there is nothing more central to the continuation of a functioning democracy than an educated citizenry. If status quo instruction persists, as has been the case for far too many decades now, the result is the establishment of an underclass who is then blamed for the sins of their own oppression. Freire (1970) warned of this danger half a century ago. It is no longer science fiction to witness a populace unable to distinguish facts from fabrications or human rights from privilege. It is exceedingly important, perhaps now more than ever, to educate students, not only in service of professional achievement and future endeavors, but in protection of a safer, saner future. In this spirit, I looked to the pedagogical approaches of culturally relevant pedagogy (Freire, 1970, Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Moje et al., 2004, Paris, 2012), critical language approach (Delpit, 2002; Godley, et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988), critical literacy (Hartland, 2003, Shaughnessy, 1977, Shor, 1997) and the intersectionality which exists amongst the academic community and

the larger world, between education and liberty. The starting point for continued freedom is knowledge, therefore knowledge-making must remain at the center of the college classroom (Hull & Rose, 1990). As further suggested through the Hull and Rose (1990) case study, student belonging is key to establishing the interactive process of generating knowledge and questioning knowledge within academic communities. As Freire (1970) posited long before the formal construction of CRP, but certainly as a contributor to its foundation, quality teaching and learning must transcend the banking education of the teacher-centered classroom. Instead of the teacher acting as omniscient lecturer filling the student with one-sided perspectives of knowledge (Freire, 1970), classrooms built upon the dynamic discourse of multiple cultures engaged in intellectual exchange is made far richer by the transactional nature of the experience (Hull & Rose, 1990).

In their study, Hull & Rose (1990) present the tensions that mounted as a result of an unanticipated interpretation of a literature assignment. Through encouragement, dialogue, and exploration of the student's cultural understandings, the student's assumptions were explored and analyzed to the profound benefit of both teacher and learner. This kind of discourse contributed to the sense of student belonging to an academic community, a necessary component for academic success.

This shift in pedagogy was necessary to improve the nature of instruction. Developmental writing instruction in its traditional form, like other manifestations of institutionalized discrimination, actually defeats the promoted purpose of higher education. In fact, Shor's (1997) assertions from 20 years ago still remain unfortunately true today: developmental writing slows down student progress to college degrees and limits the possibility of improved employment. Without modification to the way developmental writing is taught in

college, ascending upward in economic status and gaining access to social capital are effectively denied for the vast majority of students in developmental classes— and the denial is perpetuated in such a way that the student and his or her culture are blamed for this limitation (Shor, 1997). Furthermore, according to Shor (1997), in its current design, developmental writing actually acts as "a gate beneath a gate" and blocks access to higher education's promise of economic and social change; moreover, it conditions students into acceptance of "the way of things" (Shor, 1997, p. 94). The practice of culturally relevant pedagogy, however, offered the redesigned Writing 60 course an alternative to the continued acceptance of this current unfair situation.

2.2   CRITICAL LANGUAGE APPROACH

Aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy, critical language approaches also have much to offer developmental writing classrooms (Godley & Minicci, 2008; Foster, 1989; Jordan, 1988; Sanchez & Paulson, 2008). Through recognition of the value of vernacular language varieties, students may gain greater insight about academic literacy expectations and communication needs of various environments (Delpit, 2002; Godley & Minicci, 2008). In the process, students may also develop confidence in their voices and recognize the historic relationship between language and access to power (Jordan, 1988). As argued by Shor (1997), to address the immoral teaching that perpetuates continued adherence to unfair structures of dominance, "ethnographic, context-oriented, community literacy" should be the framework for the educational opportunities offered in developmental writing classrooms (p. 100). Surely, critical language approaches are entwined with literacy as so described.

Critical language approaches provide instruction that validates the language of the student and of his or her community and does not perpetuate the myth of inferiority (Delpit, 2002; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988). In Godley and Minnici's (2008) study, one of the researchers acted as a "guest teacher" and taught a week-long unit to students in a 10th grade classroom focused on the role and weight of language vernaculars in history, education, and community. Using the students' completion of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a starting point, the researcher facilitated a whole group investigation into the social perceptions of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Through a variety of activities, students were introduced to sociolinguistic concepts, watched a documentary film, listened to a guest speaker, and took part in whole group discussions, all of which were focused on distinctions between *privileged* and *stigmatized* dialects. Throughout the week-long unit, students were provided with opportunity to explore the relationship between AAVE and historical and residential segregation, teacher expectations, historical oppression, and persistent institutionalized discrimination. By directing attention to language vernaculars and embedding debate and discussion into the literacy curriculum, it became possible for students and adults to challenge the dominant ideologies which continue to block access to cultural capital. Furthermore, the participants recognized and discussed the unfair judgments applied to speaking and writing in non-dominant language vernaculars that too often results in inaccurate perceptions and low expectations of both intellect and potential.

The appreciation for language, culture, identity, and academic success has long been honored for the dominant classes. If educators are serious about improving opportunities for achievement for all students, then the time is far overdue to apply the same value toward diverse cultures and vernacular varieties within every classroom. In further evidence of the importance

and utility of addressing vernacular dialects in the college composition classrooms, Jordan (1988) described implementation of a course in African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Prior to the establishment of the focused course of study in AAVE, Jordan became aware of her students' discomfort and attitude toward AAVE in relation to reading Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.* In response to the dialect used in the novel, Jordan's students initially expressed an attitude of disdain for Walker's choice of dialect. As many of the students spoke in a vernacular similar to the one utilized by Walker's characters, Jordan was at first curious, and then disturbed, by the students' perception of Walker's language choice as flawed. Using this opportunity to further engage her students in a closer examination of the role of language, Jordan and her students examined the rules and qualities of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). As a result of this initial class, Jordan (1988) ultimately devised an entire course focused on the study of AAVE. Throughout the course, she and the students worked collaboratively to define and examine the characteristics of AAVE and to delve into the reproduction of power rooted in language dominance. Because of this process, not only did students become more aware of their own practices and choices around their use of both AAVE *and* academic English, but they also entered into a discourse in which they confronted societal violence and an unjust social order.

Whether or not the exact replication of Jordan's (1988) or Godley and Minnici's (2008) studies would prove effective in a developmental writing college classroom on Northeast Riverside Community College remains uncertain. However, the redesigned Writing 60 course utilized the critical language approach through attention to language choices and variety, particularly in regard to purpose and audience, as an important component of meaningful college-level preparations. As asserted in Godley and Minnici's study (2008), "…Because

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language is a primary means through which existing power structures are upheld and challenged, understanding its nature, use, and variety is an essential part of academic and critical literacy" (p. 322). Certainly, practicing close examination and evaluation of language varieties would contribute to student awareness of the cultural weight vernacular variations carry. As inferred by Delpit (2002), the building of academic and critical literacy skills contributes to the range of choices available to the student and permits deeper consideration of purpose and audience in their own work.

3.0   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At Northeast Riverside Community College, the anticipated site of this study, students who earn between 20 (the lowest possible score) and 54 points out of 120 possible points on the multiple choice writing section of the Accuplacer, the newest version of the required placement test, or a score of 52 or below on the Compass, the previous version of the required placement test, must enroll in the first tier of a two-level developmental course sequence. The first level developmental writing course is called Writing 60 (renamed for the purpose of this study). For clarity, in both the previous and current placement test required by NRCC upon enrollment, students do not actually draft a writing sample; rather they answer multiple-choice questions about writing. Teachers are encouraged to provide a diagnostic writing test during the first week of the semester to identify any potential misplacement of students and to move them vertically, as needed. This movement only occasionally happens and the placement test remains the primary designator of whether students are required to take one or two levels of developmental writing courses or enroll directly into college-level English classes.

The college-defined objectives for Writing 60 were and are focused on skills such as general academic English grammar, punctuation, sentence to paragraph composition, and error remediation. In many classrooms, in service of learning, practicing, and mastering these basic writing skills, students often write brief responses, sometimes typed, sometimes handwritten, often reflective or summative in nature, rarely requiring analysis or more complex critical

thought. In some classrooms, summary remains the primary writing skill practiced throughout the bulk of the semester. In many classrooms, lessons are frequently lecture-based with little interaction between class members. Isolated completion or error remediation still occurs. In the latter part of any given semester, students may move into fundamental essay construction, sometimes following the formulaic five-paragraph essay structure with very basic use of source information, possible introduction to MLA citation, and limited amounts of analysis, if any.

Once placed in Writing 60, students must pass with a grade of C or better in order to ascend into Writing 90. In Writing 90, a grade of C or better is again required to ascend into the first required college level English course. At Northeast Riverside Community College, less than 25% of the students who started in two or more developmental literacy courses in 2007 successfully completed the first required college-level English class within three years (Lowe, 2015). Additionally, this trend has generally continued to move downward from 2007 through the present (Lowe, 2015).

In an attempt to improve upon these outcomes, I taught a redesigned Writing 60 course which met the objectives as identified on the master course syllabus, but also utilized culturally relevant pedagogy (Hull & Rose, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012) in a much more student-driven, problem-posing classroom environment (Freire, 1970; Hartland, 2003; Hooks, 1994; Moje, E., Ciechanowski, K., Kramer, K., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R. & Collazo, T., 2004; Shaughnessy, M., 1977). Additionally, the focus of writing instruction and writing practice was enhanced by a critical language approach (Chisholm & Godley, 2010; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006; Jordan, 1988).

Other pedagogical modifications included a change in the textbook, course readings, and writing assignments in order to engage students in a thematic collection of culturally relevant

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materials. In previous semesters, I used the textbook that is commonly assigned to adjunct instructors who teach the majority of Writing 60 classes on our campus, Skywire & Weiner's (2012) *Student's Book of College English: Rhetoric, Reader, Research Guide, and Handbook.* As a fulltime faculty member, I may use any book I deem suitable to the class needs, but had chosen to use the same book as everyone else until this point in time. Skywire & Weiner's (2012) *Student's Book of College English: Rhetoric, Reader, Research Guide, and Handbook* is not necessarily of low-quality or ill-suited for Writing 60. In fact, in previous semesters, I had some success with some of the readings and writing assignments and less success with others. I had previously thought that some of the pieces included were very complex for students who struggle as readers in the first place. Examples of particularly difficult readings included Orwell's "A Hanging," for example, or Chopin's, "The Story of an Hour," Kingston's "My Mother Has Cooked for Us," or Brady's "I Want a Wife," along with many of the expository essays. However, after including equally complex, and in some cases, more complex readings in the redesigned Writing 60 course with far greater success, I have since reached the conclusion that the previous problem of reading selections rested not in the reading levels of the texts or in the students' ability or willingness to read them. The problem with the readings in the previous Writing 60 course, as compared to the readings in the redesigned Writing 60 course, was not one of literacy, but of relevance to the students. They were not unwilling to struggle with unfamiliar words and sentence structures if they were reading materials which they considered worth the effort. To read Orwell's "A Hanging," from 1931 Britain or Chopin's "Story of an Hour" from 1894 Louisiana simply lacked significance to my students. Even with my best attempts to pull out connections between past and present situations, these writings remained elusive from the start because they simply didn't matter in character, place, or time to my students' lived

experiences or concerns. Additionally, the readings from previous courses remained fairly distinct from one another in the way I had previously presented them, and thus did not provide focused, coherent themes through which the students might build and retain knowledge across the semester. This is not to say that the Skywire & Weiner's (2012) textbook or the previous selection of identified readings and related subjects would never be relevant to my students, but in the Writing 60 courses I taught, populated by the students enrolled at Northeast Riverside Community College, this kind of text did not yet hold any form of importance or cultural relevance with them— and would not yet serve the purpose that other texts could serve better.

I believe that it can benefit students to grapple with texts that are outside their realm of expertise or above their reading level, but what I often saw as interestingly complicated, my students experienced as dull, detached, and not worth the effort. An additional pedagogical problem of the previous class was that the readings were unrelated in topic, sequence, and meaningful public discourse. So much time was spent in attempts at building background necessary for understanding the text, and then to make sense of the text, and to then make the text matter, that little time was left to examine the text from a writer's standpoint. As Writing 60 remains, at its core, a developmental composition class, the assignments used in the previous version of the course actually diverted students away from thinking like writers, discovering the power of language, or embracing the importance of written academic communications.

Students' difficulties responding to the reading and writing assignments in the prior Writing 60 class were not a matter of learning new vocabulary or understanding sentence structure. The struggle was an issue of not teaching from a culturally responsive perspective, not aligning the assignments in such a way that intellectual growth became veritably inevitable, and not providing an opportunity for students to recognize the necessity of developing their own

voices as writers. In relation to Dewey's (1899) propositions which appeared in *School and Society*, Ira Shor (1997) wrote, "With vital interests disconnected from classroom discourse, the students lose touch with the purpose of human communication. When students lose touch with purpose in speaking or writing, they struggle to mobilize their inherent language competencies. They lose their articulateness along with their motivation" (p.8). In my previous Writing 60 course, offering short stories and essays about 1931 Britain, 1894 patriarchy or a monkey feast to a class who experienced far more urgent social, economic, and political community concerns on a daily basis, was foolish on my part, if not downright discriminatory.

Thus, in attempt to redress this significant error, the primary pedagogical motivations of the redesigned class were formed. The focus was on cultural relevance and student-centeredness in everything from the development of the course materials, the sequence and pace of the reading and writing assignments, and the infusion of grammar in meaningful work. Cultural relevance was discussed in the classroom upon the opening of the semester and culture was defined via Ladson-Billings' (2014) definition. Ladson-Billings wrote, "Culture [is] an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief systems… with notions of membership, language, art, and traditional ways of being. However, in reality, culture is always changing" (p. 75). Within the redesigned Writing 60 classes, after discussion of Ladson-Billings' explanation of culture, students self-identified their multiple cultural groups, some that included the traditional associations of race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, transgender, and age; others that allowed students the cultural identification of artists, musicians, athletes, students with disabilities, and residents of particular neighborhoods.

As language is deeply embedded in culture, early in the redesigned Writing 60 classes, the critical language approach was also embedded into assignments and discussions. Throughout

the semester, I attempted to call attention to the value of vernacular variety while underscoring awareness of power structures which placed judgments and limits upon particular language forms. In addition, by increasing awareness of language choices, consideration of purpose and audience was emphasized throughout the course. Everything students read, discussed, and wrote about held connections that tied directly back to their lived experiences, as from there— and only from there— could we build new knowledge and provide students with the ability to recognize the need for access through written communication.

It is important to note here, the term "we" as used in the previous paragraph is not intended to be understood as a generality. In the redesigned Writing 60 course, the students and I became a unified group. While I remained the teacher-researcher, guide, and facilitator, I certainly learned a great deal *with* my students throughout the semester and I trust they would echo the same sentiment. Our educational interactions were mutually enlightening as we evolved into a consortium engaged in various levels of academic inquiry (Freire, 1970). The term "we" as used in this dissertation is an accurate representation of the transactional learning experiences that occurred in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes at the focus of this study.

Another purposeful consideration of the redesigned Writing 60 course was the specific selection of materials of cultural relevance as I did not want to contribute to unintentionally retelling cultural myths of deficit and defeat. Several semesters ago in one of my classes, a student asked the metaphorical question: why does every story end with the death of another Black hero? She referred to her experiences as a Black student in predominantly White classrooms who, throughout her education, had read the familiar essays by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X almost completely to the exclusion of other Black writers. In the book that I

decided upon for the redesigned course, Anker's (2015) *Real Essays with Readings,* and additional articles that included handouts, book excerpts, and Blackboard video links, I made certain there was representation of multiple diverse voices with purposeful attention to achievement and action in response to injustice. The reading selections and associated essay assignments are listed in the Table 1, below. Full scoring guides for the essays may be found in Appendices D, E, F, and G.

Table 1. Redesigned Writing 60 Example Class Readings & Associated Essays

"The Dangers of a Single Story" (Adichie)	Tell a Different Story: A Personal Essay, Appendix D
"South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at U.C. Berkley" (Streeter) "Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" (Pausch)	Achieving Your Childhood Dreams: A Narrative Essay, Appendix E
"Three Ways to Speak English" (Lyiscott) "A Return to Education" (Brown) *Between the World and Me* (Coates excerpt) Teacher-assisted student research	Shine a Light: A Process Analysis Essay, Appendix F
"The Star Spangled Banner"—complete version "Singer Reveals Black Lives Matter Shirt, Kneels During National Anthem" (Ax) "Olympic Runners Tommie Smith & Juan Carlos: Memba Them?" (TMZ) "The Shalefield Stories" (Friends of the Harmed) "The Real Story of Thanksgiving" (Bates) "Standing Rock & Morton County Sheriff's Department" (Digital Smoke Signals) Student independent research	It's Debatable: An Argument Essay, Appendix G

Pedagogically, the decision was made to teach students how to think critically about the choices writers made as related to purpose, audience, and style. In addition to high interest subject matter, in preparation for writing each essay, we examined every model from our textbook chapters related to narratives, process analysis, and argument writing in order to understand the similarities and differences between the modes. With each essay mode, students

selected writers they liked from textbook chapters for use as models of organization and language options.

In relation to cultural relevance, every assignment was selected because it was likely that it held some connection for the students in the room. As the class unfolded and the students' interests and curiosities became more apparent, the subjects covered frequently provided overlap and connections across the semester. Through our studies, we had opportunities to learn not only about writing, but about each other, and about the society we share. Although there still remained a need to build background and grapple with difficult language or supply missing historical knowledge, I was no longer the lecturer and students the note-takers or half-hearted followers of directions. Students were actively engaged through their own inquisitiveness. With cell-phones in hand, they eagerly looked up words and statistics, asked questions of data, double checked information with me and with each other. They tried to make sense of graphs, drew representations of facts and figures on the classroom whiteboard; they asked questions and made connections between the articles we read and the larger world around them. As Shor (1997) stated in his push for the development of critical literacy "Human discourse, in general, education in particular, and literacy classes, specifically, are forces for the making the self in society (p. 13). All semester, I bore witness as the students made and remade the self. It was not unusual to hear sighs when I announced we had once more run slightly past our class time.

In the redesigned Writing 60 course, the design aligned with approaches to teaching developmental writing that focused on cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Hull & Rose 1990; Jordan, 1988; Paris, 2012) and on students' knowledge-making and critical thinking (Freire, 1970; Grubb et al., 2011; Hull & Rose, 1990; Shor 1997). Additionally, in Shaughnessy's (1977) study of basic writers in the City University of New York system, she

discussed the necessity of exactly the type of pedagogical processes that were utilized throughout the semester in response to the subject matter and in preparation and revision of the writing assignments. According to Shaughnessy, "Precisely because writing is a social act, a kind of synthesis that is reached through the dialectic of discussion, the teaching of writing must often begin with the experience of dialogue and end with the experience of a real audience, not only of teachers, but of peers" (p. 83). This philosophy very much shaped the course from beginning to end.

My study focused on answering the following inquiry questions:

1. Was student retention in the redesigned Writing 60 course greater than retention in the previous Writing 60 course?

2. Did students' motivation for learning increase from the beginning to the end of the term?

3. Did students improve their academic writing skills from the beginning to the end of the term?

4. How did students engage with and perceive the culturally relevant pedagogy in the redesigned course?

5. How did students engage with and perceive the critical language pedagogy in the redesigned course?

4.0   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore a change within a context of practice. I chose to use action research as my approach for several reasons. To begin, my problem of practice was rooted in the fact that the previous construct of Writing 60 courses was not proving successful for the vast majority of students. Multiple stakeholders have already been negatively impacted by continuation of status quo course design and instruction. Thus, investigation of possible solutions was both warranted and necessary.

Also, as an Assistant Professor of English with many years of experience working with the particular student populations enrolled in developmental writing courses, I brought expertise, commitment, and perspective to the research at hand. Moreover, I acted as a participant-researcher and took necessary risks in my practice in order to contribute to the study of improved student retention and achievement.

Finally, I was very interested in building local theory that has immediate practical value to Northeast Riverside Community College and to the students served there. The experiences of my classrooms may not be generalizable beyond my context, but the interventions and outcomes may be transferrable to other similar environments and student populations. Also, I look forward to opportunities through which I might share my findings with other stakeholders and educators involved in similar challenges. As noted by Herr and Anderson (2005), action research is useful

to the production of new understandings, and contributes to the practices of researcher and participants, alike.

4.1   STUDY DESIGN: METHODS AND EVIDENCE

I chose a mixed-methods approach for several reasons. Primarily, in addition to measurable outcomes and other statistical data, it was exceedingly important for student voices to remain central in this study. Educational success is often discussed in relation to achievement outcomes and attainment of particular levels of mastery— yet too often, the human element that is critically important in understanding the utility of particular strategies and interventions is overlooked. Additionally, the type of teaching and learning used in basic writing classrooms thus far has not proven particularly effective for the majority of students enrolled in developmental classes. For these reasons, I chose to provide opportunities to collect data that captured students' perceptions of the course. Finally, a mixed-methods approach also limited the potential bias of my interpretations of more subjective data.

Quantitatively, I collected and compared student attendance and retention data from my Writing 60 courses from spring of 2014 though spring of 2016, to attendance and retention data in the redesigned classes investigated in this study. Students completed an adapted version of the "Motivated Strategies for Learners Questionnaire" (Pintrich, 1990) at the beginning and the end of the semester (See Appendix H). This instrument measured changes in student learning styles, academic anxieties, self-perceptions of academic identity, and study habits. In specific

adaptation of this instrument, I replaced the word *tests*, for example, with the word essay or assignment or quiz, as tests are not a significant part of this writing class.

I also designed a pre- and post-assessment of academic writing to measure changes in the academic writing process typically addressed in Writing 60 (see Appendix B). This occurred at the beginning and the end of semester. In this written assessment, I provided the same prompt and directions each time. Then, with the aid of a 10 point rubric (see Appendix C) I examined the progress made in relation to academic writing skills such as idea development, use of source information as support for student claims, improved student analysis, greater organizational control, and reduction of sentence errors.

Qualitatively, I held two focus groups at the conclusion of the semester. All student participants were invited. Two different dates and times were offered in order to capture a greater number of student participants outside of our regular class schedule. Of the 19 students who persisted through the end of the semester, 11 students participated in the focus groups. During the focus groups, students were asked to discuss specific assignments, their attitude toward student decision-making in the class, suggested changes for the course, multiple English vernaculars, their understanding of purpose and audience, and the relationship—if any—between their writing and reading courses. (See Appendix K). This event was audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Table 2, below, provides a complete list of the research questions, the data sources that were aligned with each question, and the methods I used in analysis and interpretation of my findings.

Table 2. Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analysis

Research Questions	Data Sources	Analysis & Interpretations
Will student retention in the new writing course be greater than retention in the old writing course?	**Quantitative data sets** • Attendance records from 12 previous sections (spring 2014-spring 2016) and 2 redesigned sections of Writing 60 (fall 2016) • Stopped attending dates for students from 12 previous sections and 2 redesigned sections of Writing 60 • Withdraw dates from 12 precious sections and 2 redesigned sections • Demographic data from students in redesigned sections • Student contact with some students who stopped attending	• Compare averaged attendance records between previous 12 sections to averaged attendance of 2 redesigned sections • Compare averaged numbers of days absent • Compare number of students who withdraw or stop attending • Compare averaged number of students who complete
Will students' motivation for learning increase from the beginning to the end of the term?	**Quantitative data set** • "Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire" See Appendix H	• Provide questionnaire in beginning and end of semester to redesigned Writing 60 sections Compare averaged group scores
Did students improve their academic writing skills from the beginning to the end of the term?	**Quantitative data set** • Pre- and post- assessment of academic writing See Assessment in Appendix B See Rubric in Appendix C • Passing rates/records from previous 12 sections and 2 redesigned sections	• Provide assessment in beginning and end of semester to redesigned Writing 60 sections Compare averaged group scores • Compare averaged passing rates between previous sections and redesigned sections
How do students engage with and perceive the culturally relevant pedagogy in the redesigned course?	**Qualitative data sets** • Field notes • Culturally relevant assignment chart See Appendix K • Focus Group See focus group questions in Appendix L	• Field notes—reflect, seek themes and patterns • Chart— collect tallies, count, compare • Focus group— record, transcribe, code, categorize by theme, interpret
How do students engage with and perceive the critical language pedagogy in the redesigned course?	**Qualitative data sets** • Field notes • Focus group See focus group questions in Appendix L	• Field notes— reflect, seek themes and patterns • Focus group— record, transcribe, code, categorize by theme, interpret

The goal of this inquiry was to examine the usefulness of a culturally relevant course offered to students who tested into Writing 60 via the college placement exam. As a result of meaningful skill-building and applied practice, many students experienced an increased sense of confidence and personal commitment as suggested by the improvement of attendance, retention, and achievement rates in comparison to 12 sections of previous Writing 60 courses. As the persistent problem of developmental education and the continued lack of student retention and ascension into college level courses occurs across our country and is neither new nor acceptable, this culturally relevant course design offered an option for improved student outcomes. At the very least, this course offered a starting point for much needed developmental education reform.

In addition to the construction of my doctoral dissertation, one of the main purposes for my participation in this course redesign was to open up professional dialogue on my campus and other college campuses focused on the development of new approaches to the persistent problems of student motivation, retention, and achievement in college developmental writing classrooms. Through exploration of this issue, I identified faculty at our institution who are interested in the process of reform and the establishment of alternative developmental course designs that will better meet the needs of our students. Although I am aware of the challenges likely to arise in response to any new improvement efforts, I remain unwilling to accept continuation of status quo course structures or the placement of simplistic solutions or quick reactive measures to address the less than satisfactory achievement rates for students designated to the lowest levels of developmental coursework.

5.0   FINDINGS: RETENTION, ATTENDANCE, AND PASSING RATES

My first research question was: Would student retention, defined for the purpose of this study as continued attendance and completion of the course with a C or better, be greater in the redesigned Writing 60 course than in the precious Writing 60 course? As expressed in Table 3 below, in order to compare retention and passing rates in the redesigned version of Writing 60 with rates from the previous version of Writing 60, I compared average attendance across my previous 12 Writing 60 sections (spring of 2014 - spring of 2016) with the average attendance across the two sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes taught in the fall of 2016. I also compared the average number of days absent, the average percentage of students who completed the course, and the average percentage of students who earned a grade of C or better between the previous sections and the redesigned sections of Writing 60.

Table 3. Student Attendance & Persistence

	Total number of students	Average class size	Average days absent	Percentage attended through end of semester	Percentage passed with a grade of C or better
12 previous sections spring 2014 – spring 2016	156	13	3.85	59%	47%
Redesigned fall 2016	27	13.5	3.21	70%	59%
Percent Increase				**19%**	**25.5%**

Originally, I had planned to compare the retention and passing rates of the newly-designed Writing 60 course to college-level enrollment data from all previous Writing 60 sections, college wide, from 2014 – 2016. However, in order to remove the variables of different teachers, different teaching styles and attitudes, and different teacher-student interactions from the comparison, the decision was made to measure the new course, taught by me in this action research project, against attendance, retention, and grade data from 12 previous Writing 60 sections also taught by me. The students' final grades, dates of withdrawal and last date of attendance were gathered from the college's central database. As a faculty member, I have continued access to all of the classes I teach or have taught in current or past semesters and past years. The number of days that students are absent is not collected by the college, but I keep records in traditional gradebooks and I regularly retain the gradebooks for multiple years. It is from these gradebooks that I counted the days when students were either absent or in attendance.

The previous Writing 60 courses from spring of 2014 – spring of 2016 included a total of 156 students spread across four semesters and 12 classes. Of the 12 classes, the smallest class consisted of 6 students, the largest class contained 18 students, and the average class size across all 12 classes was 13 students. During the fall of 2016, 27 students comprised the study group in two sections of the new Writing 60 course. One new section contained 10 students and the other new section contained 17 students for an average class size of 13.5 students. All 12 previous sections of Writing 60 and two redesigned sections of Writing 60 were taught on the same campus.

I also compared absence rates of the previous and redesigned classes. The English department on this campus has an absence policy by which teachers usually abide. Although teachers may make exceptions based on individual circumstance such as significant student

hardships, serious unanticipated illness or hospitalization of the student or close family member, death of a close family member, or involvement in court proceedings, the general policy is more than 6 absences per semester, or more than 3 absences in a row lead to an automatic grade of F, failure of the class. Even with a grade of F, students are permitted to attend the class, but rarely do students choose to exercise this option. Instead, it is more common for students to withdraw or to cease attending entirely once they have passed the third consecutive or sixth alternating absence limit.

In the previous Writing 60 courses, of the 156 students enrolled, a total of 9 students withdrew and 57 students stopped attending entirely. Of the remaining 90 students across all 12 classes, the lowest number of student absences for any single student was 0. The highest number of student absences for any single student was 17.

In comparison, in the redesigned Writing 60 course, of the 27 students enrolled across two sections, 1 student withdrew and 6 students stopped attending. Of the 19 students who continued to attend through the conclusion of the semester, the lowest number of student absences for any single student was 0. The highest number of student absences for any single student was 10, and this was a special circumstance with the student experiencing first a serious health concern followed almost immediately by the death of a parent. This student did, in fact, complete the class with a passing grade.

Overall, the average number of absences per student across all 12 previous Writing 60 courses was 3.85 days, 2.15 days below the 6-day department requirement for passing the course. Of all students who initially enrolled in the 12 classes, 59% remained in the class through the conclusion of their respective semesters. Additionally, across the 12 previously taught Writing

60 classes, the percentage of students initially enrolled who passed the course with a C or better was 47%.

In comparison, the average number of days absent for students across the two sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course was 3.21 days, about ½ day less than the average for past classes. In the redesigned Writing 60 course, 70% of the students across two sections continued to attend class regularly through the conclusion of the semester, a percentage increase of 19% over the average completion rate of the previous Writing 60 classes. Accounting for all the students initially enrolled in the two sections of the new Writing 60 course, 59% passed with a C or better. This number represents a percentage increase of 25.5% over the average passing rate for students across the previous sections of Writing 60.

In the redesigned Writing 60 course, several students consistently attended even though they knew they were not passing the course due to lack of work completion. Two of these students began submitting work, although unfortunately too late in the semester to alter their grades enough to pass. Two of the students elected to retake the course with me this semester and a third student who also did not pass stopped to talk with me this semester to inform me that he wanted to retake the course with me, but could not fit it in with his schedule.

A number of factors may have affected the increase in attendance, retention, and passing rates in the redesigned class. First, the students were aware from the very beginning of the fall 2016 semester that I was also a student enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Pittsburgh. They knew the focus of my research was ways to improve student retention and passing rates through this new Writing 60 course and they had agreed to be participants in my study. They also knew that I had started my education at the same campus where I now taught and that I fully believed college education could change lives. These factors may have

contributed to some degree to the increased retention and passing rates. From the very first day, students were aware that this course was going to be different from other similarly designated sections. In consideration of these factors, it would likely be beneficial to repeat the same course approach in several future semesters with different professors and different student populations, in order to see if the results obtained in this study remain consistent.

Another feature which may have affected attendance and passing rates is the inherent motivation students brought into the classroom. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students who were enrolled in both sections of the new Writing 60 course were provided with a "Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire," a survey modified from Pintrich, R.R. & DeGroot, E. V. (1990) Motivational and Self-Regulated Learning Components of Classroom Academic Performance. (See Appendix H). As a post-measure comparison, all students who persisted through the end of the semester were again provided the same survey during the last week of the term, prior to the final exam week. More extensive descriptions and interpretations of the data from this survey will be discussed in greater detail in its own section, but for the specific purpose of examining the improvements noted in attendance, retention, and passing rates in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes, one key factor was made clear from the motivation survey.   Despite commonly held perceptions of freshman college students in developmental classrooms as unmotivated, the results of the motivation survey for the students enrolled in the redesigned Writing 60 course showed that the students arrived to the course with high motivation. In comparison of the pre- and post- motivation surveys after the conclusion of the semester, no statistically significant change was noticeable in the results of the post-motivation surveys. In fact, only 1 of 37 statements resulted in an averaged difference of almost 1 point. In other words, in regard to individual responses and to group averages, the findings

suggest that students began the semester with a high degree of motivation and concluded the semester with a fairly equal high degree of motivation.

Likely reasons the attendance and passing rates increased in the redesigned Writing 60 course was that students were ready to engage in college work. They actively took part in the culturally relevant class and participated in its design (Hull & Rose, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Together, the students and I developed the curriculum; students actively participated in shared decision-making about course readings and worked collaboratively with me in the establishment of the class structure (Freire, 1970; Hartland, 2003; Moje et al., 2004; Shor, 1997). At multiple points in the semester, students noted that what they were learning was important and relevant to their lives, their own histories, their curiosities, and their personal belief systems.

In field notes written after an important discussion following the reading of an excerpt from Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me,* the students became very interested in the allusions Coates made in his prose. On one particular day, students read aloud, as had become our practice: "But a society that protects some people through a safety net of schools, government backed home loans, and ancestral wealth but can only protect you with the club of criminal justice has either failed at enforcing its good intentions or has succeeded at something much darker" (18). We stopped here and students were asked to go over the language slowly, one detail at a time, to understand exactly what the phrases meant. The details "government backed home loans" and "ancestral wealth" led into a larger discussion of red lining as one student was familiar with the practices. This information led into a slightly larger discussion of white flight and the manipulation of fear and prejudice for greed and the predatory lending of that era.

One student, not the only one, who was learning this information for the first time asked the question: "Why were we never taught this information before?" I asked her why that mattered. Why did she think she should have learned about these ideas [about redlining, historical racism, institutionalized discrimination] prior to college? Her response was: "Where you come from, your history, *my* history—I should know." In the field notes from that same day, other students agreed. Another young woman said: "At [high] school, kids don't know why they are learning what they learn." She continued with the statement: "We are talking about what matters." This was the kind of writing instruction and connected relevant problem-posing discourse that Freire (1970), Godley & Minnici (2008), Hooks (1999), Jordan (1988), Ladson Billings (1995), Moje et al. (2004), Paris (2012), and Shor (1997), advocated for in their call for student-centered, culturally relevant pedagogy that allows students the opportunities to challenge the unjust social order embedded in our institutions. It is through this kind of education that students develop a fuller understanding of their need to access academic communication skills.

To meet this pedagogical need, the class most certainly addressed the course objectives as defined by the college master course syllabi; but in service of cultural relevance and student-centeredness, students had choice in assignment topics and project topics, within the parameters of our studies. Through the design of the class, I was knowledgeable guide and facilitator, but also interested scholar (Freire, 1970; Shaughnessy, 1977; Shor, 1997). As such, the class became a mutually engaged group of academics occupied by the joys and challenges of intellectual work, rather than individuals attempting to correct sentences or paragraph structures detached from real writing for the purpose of remediation (Grubb et al., 2011; Shor, 1997). As students wrote reflections with added care to their sentence and paragraph construction, further researched Coates' information, discovered how to check facts and make sense of data, and examined the

craftsmanship with which he carefully selected his word choices, they discovered new options for ways they could research and write about subjects that stimulated their minds and passions. They learned how to "talk about what mattered" not only in discussion circles, but in academic essays (Delpit, 2002; Freire, 1970; Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Ladson-Billing, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012; Shaughnessy, 1977; Shor, 1997).

Additional opportunities for student choice existed in the variety of essay models from their textbooks that students selected, read, and dissected in preparation for each essay assignment. Initially, we examined various models connected to upcoming writing assignments as part of class. Later in the semester, we sometimes examined various models or a model as part of class, and students were provided with page numbers of additional models to examine independently, prior to essay drafting. After several rounds of demonstrating how to move back and forth between the essay scoring guides and the published essay examples, students began to recognize their preferences between one writer and another and to "try out" different voices, organizational styles, essay structures, ways to transition between paragraphs, use of examples, and choice of word selections in their own essay writing. The emphasis placed on teaching students how to use published essays in this way, independently, was done so with the hope that students would continue to use these skills beyond this single class and single semester.

6.0   FINDINGS: MOTIVATION

To answer my second research question – Will students' motivation for learning increase from the beginning of the fall 2016 semester to the end of the fall 2016 semester? – I measured changes in students' responses to the "Motivated Strategies for Learning" questionnaire modified from Pintrich, & DeGroot (1990). Thirteen students completed the survey once during August at the beginning of the semester and again during December at the end of the semester. Students were asked to complete the same questionnaire, both times outside of class.

The questionnaire contained 37 questions focused on student self-perceptions about classwork, writing projects, grades, learning, and knowledge of subject matter, study practices, work habits, and independent reading routines. Students were asked to answer all questions honestly by using a five point Likert scale. The exact statements and group averages for both pre- and post-motivation survey are represented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Group Averages for Pre and Post Motivation Survey

	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire modified from Pintrich & DeGroot, (1990)	Group Average PRE	Group Average POST
1	I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.	3.38	3.76
2	Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.	4.00	4.07
3	I am so nervous during a quiz that I cannot remember facts I have learned.	3.07	3.30
4	It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class.	4.84	4.84
5	I like what I am learning in this class.	4.15	4.76
6	I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.	4.23	4.23
7	I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.	4.61	4.76
8	I expect to do very well in this class.	4.04	4.53
9	Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.	4.15	4.23
10	I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work	3.23	4.10
11	I am sure I can do an excellent job on the work assigned for this class.	4.15	4.38
12	I think I will receive a good grade in this class.	4.23	4.30
13	Even when I do poorly on an assignment, I try to learn from my mistakes.	4.92	4.61
14	I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know.	4.61	4.76
15	My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.	3.15	3.30
16	I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.	4.15	4.61
17	Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject	3.84	3.76
18	I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.	4.61	4.46
19	Understanding this subject is important to me.	4.69	4.69
20	When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can complete the assignment correctly.	4.61	4.46
21	I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.	3.53	4.07
22	It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read.	2.93	3.07
23	When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts.	4.33	4.07
24	When I study I put important ideas into my own words I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.	4.07	4.15
25	When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.	3.38	3.54
26	I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to.	2.52	2.69
27	Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.	4.07	3.69
28	Before I begin studying I think about the things I will need to do to learn.	3.93	4.38
29	I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments.	4.46	4.23
30	I often find that I have been reading for class but don't know what it is all about.	2.84	2.76
31	I find that when the teacher is talking I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said.	4.07	3.92
32	When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together.	3.92	4.00
33	When I'm reading, I stop once in a while and go over what I have read.	4.15	3.76
34	When I read materials for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember.	3.23	3.25
35	I outline the chapters in my book to help me study.	2.76	2.76
36	I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class.	4.69	4.38
37	When reading I try to connect the things I am reading about with what I already know.	4.46	4.30
	GROUP AVERAGE OF COMPLETE MOTIVATION SURVEY	**4.04**	**4.03**

1 = not at all true	2 = rarely true	3 = sometimes true	4 = often true	5 = almost always true

Of the 37 statements on the "Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire," 32 statements are categorized as positive. Positive statements from the questionnaire included sentences such as the following examples: I like what I am learning in this class; I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course; I think I will receive a good grade in this class. For these 32 statements, an increase in the number selected from the scale, lower to higher, would suggest an increase in student motivation.

The 5 remaining statements from the questionnaire not included in the previous grouping were categorized as negative statements. The 5 negative statements are identified on Table 4 by a highlight of yellow on the statement number. In the case of these five statements, an increase in motivation would be shown by a decrease in the number selected from the scale, moving from higher to lower. To clarify, in consideration of the statement: When work is hard, I either give up or study only the easy parts, an initial student selection of 4, often true, shows less motivation than a student selection of 2, rarely true. To see a decrease from 4 on the pre-semester questionnaire to a 2 on the post-semester questionnaire would indicate an increase in motivation. With this distinction in mind for 5 of the 32 questionnaire statements, the decision was made to reverse the numerical representation of the negatively worded statements so that greater motivation was indicated by a higher score on all questionnaire items. This allowed for more accurate comparisons, recognition of patterns, and the ability to measure sums and/or assess averages for both pre- and post- measures. Table 5 below represents the changes made to the scoring of negative items.

Table 5. Group Averages for Pre and Post Motivation Survey

Negative statement Actual response	1 = not at all true	2 = rarely true	3 = sometimes true	4 = often true	5 = almost always true
Interpreted response in positive terms	5 = not at all true	4 = rarely true	3 = sometimes true	2 = often true	1 = not at all true

Of the 19 students who persisted through the entire fall 2017 semester, 13 students across both sections of the new Writing 60 classes returned both a pre-semester and post-semester motivation questionnaire. As both the pre- and post-motivation questionnaires were necessary to measure any changes in motivation that occurred, the following data is derived from the 13 students who participated in the survey in both August and December.

As identified in Table 4 on pages 34-35, based on the Likert scale, a student selection of the response 4 means "often true." As aforementioned, the statements on the motivation survey were all represented in positive terms thus the response of the number 5 signified very high motivation. The group total scores for pre- and post- motivation survey results moved from a pre- average of 4.04 to a post average of 4.03, respectively. The only individual statement that showed an increase of almost one full point, and moved from a pre- average of 3.23 to a post average of 4.10, was statement 10: I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work. This statement received a slightly higher score for motivation at the end of the semester as compared to the beginning, though not a statistically significance increase.

The fact that no statistically significant change occurred provided further evidence that in order to fully understand the success experienced across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes, future sections of the redesigned course should be run for comparison. Otherwise, in connection to this first finding from the motivation questionnaire, the question becomes: were the students enrolled across the two sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes fairly well-motivated from the beginning?

Beyond comparing averages, I also analyzed changes that occurred in the total class score for individual survey statements from pre- to post-. There were some statements in which the response showed a slight possible decrease in motivation. For example, Statement 27 read: Even

when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish. In the pre-survey, the sum of this column was 53. In the post-survey, the sum of this column dropped to 48. This very slight drop, however, could be interpreted in several different ways and again lead to further questions. Did this small drop occur because a student or students stopped working when materials were dull and uninteresting? Or did this drop occur because materials were not dull and uninteresting and so this was something of a non-issue?

Another area which showed a slight decrease in the total class score was Statement 33 which read: When I am reading, I stop once in a while and go over what I have read. This slight change could represent better reading skills, improved interaction with the text, annotations while reading that provided improved focus, or increased use of technology to quickly look up unfamiliar words. This could very well represent positive gains in reading comprehension, less fear of complex language, and greater familiarity with academic writing and college student practices.

Even though these are very small changes, I am curious why they happened. In future studies of the redesigned Writing 60 class, one recommendation I would add to the overall process is an additional semester of follow up with the students involved. I believe the time to ask these questions, to clarify and assess these and other interpretations for accuracy, the opportunity to re-interview students during their following semester and assess the impact that the redesigned Writing 60 class had, if any, on their experience with the next level writing class, would add value to this examination of the Writing 60 course.

The internal motivation highlighted though the pre- and post- motivation survey responses also aligned with my observations and assessments of students' writing processes and completed writing tasks. For example, when students planned their midterm assignments for the

"Shine a Light" project, many students chose topics that were both familiar and culturally relevant to them. One student, however, who actually arrived with lower skill sets in writing and research ability than most of the class, requested a subject he was interested in that required a great deal of research, reading, and critical thought. Not only was he willing to work hard in gathering information, he was also willing to meet with other teachers and writing center facilitators to help him outside of class time through the research, presentation, and writing process. He elected to explore a subject not only connected to his personal curiosity, but one he chose for the purpose of raising awareness around a relevant social concern.   His project was certainly harder for him than for others, but he persisted. In the process, his ability to learn basic writing skills while invested in meaningful academic pursuits was recognized (Grubb et al. 2011; Hartland, 2003; Shaughnessy, 1977).

7.0   PRE- & POST-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

My third research question was: Did students improve their academic writing skills from the beginning to the end of the term?   A total of 16 students across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 class took both the pre- and post- assessment of academic writing. All data and outcomes discussed are based upon this group.

Students were given a pre-assessment of academic writing at the beginning of the fall term which was designed to identify any students potentially misplaced in Writing 60 and also to measure students' strengths and needs in academic writing upon arrival to the redesigned Writing 60 class. An identical post-assessment of academic writing was given again at the end of the fall term in order to measure gains in students' academic writing abilities across the semester.

The pre-assessment of academic writing was given during class time with minimal instructions from me. Students were given 50 minutes to read a brief two-page article, and respond in a typed paragraph to a prompt written at the top of the article. They were instructed that in this one situation, and again at the end of the semester when this assessment was repeated, I was not going to clarify the prompt. The prompt was part of the assessment and they had to attempt to make sense of the language and respond as best they could. Figure 1, below, contains the full prompt that the students received. For the complete article and associated rubric, see Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively.

In the third paragraph of Mr. Larson's article "Its Academic, or Is It?" he asks a significant question: **"Does punctuation count any longer?"**

Please read his essay carefully, marking significant points you find. Then craft a **paragraph** of response, **taking a stand on his question**. You should support your stand with **specific details from the article that illustrate your point.**

Your paragraph should contain an explicit **topic sentence** that clearly **states your position** and directs the reader into the content of the paragraph. Your paragraph should include a **claim/reason** for your position plus **specific supporting details** that provide your rationale. The paragraph should also contain **your response to the question**, **reference to Larson's article, use of an example from the article followed by an in -text citation**, and your **concluding thoughts**. Please proofread carefully.

Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Assessment of Academic Writing

The decision was made to provide written instructions without clarifications from me as this would provide evidence of student knowledge of academic language pre- and post-assessment *and* the ability to transfer this knowledge into actual writing practice. Students were expected to complete the assignment during a single class period as this ensured that students did not receive assistance with their writing and that the writing was, indeed, representative of their abilities. Students were informed upon introduction to the pre-assessment that they would complete the same exact assessment twice, the second time at the conclusion of the semester, and they were repeatedly assured that the assessment is diagnostic and ungraded.

Data from both sets of pre- and post-assessment of academic writing was collected on a 10-point rubric. (See Appendix C). The rubric was divided into two sections with one section titled Conventions in Grammar and the other section titled Paragraph Development. Conventions in Grammar included attention to the following five grammatical skills: use of sentence variety, elimination of sentence boundary errors, elimination of spelling errors, use of correct word choices instead of commonly confused words and/or homonyms, and correct use of source or author attributions and/or MLA in-text citations. Paragraph development addressed the following five skills of effective paragraph construction: construction of clear, explicit topic sentences, reference to the article in service of context, use of paraphrase, direct quotation, or

other related example, analysis or interpretation of article information, and effective conclusion of paragraph.

In all, within a single 50-minute class meeting, the students read the short 2 ½ page article and typed a paragraph in response to the prompt that effectively met the criteria described in Conventions of Grammar and Paragraph Construction. To keep the measurement of skills as concrete as possible, a score of 0 was assigned when the student did not meet the skill requirement at all. For example, if the student did not include a topic sentence, the absence of a topic sentence would receive a score of 0. A score of .5 meant the student attempted the skill, but the skill was not effectively met. For example, a student attempted to construct a topic sentence, and the topic sentence was clear, but was not responsive to the prompt and/or was not effective in relation to the paragraph. That attempt would receive a score of .5. If the student met the criteria exactly as described for the specific skill area, wrote a topic sentence which was responsive to the prompt, was clear, and was effective in connection to the other information contained in the paragraph, that attempt would receive a score of 1.

Overall, the areas that represented the greatest challenge for students in the pre-assessment was the use of sentence variety, controlling sentence boundary errors, the use of MLA in-text citations or basic attributions, and the paragraph development section, as a whole. One skill area of consistent strength that students displayed on the pre-assessment of academic writing was accurate spelling. A second strong skill area was the use of the correct word instead of commonly confused words or homonyms.

In regard to overall group gains in specific skill areas, improvements occurred in 9 of the 10 skills measured.   This is expressed in Table 6 below.

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Table 6. Pre- and Post-Assessment of Academic Writing Average Scores

	AVERAGE PRE	AVERAGE POST	AVERAGE CHANGE
TOPIC SENTENCE	0.41	0.81	0.40
ARTICLE CONTEXT	0.32	0.53	0.21
QUOTATION, PARAPHRASE, EXAMPLE	0.56	0.88	0.32
ANALYSIS	0.25	0.59	0.34
CONCLUSION	0.53	0.72	0.19
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	0.62	0.87	0.25
SENTENCE VARIETY	0.28	0.71	0.43
ELIMINATE SPELLING ERRORS	1.00	0.97	-- 0.03
AVOID COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS	0.72	0.84	0.12
CORRECT MLA IN TEXT/ ATTRIBUTIONS	0.00	0.12	0.12
TOTAL	4.78	7.53	2.75

Large gains were also seen in the skill areas of grammar conventions. Specifically, 6 of 16 students increased their score in use of sentence variety and 9 of 16 students decreased their score in reduction of sentence boundary errors. Although correct word usage did not present as a problematic skill area for the group in the pre-assessment, 4 of 16 students raised their score in this skill area.

Interestingly, one of the pedagogical adaptations of the revised class was that grammar instruction was not an area upon which we spent an excessive amount of time throughout the semester. Instead, formal address of grammar usually occurred in the form of an occasional mini-lesson without regularity and without great frequency. Typically, mini lessons were presented after an assignment or essay submission gave evidence of a particularly problematic grammar issue that occurred across the work submitted by multiple students. For example, if numerous students had fragments throughout their writing, I presented a mini-lesson on fragments. During the mini lesson, students took notes as I explained the requirements of a complete sentence and provided examples of fragments. Students used their text books and

contributed their interpretation of fragment causes and fragment repairs. We orally corrected a minimal number of fragments, and then moved on to the readings, viewings, and/or discussions of the day. Then, typically, a reflection or small writing assignment was assigned for homework based on the day's readings, viewings, and/or discussions. In the homework, students practiced the grammar conventions we had learned.

In one of the focus groups, a student brought up our in-class grammar work as described above. He said, "The punctuation projects helped a lot, because, like, I had (laughs) very little idea about punctuation." Another student quickly agreed. The lesson following punctuation was run-ons. Then we covered capital letters. The process repeated itself each time a new assignment came in which showed a grammar issue in demand of attention. In this way, the grammar work remained directly tied to student writing, needs, interests, and investment.

The fact that the group showed satisfactory gains on the post-assessment supported Grubb et al. (2011), Shaughnessy (1977) and Shor's (1997) philosophies that rote corrections of detached sentences was not the most effective way to teach grammar skills; meaningful work, discussion first, and attention to critical problem-posing education resulted in a significant number of students who made progress in the conventions of grammar across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 class.

In the paragraph development section of the post-assessment, 11 of 16 students earned a higher score for their construction of clear and effective topic sentences. Across the group, 6 of 16 students received a higher score for providing context for the article. Additionally, 7 of 16 students improved their ability to use a specific quotation, paraphrase, or related example. Another 5 of 16 students improved their ability to construct a clear, effective concluding sentence.

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The improved skill areas noted in paragraph development were likely the result of close attention to organization and structure in published essays, articles, and student drafts. In another pedagogical adaptation to the class, throughout the semester, we studied the way that writers chose to organize essays and structure specific paragraphs. With each essay that the students prepared to write, they read and re-read models, examined, underlined, discussed, and considered why writers made the choices they did. For example, when discussing the use of topic sentences in an argument essay, students went through several examples of argument essays, paragraph by paragraph. Students identified the topic sentence, discussed their purpose, their relationship to the thesis, and their connection to the information in the paragraph.

Additionally, as students completed a first draft of their essay, the classes spent time in the writing center, worked together on peer review, and were encouraged to use the writing center outside of class for additional support. During the focus groups, 4 different students mentioned the usefulness of the writing center. One student said, "We're getting help from everywhere. They [the writing center facilitators] are giving us hope." He also said, "If this thing [the writing center used as part of the regular class] keeps going, it's going to be great help for faculty, students, and everyone else. Like this thing has to stay in the class. You know, the projects we're doing, it helps everyone move on to their next level of study."

8.0   FINDINGS: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

How did students engage with and perceive the culturally relevant pedagogy in the redesigned course? To begin this section, clarification of the term culturally relevant, as used and understood in both sections of the Writing 60 classes, is required. Often times, the term culturally relevant pedagogy is discussed synonymous with the overly simplified identifications of race or ethnicity. Additionally, then, culturally relevant pedagogy is misused in the sense that judgments about a particular group's culture are made quickly, sometimes based on physical appearance or location of the school or other beliefs about a particular population. Furthermore, culturally relevant pedagogy does not mean that if a class is made up of predominantly African American students, for example, a teacher selects from a handful of familiar works written by African American authors and offers little in the way of new voices or widened perspectives. Likewise, as expressed by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), there is danger in telling a singular cultural narrative as our nation has done throughout its history, particularly when that narrative is one limited by disproven notions of deficit, oppression, and disempowerment.

In defining cultural relevance as the term is used and understood in the redesigned Writing 60 course, I chose to adhere to Ladson-Billings' (2014) most recent address of her theory. As she asserts, "Scholarship is ever changing. Today, researchers and practitioners are moving and evolving in new ways that require us to embrace a more dynamic view of culture" (p. 75). Culture is not limited to clearly solidified forms of race, ethnicity, or nation of origin

(Ladson Billings, 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012), according to Ladson Billings is a "newer, fresher version of culturally relevant pedagogy…[that] recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity—that is that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects" (p. 75). One of the key points in Ladson Billings' theory that must not be overlooked in the implementation of culturally relevant/culturally sustaining pedagogy is this: yes, the teacher is the expert in the subject matter, but the students are the experts in the culture or multiplicity of cultures they bring to the classroom, and the classroom becomes a culture of its own. This is the intersectionality that is embedded in the theories of Freire (1970), Hartland (2003), Hull & Rose (1990), Ladson Billings (1995, 2014), Moje et al. (2004), Paris (2012), Shaughnessy (1977), and Shor (1997). Just as I used my strengths and passions to teach academic English, it became equally necessary to open a space for my students so that they have the opportunity to use their strengths and passions to teach me and each other. The creation of "repositioned normativity" (Ladson Billings, 2014) demanded a flexible course design, modified time frame for assignments, and tremendous energy from all involved.

Another important point necessary to consider when developing a class centered on culturally relevant pedagogy is that however the students define their various cultures, does not mean that there is a singular group or culture that the students are interested in learning about. The stories of other cultures' struggles, experiences, lessons, and triumphs may have equal application to the students' past and present experiences or future aspirations. The focus in culturally relevant pedagogy is that the selection of materials, tasks, and assignments must hold relevance to the students' lives. These points were considered deeply in the planning and flexible design of both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course. The result was a co-

constructed academic experience in which the teacher served as facilitator, but students' contributions were not only expected, but encouraged, in the ongoing selection of topics, interests, course materials, and subject matter for writing assignments.

An example of a culturally relevant assignment was the first actual essay written in response to Adichie's (2009) Ted Talk, "The dangers of a single story." In the pre-writing stage, the term culture was defined as a group which shared similar values, beliefs, traditions, and history. The group brainstormed different cultural groups they belonged to such as: college students, athletes, musicians, women, men, teenagers, (paraprofessional) caregivers, parents, and millennials. They also identified as members of particular neighborhoods, churches, and schools. Interestingly, no one mentioned race or ethnicity. During this process, one student asked why people always have to be put in categories. The group discussed the question briefly and agreed upon the answer that it helps people know what to expect.

I selected the cultural group "college student" from the list and then made it more specific to "community college student." I then asked students to define stereotypes. What do other people— people who haven't attended college here— think about community college students? What negative stereotypes get thrown around? Students shared out phrases such as: not as good as a four-year school; must not have done good in high school; no money; dumbed down classes. I then turned the conversation around to Adichie's claim that if you only tell one story about a group of people, that story becomes what others think of as truth. I asked: What's the truth about being a community college student? Students shared phrases such as: saving a lot of money; still getting a good education; people go here first and transfer to four year institutions. Students then discussed their experience as community college students that challenged the stereotypes.

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In this way, they prepared for writing their first essay. We discussed the fact that they probably belong to more than one cultural group. Student chose the cultural group of their choice, the one they wanted to write about for this assignment. One student used this essay to share with me his experience of growing up transgender and finally having his outside match his inside. Another student wrote about playing the violin and how that helped her feel less like an outsider. One student wrote about what it meant to be a young mother. Other assignments of the semester followed similar patterns, culturally relevant, discussion first, rooted in subjects that matter (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Shaughnessy 1977; Shor, 1997).

Near the end of the semester, prior to the focus groups, students were asked to complete a survey that listed 17 of our major reading and writing assignments that occurred across the 16-week semester. Students were asked to place tally marks in the columns that best represented the way they felt about the readings and assignments we experienced through the semester. Students were permitted to check as many columns as fit their response. Figure 2, below, is the survey students took and the number of tally marks placed in each column from 18 of 19 students across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course.

	This assignment **DID NOT** feel connected to me or my life	This assignment reminded me of similar situations or experiences I've had	This assignment made me think about people or society in a new way	This assignment felt true to me or my beliefs	This assignment made me feel confident or proud of my group (however I identify my group)	I don't know how I feel about this assignment	I don't remember this assignment
"The Dangers of a Single Story"	1	8	11	8	5		1
"Witness"	3	3	6	5		3	2
"3 Ways to Speak English"		5	6	6	3	1	3
"South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at U.C. Berkley"		6	3	8	1	2	2
Tell a Different Story (Personal Essay) Different Stories that Should be Told about your Group (as you define your group)		3	3	15	7		
Police Report	4	1	4	2		5	3
"A Return to Education"		4	4	9	2	1	3
Vanessa German Presentation (poet from Homewood in auditorium)	1	1	7	7	2	1	3
Achieving Your Childhood Dreams: Student Narrative Essay		6	4	13	3		
Achieving Your Dreams Book & Video		6	3	12	11	1	

Between the World and Me book excerpt		2	5	7	2	1	6
Poster Presentation Challenging Stereotypes with research	1	6	6	7	4	1	
"The Choice to Do It Over Again" Process Analysis	1	2	5	5	3	3	2
Shine A Light: Student Process Analysis Essay What We Did, Why We Did It, and How We Made It Happen		3	4	7	4	3	
"Josh Powell Killed Two Young Sons"	3	3	6	3	2	2	2
"The Death Penalty's Underlying Problem"	2	1	8	2	1	1	2
It's Debatable: Student Argument Essay with Research		7	5	6	4	2	

Figure 2. Survey of Culturally Relevant Assignments

The assignment that received the highest tally (of 4 checks) for "Did not feel connected to my life" was "Police Report." Additionally, this assignment received the highest score, again 4 checks, for the column "I don't know how I felt about this assignment." "Police Report," was used early in the semester in an examination of the way narrative writing is used in particular career fields. It was also discussed in terms of purpose, audience, and language choices and was used to compare with other narratives told from a more imaginative, creative perspective. The writing was brief, concise, and more technical in nature than anything else we read. The fact that it was unappealing is not surprising.

In the column designated as: "Reminded me of similar experiences I've had," the Streeter article, "South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at UC Berkley" received 7 checks, followed by the student written argument essay which received 6 checks. "South L.A. Student…" resonated with students in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course. This article focused on a student from a difficult urban area who was accepted into college. He was smart, hardworking, and a straight A student in his public high school. Yet his first year in college, he found himself in a developmental writing class, and the work was so hard that he was unsure if he would be able to remain in college. There are clearly numerous relationships to be drawn from the article and applied to college students on the other side of the country in Pennsylvania.

Also in the column labeled "Reminded me of similar experiences I've had," the argument essay received 7 checks. For this essay, students were permitted to choose a subject for which they felt passionate about, as long as the subject was debatable, researchable, and approved by me. The fact that at least 6 students chose a topic which was connected to familiar experiences or situations in their lives is not surprising. One student, transgender identifying as male, wanted to present his argument essay focused on the importance of preserving rights for LGBTQ+ to the class, and to also use the opportunity to share with them his journey to become a man. The class perceived him as a man and did not know his full story. Unfortunately, there was no time remaining in the semester and we could not fit a presentation into the last two days.

In the column labeled "Made me think about people or society in a new way" Adichie's (2009) "The Dangers of a Single Story" earned 11 checks. Additionally, Adichie's talk received 8 checks in the column "Reminded me of similar situations I've had," 8 checks in the column "Felt true to my beliefs," and 5 checks in "Made me feel confident or proud of my group." This high number of checks this assignment received is unsurprising as Adichie's talk contributed

greatly to the shape of almost every assignment we worked on through the rest of the semester. In particular, the midterm project and process analysis essay were specifically aligned with Adichie's talk.

In consideration of the assignment that "Felt true to my beliefs," 15 students selected the personal essay, the first formal essay from the semester in which they identified and celebrated the culture to which they belonged. Likewise, this same assignment received 7 checks in the following column for "Made me feel confident or proud of my group."

The assignment least remembered was Coates' (2016) *Between the World and Me.* With 6 checks, this assignment received double the amount of checks than any of the other 16 assignments in the column labeled "I don't remember this assignment." I found this result very surprising because we had such wonderful academic discussions around the subject and the students had exhibited tremendous curiosity and insightfulness throughout the class' oral reading of the excerpt. They came to class with assigned homework sections devoured, often having read more than I assigned, and filled with questions. From my perspective, I thought this was one of the strongest academic selections of the entire semester.

At one point, my students were checking Coates' statistics, pulling up graphs on their phones, and engaged in deep discussion of hypothesized reasons for prison statistics, poverty, and "rigged systems." The energy of academic discourse was palpable in both sections of classes on that particular day. In retrospect, one possibility, perhaps, was that their excitement was not about Coates' subject matter, specifically, but about the access to the academic, intellectual world of investigation that his text inspired. The Coates' reading was valuable, but possibly not for the reasons I suspected at the time. His work mirrored much of my own interests and studies and so I was fascinated for different reasons than my students. A second

possibility was that the reading had occurred early on in the semester, prior to midterms, and there had been so many other readings and writings of interest since then that the interest in his subject was simply not as sustainable. Whatever else occurred as a result of the Coates' reading, the tallies in the "Don't remember" column of the checklist and no mention of Coates' excerpt in the focus group that followed served as excellent reminders of why it remains so important to allow students a voice in the collaborative co-construction of the culturally relevant classroom.

Shortly after completing the assignment checklist, two focus groups were held. All students across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course were invited to participate in the focus groups during the last week of the semester. The purpose of the focus groups was to ask questions about student experience with specific pedagogical choices I made and implemented in the redesign of the Writing 60 course. Specifically, I was interested in their perceptions of the culturally relevant materials, tasks, and assignments (Hull & Rose, 1990; Ladson Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012) and response to critical language, particularly in regard to purpose and audience (Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988).

Students gave permission for me to audio record each session. From the audio recording, I transcribed the focus groups and coded the transcripts into the following themes: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Engagement with Critical Language, Student Motivation, Academic Writing, Outside Study, and Crossover between Reading and Writing Classes. Both focus groups were held outside of class time on different days of the week, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Students in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes could attend the focus group of their choice or not attend the focus group at all. The first focus group was held in the morning and was attended by 6 students representing both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 classes. The second focus group was held several days later during afternoon hours and was

attended by 6 different students, all from the same section of one of the redesigned Writing 60 classes.

In both focus groups, one assignment and related writings and activities discussed repeatedly was Adichie's (2009) "The Dangers of a Single Story." In fact, "The Dangers of a Single Story" was brought up ten different times across both focus groups. Students across both focus groups agreed, "The Dangers of a single story should remain a part of the class. Another student brought up the midterm project, "Shine a Light" that related directly to Adichie's "The Dangers of a Single Story." In brief, students wanted to do a project that involved researching subjects they cared about, subjects that had been confined to a single negative narrative. Students selected topics in which they believed they could show the positive narratives that weren't told enough. A brief sample of their subjects included: growing up in Homewood, successful Black men, positive community policing, and perceptions of beauty in women of color, multiple races against racism, positive messages in hip hop music, and surviving and thriving despite being bullied. Students selected these topics completely on their own, performed research, created posters, presented to peers, and wrote well-organized process analysis essays explaining how and why this project was done. Student driven, freedom of choice, based in lived experienced, and used a building block for higher level academic skills, this is the "dynamic culture" that Ladson-Billings (2014) referred to in her "remix" of culturally relevant, culturally sustaining pedagogy (p.75).

In addition to Adichie's frequent mention in the focus group, students also noted that the self-reflection essays were well received. They said that because of the work we did together in class, the learning was "more comfortable." Students repeatedly emphasized the importance of choice and freedom, the pleasure in learning, and the motivation that came from within.

From my field notes, which were often focused on the many discussions we had in class surrounding reading and writing assignments that were complex either in language or in subject matter, students invariably revealed their perceptions of society and of each other. One section of the new Writing 60 course was much more diverse than the other in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, school district, disability, family responsibilities, and employment. In this section, in a discussion from the first week of class, the students talked about pre-judgment. Student names have been changed in this section to protect student confidentiality, but many students spoke and it is necessary to provide names in order to distinguish voices. Bodhi started the discussion by addressing his refugee status and the experience he had living in camps before arriving in America. Mae said that she believed "stereotypes become the truth." Benny expressed his belief that prejudices "rob people of their dignity." Cambria said she understood the sense of being an outsider and that she feared that the reputation of her neighborhood reflected upon her. Elijah said he understood her feelings for he lived in a neighborhood like that, too. He said, "There is more than the illusion. There are things to be celebrated." These students were strangers a week before this discussion took place. In a traditional lecture-based classroom, these students would have likely remained strangers. In my career, I have taught in classrooms where even by the end of the term, students did not know one another's names, much less where they came from or how they felt about the places where they lived. In this culturally relevant, student-centered, discussion-based writing classroom, this was not the case. Within a week's time, across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course, this group of students moved beyond a typical class and shifted with ease into the space of cohort members, invested in their studies and in each other.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Hull & Rose, 1990, Ladson Billings, 1995, Moje et al., 2004; 2014; Paris, 2012), attention to critical language (Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988) and critical discourse as a necessary access point for academic literacy (Freire, 1970; Shaughnessy, 1977, Shor, 1997) all suggest the same key understanding: education is a political act. In the world we currently inhabit, this is perhaps more important now than at any time in the memorable history of our nation. Culturally relevant pedagogy, the critical language approach, and students as co-constructers of the academic experience is necessary not only to student success, but to the removal of metaphorical walls between people who otherwise might remain separate, invisible, and othered.

This same group of students arrived the day after the U.S. presidential election quite distraught and unsure of what the election results would mean for each of them, upset for different reasons. Instead of class, they wanted to talk about how the outcome happened and how they were to make sense of it.

They shared disappointment, anger, and fear. Near the end of that class, one student, Jacob, asked if he could write a reflection about the election for homework. Jacob scored a 3 on the pre-assessment of academic writing taken in August. During the first week of the semester, he could not put sentences together in paragraph form. He copied text from the article used for the pre-assessment because he did not know what to write. He copied sentences with words missing. The Compass placement test, necessary for enrollment in college, places students with a score lower than 52 in Writing 60; Jacob scored a 9. Throughout the entire 15-week semester, Jacob never missed a single class or assignment. On the post-assessment of academic writing, Jacob scored a 6. He doubled his skill abilities in 15 weeks. At this point, I intentionally reiterate my statement from above: Jacob asked if he could write a reflection about a political

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event, the presidential election, for homework. Homework was not assigned to anyone. Jacob, a student who entered this class without the ability to copy complete sentences with all the words intact, *wanted* to write about the political outcome of the election.

That academic leap, along with the pedagogical decision-making that surrounded thematic readings, research, discussions, and writing—all student driven, all tied to social, economic, and political issues of cultural relevance, had the following effect on the 19 students who persisted through the entire semester: students arrived every day without the weight of deficit and/or anticipated persistent exclusion. They arrived at class "repositioned into a place of normativity" (Ladson Billings, 2014, p.76).   Perhaps of equal importance, as "subjects in the in instructional process," (p. 76) as co-constructors of the academic experience (Freire, 1970; Shaughnessy, Shor, 1997) they built connections, as college students do, with one another. The lessons they studied, the academic communication skills they practiced, the insights they discovered, the compassion and triumphs and frustrations they shared, *all of that,* is why culturally relevant pedagogy exerted such a powerful and positive influence across both sections of the new Writing 60 course.

9.0   FINDINGS: CRITICAL LANGUAGE APPROACH

The improvement in academic writing across both sections of the new Writing 60 courses occurred as the result of the culturally relevant pedagogy that defined the course, the co-constructed learning environment that emphasized the intersectional space of teacher as expert and guide with student collaboration and academic inquiry, attention to critical language, and the regular use of the college writing center. During immersion in the course, I incorrectly believed that my attempts to draw attention to critical language (Godley et al., 2006; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Jordan, 1988) were almost entirely ineffective. Students arrived with a fairly well-adjusted sense of language as something fluid and did not seem to recognize the way in which vernacular variations were related to power structures in our present society. On more than occasion, they voiced that they saw the entanglement of language and power as a problem of the past. However, upon closer reflection of the growth in students' composition skills, examination of the comments from our two focus groups, and rumination over my field notes, I have come to believe that our attention to critical language did have a greater impact than I first suspected, but once again, in a way I had not anticipated.

As my students reported throughout the semester and as I collected repeatedly in my field notes, they were comfortable with the way they talked, with the way everybody talked. They understood that people used different dialects or spoke multiple languages or developed particular ways of using words and tone based on where or by whom they were raised, the job

they performed, the people they interacted with regularly, their perceptions of formal or informal speech, casual and academic. They grew uncomfortable when I brought up biased academic language judgments practiced in education. Because students in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course had worked so hard all semester to find the "different, more positive stories" (Adichie, 2009) I resisted pushing against their perceptions that language bias in education was a problem limited to the past. When I repeat this course in a future study, critical languages should, perhaps, be examined exactly from this perspective of educational, test-based, practice. The forced focus on the five-paragraph essay and central attention to White English throughout their pre-college education ultimately left students with little exposure to the diversity of possibility in vernacular voice. Perhaps, as Jordan (1988) did in her English course at Berkley, this subject would best be addressed in a semester long exploration of close, focused study. In the redesign of Writing 60 as it commenced through fall 16, students remained unwilling, or perhaps opposed, to the idea that larger forces of power continued to exert hierarchal control over the definition of academic English.

As much as the students accepted spoken vernaculars as a natural evolution of language, in written form, they worked very hard to compose in the language of academic English, a language in which they had limited exposure or experience. My students' attempts to write college papers began like this: they arrived at Writing 60 classes prepared to write in their best imagined version of academic English. Many students across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course are first generation college students. In the early part of the semester, we discussed personal tastes and experiences with literacy, and a significant number of students across both sections admitted that they did not often read for pleasure, they rarely engaged in conversations with family or peers about articles or books they read, they probably had not yet

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encountered an actual academic or college level text, and they attended school districts where, according to some students, they had not been asked to write much at all. Given this lack of experience, students wrote what they conceived college essays "should" sound like. This was a good instinctive gesture, but one without actual models to follow. Thus, their writing was often long and confusing sentences with polysyllabic words placed ineffectively among other polysyllabic words, words sometimes used without clear understanding of word meaning or parts of speech. In their early attempts, there was frequently an absence of adequate punctuation, capitalization or no capitalization without patterns, and sometimes little knowledge of sentence structure or paragraph organization.

Nonetheless, the desire to write in a manner that they realized was somehow different than high school, different than work, different than any writing they had done before, was a good starting point. Unfortunately, it is not often noted as such. Rather, it is not unusual to hear student attempts as I've described criticized, looked down upon, and marginalized. In this particular academic space, attention to critical language could have possibly taken root had I recognized the potential sooner.

Instead, throughout the semester, I addressed critical language through introducing students to a variety of vernaculars in forms that ranged from poetry to speeches to fiction to academic essays. I engaged students in thinking about multiple Englishes and varied speech patterns, the different "rules" to speaking and writing that we use in different environments and times. I brought up alternative grammatical structures, and differing linguistic rules and forms based on locations and cultures and emotion and relationship. They contributed to the discussions and they made charts of how people spoke, when and where and how, the rules people followed in different situations. We discussed purpose and audience and the reason

writers selected particular words or phrases or styles. They appeared familiar with this kind of examination.

They listened and asked questions when we discussed June Jordan's college class focused on the formal study of Black English at Berkley during the 1980s. We discussed John Edgar Wideman and why the voice of his narrator in his microfiction story, "Witness" should not be made to speak like a White professor. We watched Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and they fell in love. They never asked that she speak more clearly or complained that her accent made her less accessible. We discussed the idea of voice and audience and purpose and the way that language was used with Jamila Lyiscott's "Three Ways to Speak English" or Kurt Streeter's article, "South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at Berkley." We discussed the language choices of Randy Pausch's *Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams*. We looked at samples of technical writing from career fields, performance poetry, memoir excerpts written by people of diverse ethnicities and races, cover letters, emails, text messages, and editorials. We talked about Facebook. We joked a great deal with one another and as many of the students were African American and international, we laughed when they corrected my pronunciations because I spoke "too white." In more serious tones, they discussed what it meant to be accused of speaking "too white" themselves. Throughout the semester, they exuded confidence and comfort in their differing vernaculars and it seemed that the critical language approach that intrigued me so deeply was something they already understood, perhaps inherently.

My perception of that changed, however, when I began to examine the data more closely. I think all of our attention on language distinctions made a bigger impact than *any* of us really recognized. Perhaps, we were all too close to actually see the impact of critical language while it happened.   What I noticed in their post-assessment of academic writing, in their final essays, my

field notes, and in the focus group transcripts is that the students in both sections of the new Writing 60 course had discovered different ways of using language on paper and understanding language *between* our writing classroom and their reading classroom. In example from the focus group, a student mentioned the similarities between their reading class and our writing class. He said they "move the words from here to there and there to here, maybe not the same words, but [words that] make the same sense." Several students verbalized similar statements regarding the nature of language between separate reading and writing courses, and used similar phrases such as "not the same words, but the same meaning." A student said he has "learned to pay attention [to language]" and he described himself as having the "mind of a poet." There were connections to language, more than I recognized, an awareness that was only beginning to develop, but students noticed patterns in written form, differences in word selections, or the way a concept is expressed, even when the meaning was the same. Critical language is definitely an area that should be attempted again and investigated more deeply, particularly in relation to its role in written English, in a future execution of the redesigned Writing 60 course.

10.0 CONCLUSION

There were certainly many promising findings gained from this study and it is my recommendation that the redesigned course be repeated in future semesters. Gains were made in retention and passing rates and students showed improvements in critical writing skills. As these outcomes seemed related to offering students thematic course materials, culturally relevant teaching strategies, and attention to critical language, the redesigned course is worth further investigation. Additionally, it is also worth further investigation to determine if these findings can be reproduced in different classrooms with different student groups and different teachers. Furthermore, it would also be of interest to follow students through additional semesters of their college experience in order to assess whether or not their successful completion of this culturally relevant and engaging Writing 60 course effectively prepared students for continued success in more traditionally structured, lecture-based, higher-level English courses. The minimal addition of at least a one-semester follow up would allow time for post-study student interviews to check analytical interpretations from the findings and to examine any short-term relationships that may arise in the next level of coursework. For more extensive follow up, students in future studies should be identified for possible participation in the Gallup Purdue Stretch Program (Gallup-Purdue Index: University of Pittsburgh, 2016) in order to investigate long term outcomes related to students' initial enrollment in the redesigned course.

In this study, as compared to the 12 previous sections of the Writing 60 course, students across both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course persisted to the end of the semester with a 19 percent increase over the previous Writing 60 course persistence data. The average student passing rates in the redesigned Writing 60 course also had a 25.5 percent increase. Scores from the student motivation questionnaire remained consistent between pre and post completion with minimal change between the pre-semester group averaged total of 4.04 to the post-semester group averaged total of 4.03. Likewise, the individual statements changed very little with only one question that resulted in the largest change of less than 1 point. These findings suggested that the group enrolled in both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course arrived with a high degree of motivation at the beginning of the semester and maintained a high degree of motivation through the end of the semester.

Another important finding was that students' academic writing skills showed large improvements between the pre and post writing assessments with 15 of 16 students making gains in academic writing skills, and several students making gains in 3-4 different skill areas. As aforementioned, future offerings of this course would provide additional support for the relationship between the pedagogical changes made, the focus on culturally relevant pedagogy and the critical language approach, and the increase in academic writing skill improvements.

Additionally, I think there is much to be gained through studying future sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course as I continue to hold both curiosity and reservation surrounding the benefits and complexities of this class. I also recommend that other professors attempt a similar course in order to verify whether or not my findings hold true given other teaching styles, student groups, populations, thematic variety, and time. As is probably true with many studies involving close engagement with small groups of participants, I continue to wonder if the class would work

for any group or if I was fortunate enough to end up with a group of students naturally aligned for the structure, teaching style, and interactive nature of the class. How much did the students' personalities and willingness contribute to the overall success? Were they more successful because the class worked for them? Or was the class more successful because of the students who populated it? Additional studies must occur in order to more accurately judge the value and weight of my findings.

However, in order for additional studies to occur, several features of culturally relevant teaching per Ladson-Billings' (2014) fluid and dynamic definition would have to be addressed. Teachers interested in attempting future renditions of the redesigned Writing 60 course would benefit from engagement in professional development focused on culturally relevant, culturally sustaining pedagogical theory (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012), the critical language approach (Godley & Minnici, 2008) and practice with highly engaging, interactive teaching strategies. Additional teaching, understanding, practice, and development of thematic units might also prove necessary and beneficial. Considerations for the required course objectives must also remain embedded in the curriculum and assessment processes of future studies; however, with that noted, if future studies continue to provide evidence of improved successful outcomes, revision of the course objectives may be required and this remains a future contemplation.

Additional considerations for success are as follows: In order for the redesigned Writing 60 course to run most effectively, I recommend that it be merged with the second-tier course in the developmental writing sequence. Although the course was very successful, the teaching was quite intensive. When utilizing student interests and providing opportunities for student choice across an entire of a semester, the class preparation duties were extensive and rigorous, and the

time commitment was immense. Additionally, the emotional weight of much of the subject matter, combined with preparation and time responsibilities, created far more work than is typical for a Writing 60 class. A schedule that combined both sections of the developmental writing sequence into a 100-minute block that met three times a week would likely benefit the students and the instructor by providing a longer amount of meeting time and offer students the opportunity to complete both sections of developmental coursework in a single semester. Should this adaptation be made, students would then move directly into a college level English class upon successful completion of the block. The combined 100-minute block of time over the current 50 minute timeframe would also allow for continued expansion of college level writing skills and provide more reasonable accommodations for curricular planning and preparation. However, before implementing this combined approach, further deliberations for a longer block of writing instruction would first require answers to additional questions.

Given that Writing 60 does not accrue actual college credits, would students be willing to commit to a longer block of time? Would a 100-minute course fit into student schedules? How much support would a venture like this receive and what would be the pushback from administration and/or faculty? How would a 100 minute course that met three days a week across a typical 16-week semester count in regard to transfer credits to universities, as the second tier course is sometimes counted at some institutions as elective credits? How would this 100-minute adaptation affect limits on adjuncts schedules and salaries, as it is likely they would eventually become at least some of the teachers if the course did, in fact, prove effective? Also in consideration for adjunct faculty, how would the necessary professional development be built into their salaries and semester hour limits? If continued success was represented in further studies, would this course eventually be taught at scale? The redesigned Writing 60 course as

described in this dissertation, and in a longer 100-minute version, in my opinion, is worth the effort of further investigation.

As described through my findings, in the redesigned Writing 60 course, students persisted at a rate of 70%, a 19 percent increase from the average of my former twelve classes in the previous version of Writing 60 that ran from spring of 2014 - spring of 2016 and 30% higher than the national average (Hern, 2010; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). If the students continue to persist into a college level course— as would be the case if the two developmental writing course were combined into one— this would be 45% higher than college data presently suggests for students who test into this first level of both reading and writing. Even for the three students who persisted through the end of the semester, but did not pass the class, all still remain enrolled in college, two of them have retaken another course with me, and as of this writing, are presently attending and passing. There is a great deal to potentially gain from repeating this study, and planning a 100-minute version of this course, completed in a single semester, which then places students directly into college level English101.

As described in the unfolding of the redesigned Writing 60 course, our classroom was a hugely dynamic and energetic environment, as much for me as for the students. At times, it was also a very exhausting process from a teacher standpoint, because there was not the comfort of a lesson or lecture that had been taught many times over, or familiar assignments that required minimal thought or planning. As the student groups would change each semester, in service of true cultural relevance, this active process of creating fresh and innovative academic experiences would likely remain a regular feature of course preparations. The class plan was so much more than the teaching of comma placement (Grubb, et al., 2011) or subject verb agreement. This is not to minimize such skills, as they remain necessary to effective academic English writing, but

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rather to suggest that such skills are better addressed in the context of meaningful writing opportunities in which students are genuinely invested (Grubb, et al., 2004; Shaughnessy, 1977).

My culturally relevant classroom, focused on student-centeredness, intellectual excitement, and high engagement while attending to course objectives and essay requirements, was overwhelming on occasion. The workload for both sections of the redesigned Writing 60 course was very large, preparations and research were necessary almost daily, as was quick returns (with feedback) of student work. As a fulltime teacher, this was in addition to five other classes and all the other responsibilities that accompany the role of college faculty. However, the energy of the classroom, the high interest of the subject matter, the academic relationships built with and amongst the students, and the substantial payoff of student retention and achievement was incredibly worthwhile. I believe in this course redesign and the outcomes achieved. Despite the workload, I look forward to future attempts and to working with other interested faculty on my campus who are equally passionate about the power and necessity of culturally relevant, culturally sustaining, and highly engaging teaching.

APPENDIX A

EXPLANATION & PARTICIPATION SCRIPT

One week prior to the beginning of the study I will read and discuss the following script with my students:

In addition to being your teacher for this course, I am also a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I have spent the last two years doing a great deal of reading and writing around the topic of students in developmental education classes like ours. I have also done a lot of reading and writing and thinking about college success, particularly for students who start college in developmental writing classes like this one. This semester, as part of my doctoral research, I am completing a research study in which I will look very closely at what we are doing in this class—not just what students are doing, but also what I am doing as your teacher, and the materials we are using, and the assignments we will work on. I will think very deeply about what has worked, what hasn't worked, what should be kept the same in this class, and what may need changed for the future. This study will last throughout this semester and if students are willing, I would also like to contact some of you next semester to complete a short interview about your experiences in this class.

If you agree to participate in this study, there is a small amount of risk to your confidentiality because I will be collecting and using information that may contain your names. However, I will protect your confidentiality to the best of my ability in the following manner: Your names, the name of our class and the name of our college will all be changed to pseudonyms for any writing or discussion that occurs as a result of this research. Additionally, I will do my best to not write or present any information that might identify you in any way.

I will collect and keep some of your work from this class, this semester, but these items will also not contain your real names or your names will be blacked out and replaced with your pseudonym. These items will be kept in a locked drawer in my locked office. I will keep a record of your grades and attendance that will contain your real names, but these will also be kept in the locked drawer in my locked office. No one else will have a key to this drawer except for me and I do not share my office with any other faculty, so no one should be in my office without me. Any writing I do on my computer will also not use your real names and will not provide any

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other identifiable information to the best of my ability. Also, I want you to know that my computer is password protected.

Your participation in my research project this semester is completely voluntary. You made decide to volunteer now and stay in the study throughout the semester. Or you may decide that you do not wish to volunteer at all. Or you may begin this semester as a volunteer and then decide you no longer want to participate. All of these options are completely acceptable. As soon as you say you do not want to participate in this study, you are out of the study, but you will still remain a student in this class. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will not affect your academic experience in this class, nor will it affect your assignments, your grades, or the way you are treated.

Also, if you do agree to participate in this study, you will not paid in any way and you will not receive any kind of monetary compensation, gift cards, extra points, or additional grades.

It is my hope that all the students in this class will agree to participate, but I am completely okay with anyone who does not wish to be a part of this study. Again, your participation is 100% voluntary and your agreement to participate may be withdrawn at any time.

There are small potential risks to your confidentiality for participating in this study, and there are no additional benefits that you will receive beyond any academic benefits you may experience in this classroom, this semester. Hopefully, the work we do together will benefit students in classes like this one in future semesters.

If you are willing to participate in my study, I will collect information from particular work that we do such as a pre and post motivation survey, a pre and post writing assessment, participation in two audio-recorded focus groups, my observations of our class and my field notes, my observations of some of our academic discussion groups, my attention to the percentages of students who decide to remain in this class until the end and students who pass this course, and a brief 1:1 interview with some of you next semester. I'll also look at your attendance and final grades in this class, and with your permission, I will ask about your attendance and grades next term when you are no longer my students.

Throughout this study and this semester, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the work we are doing in this class, the work I am doing for this study, the data I am collecting or the way the data will be used. At this time, I will be happy to answer any and all of your questions before you decide if you want to participate or not.

PRE- & POST-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

In the third paragraph of Mr. Larson's article "Its Academic, or Is It?" he asks a significant question: **"Does punctuation count any longer?"**

Please read his essay carefully, marking significant points you find. Then craft a **paragraph** of response, **taking a stand on his question**. You should support your stand with **specific details from the article that illustrate your point.**

Your paragraph should contain an explicit **topic sentence** that clearly **states your position** and directs the reader into the content of the paragraph. Your paragraph should include a **claim/reason** for your position plus **specific supporting details** that provide your rationale. The paragraph should also contain **your response to the question**, **reference to Larson's article, use of an example from the article followed by an in text citation**, and your **concluding thoughts**. Please proofread carefully.

Its Academic, Or Is It?

By Newsweek Staff
Charles Larson
Filed: 11/5/95 at 7:00 PM | Updated: 3/13/10 at 5:42 PM

If you're 35 years or older, you probably identify a common grammatical error in the heading on this page. Younger than that and, well, you likely have another opinion: "Its all relative"--except, of course, for the apostrophe. Unfortunately, age appears to be the demarcation here. For those in the older group, youth has already won the battle.

I've been keeping a list of places where its is misused: newspapers, magazines, op-eds in major publications and, more recently, wall texts in museums. A few weeks ago I encountered the error in a book title: "St. Simons: A Summary of It's History," by R. Edwin and Mary A. Green. My list is getting longer and longer.

Does it even matter that the apostrophe is going the way of the stop sign and the directional signal in our society? Does punctuation count any longer? Are my complaints the ramblings of an old goat who's taught English for too many years?

What's the big deal, anyway? Who cares whether it's its or it's? Editors don't seem to know when the apostrophe's necessary. (One of them confessed to me that people have always been confused about the apostrophe-better just get rid of it.) My university undergraduates are clearly befuddled by the correct usage. Too many graduate applications--especially those of students aspiring to be creative writers--provide no clue that the writer understands when an apostrophe is required. Even some of my colleagues are confused by this ugglesome contraction.

How can a three-letter word be so disarming, so capable of separating the men from the boys? Or the women from the girl's? When in doubt use it both ways, as in a recent advertisement hyping improved SAT, GRE and LSAT scores: "Kaplan locations all over the U.S. are offering full-length exams just like the actual tests. It's a great way to test your skills and get a practice score without the risk of your score being reported to schools. And now, for a limited time only, its absolutely free!"

And now, students, which one of the above spellings of the I word is correct: (a) the first, (b) the second, (c) both or (d) neither? Any wonder why Educational Testing Services had to add 100 points to the revised SAT exams?

It's been my recent experience that the apostrophe hasn't actually exited common usage; it's simply migrated somewhere later in the sentence. Hence, "Shes lost her marble's" has become the preferred use of this irritating snippet of punctuation in current American writing. "Hes not lost his hat; hes lost his brains'." "Theres gold in them there hill's." Or "It was the best of times' and the worst of time's." The latter, of course, is from Charles Dicken's "A Tale of Two Cities'." Or is it Charle's Dickens?

Where will this end? Virtual apostrophe's? At times I wonder if all those missing apostrophes are floating somewhere in outer space. Don't they have to be somewhere, if--as some philosophers tell us--nothing is ever lost? Lately, I've seen the dirty three-letter word even punctuated as its'.

What's next?

Its? 'Its?

How complicated can this be? How difficult is it to teach a sixth grader how to punctuate correctly?

Heaven knows I've tried to figure it out, agonized about it for years. I remember being dismayed nearly 20 years ago when I was walking around the neighborhood and discovered an enormous stack of books that someone had put out on the curb, free for the taking. Most of the titles were forgettable; hence the reason they'd been left for scavengers or the next trash pickup. However,

mixed among the flotsam and jetsam was a brand-new hardback collegiate dictionary. How could this be, I asked myself. Could someone have too many dictionaries? I think the ideal would be one in every room.

Someone was sending me a signal. If words are unimportant, punctuation is something even more lowly. Why worry about such quodlibets? When was the last time anyone even noticed? Certainly, no one at Touchstone Books caught the errors in a recent ad for "Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls," by Myra and David Sadker. A testimonial for the book reads as follows: "Reader's will be stunned at the overwhelming evidence of sexism the author's provide." You bet, and the blurb writers' lack of grammatical correctness.

If editors at publishing houses can't catch these errors, who can? Errors common to advertising copy have already spread into the books themselves. I dread walking into a bookstore a decade from now and encountering the covers of classics edited by a new generation of apostrophe-challenged editors: "Father's and Sons'," "The Brothers' Karamazov," "The Adventure's of Huckleberry Finn," "The Postman Alway's Ring's Twice," "A Midsummers' Night Dream." (Who's wood's these are I think know . . .)

The apostrophe is dead because reading is dead. Notice that I didn't say "The apostrophe's dead because reading's dead." That's far too complex an alteration. When in doubt simply write out the full sentence, carefully avoiding all possessives and contradictions. Soon, no one will be certain about grammatical usage anyway. Computers will come without an apostrophe key. Why bother about errors on the Internet? E-mail messages are often so badly written they make no sense. Fortunately, they get erased almost immediately. Everything passes too quickly.

Last week I went to a lamp store to purchase two new floor lamps for our living room: five rooms of lamps and hundreds of styles--except for one minor problem. Not one lamp was designed for reading. Virtually all the lamps illuminated the ceiling; all were designed for television addicts, not readers. So how is one supposed to read TV Guide? The place was so dark (was I expected to hold my book up to the ceiling?) I could hardly find my way out. And speaking of TV, what's the plural: TVs or TV's?

Time to stop this grumbling. Thing's fall apart. If I start making a list only of the times the apostrophe is used properly, I won't even have to worry about it. I can already hear you say, "Your kidding."

APPENDIX C

PRE- & POST ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING RUBRIC

The same prompt and article will be used for pre and post assessment of student's practice with essential concepts. The measurement between the pre and post assessment submission is as follows:

Specific objectives to be assessed

Paragraph Development	PRE	POST	Difference
Student will construct a clear, explicit topic sentence that is responsive to the prompt			
Student will refer to article to create context for reader			
Student will use paraphrase or direct quotation or other related, experiential example			
Student will interpret, analyze, explain, or extend ideas from article using his/her original voice			
Student will effectively conclude paragraph			
SCORE			
Conventions of Grammar	PRE	POST	Difference
Student will use a variety of sentence structures with basic capital letters and end punctuation			
Student will eliminate sentence boundary errors (run-ons, fragments, comma splices, fused sentences)			
Student will remediate spelling errors			
Student will use correct word choices (in example: there/their/they're or whether/weather)			
Student will correctly attribute or cite quote or paraphrase per MLA			
SCORE			

Total Score	PRE	POST	Difference

COMBINED SCORE ___/10__

Figure 3. Pre- & Post-Assessment of Academic Writing Rubric

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APPENDIX D

TELL A DIFFERENT STORY, A PERSONAL ESSAY

As Adichie discussed in her TedTalk, there is a danger in telling a singular story for any whole group of people. We've all heard them; we may think of them as stereotypes or prejudices; we may even believe some of them. We think know what happens to high school drop outs, for example, or teenage parents, or people who live in particular neighborhoods, dress in particular fashions, or have a particular shade of skin. We think we know what to expect about women or men or people who work in particular jobs or speak in particular ways.

Also as Adichie addressed, the media contributes to our misinformation about each other and then, in effect, contributes to our divisions. We also know—at least for people who belong to whatever groups we identify as—that what outsiders think is not the only truth that exists.

In this essay, it is your job to clear up particular misjudgments about people like yourself who are _____. Discuss what most people believe about _____ and in the process, show a different story. Teach your audience (who is *not* a part of your group) something about yourself and others like you.

How to Earn an A

Please attach this scoring guide to your essay when you turn it in.
Each of the following bullets is worth 5 points for a total possible score of 25.

- Use MLA format from start to finish
- 1½ (minimum) - 2 (maximum) pages in length
- Essay is broken into multiple paragraphs
- Essay meets directions as described above
- Essay is as close to error free as possible

This essay is due in hard copy at the start of class on Monday, August 29. Please remember due dates are firm.

Points turn into grades as follows:

23-25	20-22	18-19	15-17	14 or less
A	B	C	D	F

You are always encouraged to use the services of the Learning Commons (L313) to receive feedback and assistance in writing any assignment from this class. If you choose to go to the Learning Commons, you receive ***5 additional points***. Simply ask the facilitator you work with to sign this paper. **Turn this signed copy in to me with your essay.**

ACHIEVING YOUR CHILDHOOD DREAMS, A NARRATIVE ESSAY

For this narrative essay, imagine that you are writing for an audience of people younger than yourself. Your focus is on the importance of following your childhood dreams. In this narrative, you will discuss the benefits and all the important lessons you have learned through the process of chasing your dreams, whether they are actually achieved or not. Mimic the Pausch chapter and video clip we watched.

Scoring Guide (AKA How to Earn an "A")

- Essay is 2 -3 pages long
    - 1 ½ or 1 ¾ does not equal the minimum page requirement
    - Using larger font or big white spaces between paragraphs also does not work

- Essay is formatted with correct MLA requirements
    - Times New Roman, 12 point font
    - Correct margins, double spaced
    - Correct heading
    - Page numbers inserted (per MLA) in top right corner
    - Creative, original title

- Your purpose is to encourage and inspire your audience (people younger than you) and to discuss the benefits you have gained **from the process of chasing your dreams**—whether they have been achieved or not
    - Meet the requirements of narrative: **convey a main idea, include major events, use descriptive details, use a logical order (see chapter 10 from your textbook)**

- Write in multiple paragraphs, not one long gush of information
    - Include an introduction with a thesis
    - Write several body paragraphs in which you use examples to make your points
    - Address dreams you did not and likely will not achieve
    - Discuss dreams you have achieved and/or dreams you are still pursuing
    - Include a meaningful conclusion

- Control errors. Use capitalization as needed, write in complete sentences, and eliminate run ons
    - Work with a facilitator from the Learning Commons through the process of editing and revision
    - **Learning Commons Facilitator signature** _____

Each dark bullet is worth 10 possible points for a total possible score of *50 POINTS*
Attach this scoring guide to the back of your essay. This is where your grade will appear.

APPENDIX F

SHINE A LIGHT, A PROCESS ANALYSIS ESSAY

For this essay assignment, reflect on our project we just completed. In this project, we used research and our own experience to shine a light and tell positive stories that provide hope instead of fear. We delivered these stories to a real audience. Adichie would be proud. In this essay, explain this project to an audience of your peers. Describe the process of what you did, how you came up with your subject, the way you did your research, the construction of your poster, and the challenges you faced along the way. Also explain why we thought this project was a good idea—and why our individual topics—were important to address. Use the essay models from your book as examples for the way you choose to write this essay. The process analysis chapter begins on page 172. The essay models we reviewed and discussed in class are on pages 177, 178, 180-181, and 618-620

==2-3 page Process Analysis Essay== Scoring Guide AKA How to Earn an A

- Introduction may be more than one paragraph
    - Include overview of project. For example, you might choose to open your essay with an address of the following questions: What did we do? Why did we do it? How did we make it happen? Use you explanation to build the foundation for the rest of your essay
    - Include thesis in or near introductory section
    - Review essay model(s) 177, 180-181, 618-620 as needed
- Multiple body paragraphs will identify the steps specific to the topic you chose for this project
    - Explain your process and steps
    - Use descriptive details
    - Include your thoughts and ideas learned along the way
- Also include transitions in body paragraphs to help guide the reader from step to step and idea to idea
    - As discussed in class, try to use transitions that are more sophisticated than basic: first, second, or next whenever possible.
    - Refer to essay models on 177, 180-181, or 618-620 for examples of more sophisticated transitions
- Conclusion may also be more than one paragraph
    - Reflect on key points in essay
    - Also reflect on why this project may have been an important process to learn for college and for life beyond this assignment
- Proofread, read aloud, edit for error control
    - Write in complete sentences, eliminate run ons, eliminate fragments
    - Use capital letters correctly
    - Check spelling and use intended words

==Each dark bullet is worth 10 possible points for a total possible score of 50 points.==

APPENDIX G

IT'S DEBATABLE, AN ARGUMENT ESSAY

For this final essay, you have chosen a topic that is debatable, has some amount of controversy surrounding the issue, and can be viewed from at least two perspectives. Your goal is to become familiar with your topic, to understand both sides, and to take a stand. As this is a persuasive essay, your purpose is to convince your audience (the skeptics, the opponents) to agree with your point of view, **or** at least acknowledge the value of your side. You will use research-based evidence to support your opinion and also to address and refute the arguments from your opposition. A minimum of two sources that can be cited in text and on the works cited page are required for this essay.

Essay Scoring Guide:

- 2 ½ -3 pages
- MLA format from start to finish (including heading, page numbers, title, text, in-text citations, and works cited page)
- Opening paragraphs will give a little background on your topic, introduce the controversy, and include a strong thesis. Thesis will include your position and help to direct the reader into the rest of the essay
- Body paragraphs will include a specific claim (reason)
- Body paragraphs will support the claim with logical, ethical, and emotional evidence (three appeals)
- Body paragraphs will lead audience into research-based evidence followed by an MLA in-text citation as needed
- After the citation, writer will discuss the importance of the evidence, what it means in relation to the argument, your position or your opponent's position, and why it matters
- Conclusion paragraph will include a reflection that connects back to the thesis and finishes with strong final thoughts. This is not the place to bring in new information.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread
- Pay close attention to essay organization, sentence structure, content, and elimination of errors. Then proofread, proofread, proofread again.

Possible 100 POINTS. Please note: an additional 10 BONUS points may be earned for working with an LC facilitator prior to completing the final revision. For credit, attach signed draft to final assignment.

MOTIVATED LEARNING STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire: Please rate the following items based on your experience in this class. Your rating will use the 5- point scale below.

1 = not at all true	2 = rarely true	3 = sometimes true	4 = often true	5 = almost always true

1. ____ I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.
2. ____ Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.
3. ____ I am so nervous during a quiz that I cannot remember facts I have learned.
4. ____ It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class.
5. ____ I like what I am learning in this class.
6. ____ I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.
7. ____ I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.
8. ____ I expect to do very well in this class.
9. ____ Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.
10. ____ I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work.
11. ____ I am sure I can do an excellent job on the work assigned for this class.
12. ____ I think I will receive a good grade in this class.
13. ____ Even when I do poorly on an assignment, I try to learn from my mistakes.
14. ____ I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know.
15. ____ My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.
16. ____ I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.
17. ____ Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.
18. ____ I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.
19. ____ Understanding this subject is important to me.
20. ____ When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can complete the assignment correctly.
21. ____ I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.
22. ____ It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read.
23. ____ When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts.

24. ____ When I study I put important ideas into my own words I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.

25. ____ When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.

26. ____ I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to.

27. ____ Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.

28. ____ Before I begin studying I think about the things I will need to do to learn.

29. ____ I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments.

30. ____ I often find that I have been reading for class but don't know what it is all about.

31. ____ I find that when the teacher is talking I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said.

32. ____ When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together.

33. ____ When I'm reading, I stop once in a while and go over what I have read.

34. ____ When I read materials for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember.

35. ____ I outline the chapters in my book to help me study.

36. ____ I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class.

37. ____ When reading I try to connect the things I am reading about with what I already know.

Modified from Pintrich, R. R., & DeGroot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance, *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*, 33-40.

MASTER CREDIT COURSE SYLLABUS

CAMPUS: ALL

COURSE NUMBER: ENG060   COURSE TITLE: BASIC WRITING TECHNIQUES

CREDITS: 3 HOURS: LECTURE 3 LAB___CLINICAL___ STUDIO___ PRACTICUM___

PREREQUISITES: ENGLISH PLACEMENT TEST COREQUISITES: NONE

CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION
This is a course to help the student who has little writing experience to develop skills and fluency in writing and to detect, diagnose, and correct error patterns in focused writings. This is the first of two courses that prepare the student for college-level writing.
Students must earn a "C" grade or better to register for the next course in this discipline or to use this course as a prerequisite for a course in another discipline.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Upon successful completion of the course, the student will:
A. Write in response to readings
B. Generate ideas and express them in written forms
C. Detect, diagnose, and correct error patterns in focused writings
D. Edit to eliminate errors in the use of standard written English
E. Construct elementary summaries and paraphrases
F. Use a variety of sentence structures

LISTED TOPICS
A. Sentence elements
B. Sentence types
C. Punctuation, spelling, grammar
D. Sentence boundary errors (fragment, run-on, comma splice, fused sentence)
E. Sentence structure errors
F. Topic sentences and basic paragraph development
G. Thesis statements and essay development
H. Prewriting strategies

I. Editing
J. Revising
K. Basic attribution and avoidance of plagiarism
L. Elementary summaries and paraphrases

The student will produce numerous focused paragraphs and essays totaling a minimum of 10-14 pages of writing for the semester

REFERENCE, RESOURCE, OR LEARNING MATERIAL TO BE USED BY STUDENT:
(May be unique for each campus)
Approved by the President on: Dr. Michael Murphy 03/04/08
Start Year/Term: _____

REDESIGNED WRITING 60 COURSE SYLLABUS

BASIC WRITING TECHNIQUES
Writing 60 FALL 2016
REVISED SYLLABUS

Professor Angela Gaito-Lagnese, M.F.A., M.Ed.
Meeting Days: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday   **Classroom:** M220
Office: **Phone:**   **Email:**

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday: 10:00-11:50; Friday 10:00-10:50
Campus: **Credits:** 3 (Lecture: 3)
Prerequisites: English Placement Test   **Co-requisites:** None

Please note: The best way to reach me is via my email listed above. My phone does not signal that a voice message has been left, so even if you leave a voice message, I may not actually hear it in a timely manner.

REQUIRED BOOK:

Anker, Susan, ed. *Real Essays with Readings.* 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015.
     ISBN 89 9781457664366

CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course to help the student who has little writing experience to develop skills and fluency in writing and to detect, diagnose, and correct error patterns in focused writings. This is the first of two courses that prepare the student for college-level writing.

Students must earn a "C" grade or better to register for the next course in this discipline or to use this course as a prerequisite for a course in another discipline.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course, the student will:

>   A. Write in response to readings
>   B. Generate ideas and express them in written forms
>   C. Detect, diagnose, and correct error patterns in focused writings
>   D. Edit to eliminate errors in the use of standard written English
>   E. Construct elementary summaries and paraphrases
>   F. Use a variety of sentence structures

LISTED TOPICS

>   A. Sentence elements
>   B. Sentence types
>   C. Punctuation, spelling, grammar
>   D. Sentence boundary errors (fragment, run-on, comma splice, fused sentence)
>   E. Sentence structure errors
>   F. Topic sentences and basic paragraph development
>   G. Thesis statements and essay development
>   H. Prewriting strategies
>   I. Editing
>   J. Revising
>   K. Basic attribution and avoidance of plagiarism
>   L. Elementary summaries and paraphrases

*T*he student will produce numerous focused paragraphs and essays totaling ***a minimum of 10-14 pages of writing for the semester.***

Attendance
- Students are expected to attend class each day, arrive on time, and remain for the entire class
- **More than 6 absences may result in a grade of F for the course**
- **More than 3 consecutive absences may result in a grade of F for the course**
- Arriving late or leaving early will count toward absences. For example, if you arrive or leave halfway through class, you will have ½ of an absence
- Additionally, I am happy to complete attendance reports upon student's request. However, please understand that these reports must be filled out accurately. For example, if the student arrives halfway through class time, I will note ½ class on the report.

Course Expectations

- *Show up for class every assigned day. Be on time. Stay for the duration*
- **Read** assigned texts in preparation for class discussions and tasks
- **Participate** in all class discussions, activities, and other assigned tasks
- **Electronics** should be used **only for academic purposes** (texting, phone calls and other social uses occur outside of the classroom)
- **Complete all work as assigned and <u>turn in on due date.</u>**
- Late work will not be accepted.
- All traditional written assignments **MUST** be <u>typed in MLA format</u>
- Create and present two multimodal projects (midterm and final)
- **Extra credit work will not be offered to make up for missed assignments**
- Set up CCAC Net ID
- Check CCAC email regularly
- Set up Google Docs/Google Drive

Essay Requirements

- **All writing assignments will be typed according to MLA format.** Specific MLA formatting directions will be discussed and exampled in class. If you do not have a personal computer, there are numerous computer labs on campus, including in the Learning Commons
- Students will utilize the Learning Commons to work on error control and revision for all essay assignments
- Any sources used to contribute to essays must be acknowledged and/or cited appropriately
- **<u>Essays must be turned in by the due date; late work is NOT accepted</u>**

Cheating & Plagiarism

- **Plagiarism** is the act of copying and pasting another person's published work without providing sufficient attributions or citations—in other words presenting someone else's work as your own
- **Cheating** is copying and pasting from peers, using someone else's work with or without their permission, providing your work for someone else to use, or having another person draft your assignments with the intention of turning them in as if your own original work
- **Cheating and/or plagiarism will result with a score of 0 (grade of F) for the assignment. Such assignments cannot be made up or revised for improved scores**
- **Your own original work**, words, sentences, paragraphs should make up the bulk of your writing. A good rule to follow is this: every quote, paraphrase, or summary of published information should be followed by an in-text citation and then by **twice as much writing that belongs purely to you.** For example, if you use a quote that is two lines long, you should then talk about the quote for a minimum of four lines

Grades

Students are encouraged to check grades via our course Blackboard link throughout the semester.

Additionally, students may come to my office during office hours, send me emails, or make appointments to further discuss grades, clarify assignments, or have general conversations relevant to our class.

90 – 100%	A
80 – 89%	B
70 – 79%	C
60 – 69%	D
59% or below	F

Midterm & Final Multimodal Presentations

- In addition to traditional essays, students will prepare two multimodal presentations and deliver them to the class
- **Multimodal means the presentation will include attention to other modes of communication (such as visual or musical, for example) beyond written text**
- The midterm presentation will be informational in nature and will be discussed in detail at a future date
- The final presentation may be completed in pairs or trios and will be based on the final researched argument essay of the semester

Students must achieve a grade of C or better (70% or above) *in order to register for English 100.* Students completing the course with grades of B or higher are encouraged to consider registering for *ALP English 100/101 combination.* Anyone interested in ALP, please feel free to come and talk with me outside of class to discuss the project at greater length.

Student Supports

Professor/Student Email Communications: If you would like additional information or clarifications on any assignments, want to set an appointment to meet face to face, or have any comments, questions, or concerns, please visit my office during office hours (M 406) or contact me via email at agaito-lagnese@ccac.edu

For email communications, please allow 24 hours response time Monday – Friday and 48 hours response time Saturday & Sunday. In emails, please identify yourself by your name and the course name.

- Early Intervention: Students that appear to struggle greatly with attendance, work completion, or other academic issues that may block success may be referred to CCAC'S Early Intervention Services to help provide additional supports
- Technology Services: https://www.ccac.edu/ITS__Students.aspx 412-237-8700
- Online Tutoring/ Smart Thinking: https://www.ccac.edu/Tutoring.aspx Ten hours of free online tutoring per semester is offered to all CCAC students and will be particularly useful for students who are not able to use the in-house facilities. Writing support for all subjects is also provided through the online writing lab
- Additional Writing Support: Allegheny Campus Learning Commons (L 313) https://www.ccac.edu/Learning_Commons.aspx This area offers a quiet workspace, computer lab, and faculty facilitators to provide reading and writing support for all disciplines, all levels Monday through Thursday 9:00 am -- 8:00 pm Fridays & Saturdays 9:00 am – 2:00 pm
- In-house tutoring: Allegheny Campus Learning Center (L 309) 412-237-2584 Same suite as The Learning Commons and the Math Cafe Monday through Thursday 9:00 am – 7:00 pm Friday 9:00 – 2:00 Saturday 10:00 – 2:00
- Supportive Services for Students with Disabilities (Library 114) https://www.ccac.edu/Disability_Services.aspx

Tentative Course Plan of Major Readings & Assignments

Week	Skill Focus	Related Textbook Chapter	Assignments
1	Welcome to English 89 (course overview) Diagnostic Writing Draft		"The Man" Aloe Blacc **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm660vIn8Tg** Set up CCAC Net ID Set up Google Docs/Google Drive The Dangers of a Single Story LeBron James "We Have to Go Back into Our Communities and Lend a Hand" abc news link **In Class Diagnostic Writing:** Different stories that should be told **Purchase** *Real Essays with Readings* (Anker) 5th edition ISBN 89 9781457664366
2			Pitt Study

	Critical Thinking, Reading & Writing	Part 1	Motivation Survey (HW)
			Pre-Assessment of Academic Writing
			Email Communications
			Paraphrase Exercise
			Wideman Exercise ("Witness" handout)
			Language vernaculars
			Email communications, cover letters, academic voice
3	Writing as a process	Part 2	Apostrophes
			Multiple Englishes: Trilingualism
			MLA format Writing as a Process Revision (diagnostic)
			Narration
			"Have a Caltastic Day" (handout/link to LA Times)
			"Police Report" (134)
			Achieving your Childhood Dreams (Excerpt handout)
			Essay 1: **Achieve Your Dreams Essay**
4	The Four Most Serious Errors Sentences, fragments, run-ons, subject-verb agreement	Part 5	**Learning Commons:** **Editing & Revision Practice (Inspiration Essay)**
			Editing focus: most serious errors
			Thesis Development
5	Project Preparations	Audience & Purpose Evaluating your	**Revised Schedule** **(Review)**

	(for Midterms)	purpose Sharing information Putting it all together Addressing your audience Making your point	**Run Ons and other Sentence Boundary Errors** **Sentence Structure and Sentence Variety** Begin: *Process Analysis* *Between the World and Me* (Coates) excerpt **Purpose & audience** **Relationship to recent police shootings/BLM/ other issues of social justice** **Context:** **How Something Came to Be** **How to Do Something** Shine a Light Project
6	Project Preparations		Use of visuals Multimodal Preparations Thesis Claims Significant Details
7			Shine a Light Project: The Show **Process Analysis Essay:** Shine a Light Project "What we did, why we did it, and how we made it happen"
8	Other Grammar Concerns Pronouns Parallelism Sentence Variety	Part 6	**Parallelism** *Illustration* "I am Adam Lanza's Mother" (594) "Words that Wound" (599) *Definition* "What is Hip?" (213) "On Being a Cripple" (645) Dual entry journal (HW) Urban Dictionary Writing Assignment: **Power of Words**: Identify a Word that has had a Powerful Influence on Your Life and Tell the Tale **Learning Commons**
9	Research & the Writing	Parts 2 & 4 (Revisited)	Persuasive Writing Prompts

		Process		-Only one A -College is worth the Cost -Take this Class Chunking Chapters from Part 3
10	Argument	Part 3, Chapters 18, 19, & 20 Building Background		*Argument* "Josh Powell Killed Two Young Sons" (handout/Link from *Daily Mail*) "The Death Penalty's Underlying Problem" (handout) Death Penalty Debate with Cenk (Young Turks)
11		CCAC Digital Database Evaluating Other Sources Summarize, Quote, Paraphrase (review) Extend		**Commonly Misused Words/Wrong Words** Capital Punishment Debate Prep Debate Reflection
12	Beginning research process	Parts 3 & 9		**Research proposal** **Research questions**
13	Organization Options	Transitions Claims & Counter Claims Evidence Say-Mean-Matter/Analysis Essay Unity		Shared student discovered research articles Annotated bibliography Outline
14	Punctuation & Capitalization	Part 8		Essay Drafting Peer Revision Workshop **Learning Commons** **Final Revision & Polish** Presentation Prep
15				**Final Presentations**
FINALS				**Conclude Final Presentations** **& Wrap Up Reflection**

Figure 4. Tentative Course Plan of Major Readings & Assignments

Professor Gaito-Lagnese

English 89

21 January 2016 (this date should reflect the due date of assignment)

Student's Original Title for Assignment

The assignment should always be typed in Times, New Roman, 12 pt font. Everything (including the heading and reference page) should be double-spaced. Be sure to follow a comma or a period with one space before the next word. Be sure to use capital letters when needed and do not start sentences with a numeral. Use the computer tools of spell check and grammar check, but always proofread before handing in the assignment.

When using direct quotations, paraphrase, or any information that you did not originally create or already know, follow the section by the author's last name and page number. For example, in the short story, "Metamorphosis," the character of Gregor wakes up to find that he has turned into a cockroach. One quote you might chose is as follows: "One side of his body rose up, he was tilted at an angle in the doorway, his flank was quite bruised, horrid blotches stained the white door…his legs on one side fluttered trembling in the air" (Kafka 17). Please note that MLA in-text citations will align with the full citations on the MLA works cited page. Also, in a real essay, you would always follow the source information/quote with your own analysis, thoughts, beliefs, or ideas. We will review and discuss proper essay structure, critical reading, critical writing, and analysis throughout the semester.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT ASSIGNMENT CHART

	This assignment **DID NOT** feel connected to me or my life	This assignment reminded me of similar situations or experiences I've had	This assignment made me think about people or society in a new way	This assignment felt true to me or my beliefs	This assignment made me feel confident or proud of my group (however I identify my group)	I don't know how I feel about this assignment	I don't remember this assignment
"The Dangers of a Single Story" (Adichie)							
"Witness" (John Edgar Wideman)							
"3 Ways to Speak English" (Jamila Lyiscott)							
"South L.A. Student Finds a Different World at U.C. Berkley" (Kurt Streeter)							
Tell a Different Story (Personal Essay) Different Stories that Should be Told about your Group (as you define your group)							

Police Report (Officer Pyland)						
"A Return to Education" (Jordan Brown)						
Vanessa German Presentation (poet from Homewood in auditorium)						
Achieving Your Dreams Book & Video Clip (Randy Pausch)						
Achieving Your Childhood Dreams: Student Narrative Essay						
Between the World and Me book excerpt (Coates)						
Poster Presentation Challenging Overly familiar Stereotypes with research						
"The Choice to Do It Over Again" (Flanagan) Process Analysis Example						
Shine A Light: Student Process Analysis Essay What We Did, Why We Did It, and How We Made It Happen						
"Josh Powell Killed Two Young Sons" (Miltich & Green)						
"The Death Penalty's Underlying						

Problem" (Guengerich)						
It's Debatable: Student Argument Essay with Research						

Figure 5. Culturally Relevant Assignment Chart

APPENDIX L

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In general, what did you think of having a say in some of the decisions in the class? Have you done that before? What did you think about having a say in your classes about what your work is?
2. Every semester I look at what worked and what didn't, what I want to keep and what I don't want to keep—when I'm thinking about that over the break, are there things I should definitely keep and why?
3. I'm going to cut some things, so you don't have to worry about making me feel bad. Some things are going to go. So what should I definitely cut? What should I get rid of?
4. In the beginning of the semester, we talked a lot about multiple Englishes. We talked about the way people use different words for different purposes and different audiences. Through the semester, have you noticed any changes in the way you use English differently in different places?
5. So with thinking about that, tell me what you learned about purpose and audience in writing. How does [thinking about choice of Englishes] that affect the way you write?
6. If you could talk to future students or future teachers of this class, what would you tell them? What advice would you give?
7. What benefits or challenges or overlaps did you notice, if you noticed any, between this writing class and your reading class?

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