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The Educational Storytelling Project: Three Approaches to Cross-Curricular Learning

Three professors explicitly examined how educational dialogue and narrative informed their students' reading and writing experiences. In three introductory courses (composition, sociology, and literature), each taught in a developmental education unit within a large research university, students wrote at least one story about "social ghosts," the strong but usually unexamined forces that shape their everyday lives. The "ghost stories" and their telling were discussed as important indicators of students' educational histories. The power of these stories to actively shape student learning outcomes was explored.

The nature of educational dialogue and narrative as they inform college student reading and writing experiences has been studied extensively in recent years (Jacobs, 1998; Jacobs & Brooks, 1999; Reynolds & Bruch, 2002; Smith, 2004; Yaworksi & Ibrahim, 2001). We designed the Educational Storytelling Project (ESP) to extend this line of research across three introductory courses: "Communicating in Society" (composition), "People and Problems" (sociology), and "Introduction to Asian American Literature" (humanities), each taught in a developmental education unit within a large research university. In each of these courses, students wrote at least one story about "social ghosts," the strong but usually unexamined social forces,

such as race, sexual orientation, and social class, that shape their everyday lives. In this article, we discuss student "ghost stories" and students' telling of them as important indicators of students' educational histories. We also explore the power of these stories to actively shape student learning in each of our classes. We used Gordon's (1997) conception of ghost stories:

> to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows. (p. 17)

Some students chose to tell autobiographical narratives, while others' stories were about other people, both factual and fictional. All, however, in writing these stories, investigated the complex interplay between social privilege and disadvantage. We encouraged our students to "write the stories and tell the tales that will connect seemingly isolated moments of discourse—histories and effects—into a narrative that helps us make sense of transformations as they emerge" (Balsamo, 1996, p. 161).

Context

Our students, as part of the University of Minnesota's developmental education General College (GC), were admitted with relatively low test scores (ACT average of 20.3 vs. 23.7-28.1 for other colleges) and/or high school grades (average class percentile rank of 56.3 vs. 74.2-93.6 for other colleges). Many students in the GC program, consequently, are stigmatized, but do not normally articulate their understandings of stigmatization. The ESP allowed students to explore this educational experience, and gain essential clues into their overall educational histories and the contexts in which those histories take shape.

The GC is one of the nation's oldest developmental education programs. It offers a pre-transfer, credit-bearing undergraduate curriculum for students entering degree-granting colleges in the University of Minnesota. The GC curricular model includes a multi-disciplinary range of courses integrating both skills and academic content, providing students with a set of perspectives and academic training for continuing work directly in their majors. Students can take courses in writing, math, sciences, social sciences, and humanities, all of which fulfill university graduation requirements. In all of these courses the literacies, practices, and aspirations of GC students are the point of departure for helping students construct a critical understanding of their social worlds, academic as well as those outside of the classroom. We believed the ESP

could help students gain valuable practice in this effort by critically reflecting on their own beliefs, experiences, and skills.

The ESP in Three Courses

In the following sections, each author discusses how he used the ESP to help students explore the social ghosts in their lives. Specifically, Reynolds provides a close reading of one student's ghost story in a composition course, Jacobs reports on the sociological significance of students' discussions about their stories in a sociology course, and Choy focuses on the ramifications of this particular creative writing assignment in a literature course. We anticipated two benefits of cross-curricular use of educational storytelling: (a) students would use the experience to reflect on multiple aspects of their lives (non-academic as well as in the classroom), and (b) by experiencing the ESP in more than one setting, students would reinforce lessons learned. We used the ESP in three variations to help students appreciate the different ways disciplines approach similar ideas. We believed that cross-curricular exposure to a technique like the ESP could help students gain both general and discipline-specific skills needed for success in mainstream college courses.

Reynolds' Composition Class: Building a Richer Sense of Student Literacy Narratives

The GC writing curriculum is made up of a two-course, credit-bearing sequence that fills the University of Minnesota's first-year writing requirement. Reynolds brought the ghost stories project to two sections of the second semester writing class, "Communicating in Society." Each of these sections enrolled 18 students, with all but two of the students (one in each section) in their first year of college work.

Emphasis in GC's writing classes is placed on the practice of meaningful writing tasks rather than on grammar instruction and workbook type exercises (Reynolds & Bruch, 2002). We also ask students to develop an awareness of their own literacy narratives, including their individual histories, successes/failures, and the cultural backgrounds that have shaped their reading and writing experiences. We hope that students who are more aware of themselves as writers acting in the world will be better at moving on to new literacy tasks in other classes and outside of the university.

The ESP held possibility for both enriching and extending student literacy narratives. Reading and writing about literacy narratives has been shown to be an effective strategy for writing instruction (Soliday, 1994). For some students, writing personal stories about their own literacy experience can be a powerful tool for writing development. But these

stories can also follow a sort of already-written script of what students should be as first-year students, especially those in a developmental writing class. That is, they follow the script of Horatio Alger, a sort of "I was down but now I'm pulling myself up" story—more particularly, "I was a bad writer, mostly because of grammatical problems, but now I'm gaining control over those problems." This is a fairly common version of the literacy narratives written in the first semester writing class when students reflect on their own writing and, in effect, begin to re-write their literacy narratives (Reynolds & Bruch, 2002, p. 18). And we do want students to gain the confidence expressed in that narrative. Left as mere reflection on how well course assignments were completed, however, this narrative can escape reflection on the always-embedded nature of literacy as a social activity. Gaining the critical distance that places those assignments into a wider understanding of how individual literacies operate within larger social and cultural forces can be a challenge for students.

By bringing the ghost story idea to the second semester writing class, Reynolds attempted to help students deepen their understandings of what might constitute richer literacy narratives. Ghost stories held the possibility of getting students to write their literacy narratives from a wider perspective that included more contextual factors from their lives and society.

In a series of shorter assignments, students were asked not only to address their current experiences with writing as they also carried on their lives as workers and consumers outside of school, but also to project those experiences into the future. In other words, instead of having students write their literacy narratives solely about their writing development in the class, students were asked to join reflection on their own work and consumer lives to their ongoing literacy narratives. They were asked to address the ghosts of the individualist narrative that most of Reynolds' students take for granted, a narrative that parallels their often optimistic educational narratives. If one works hard and plays by the rules, both kinds of stories suggest, then reward will come. In addition to their reflective writing on the class itself, their writing was to address the system in which they presently found themselves working as retail clerks and at other jobs on the lower end of the spectrum but which seemed to promise the reward of "better" jobs later on. Also, they wrote as consumers with pressures placed on them by advertisers and peers, pressures that only a higher income would seem to ease.

Readings dealt with the power of advertising, the implications of working for companies that made demands on language and behavior, and the forces that shape ideas of normality in our lives. One goal of

the assignments was to help students see that corporate and other work codes are a kind of "writing" that helps to determine how their own writing is (or will be) shaped as workers who gain the chance to both perpetuate and, possibly, change status quo writing practices. Where are socially conscious young people's voices in this system? How is expression encouraged and/or limited? What kinds of limiting factors are students willing to accept as they look forward? Ghosts in this narrative, Reynolds thought, would be factors such as gender, class, and race that are usually ignored in the powerful narrative of success in the country. As students wrote about the broader dimensions of their work/consumer lives, he also asked them to think and write about the ghosts that inhabit their immediate writing processes. In other words, Reynolds wanted them to get to know the ghosts of their non-student lives as part of their "scheduled" literacy experience.

Student writing often succeeded within this framework, but almost as often resisted Reynolds' assumption that the system was inherently unjust in some ways. For many students, the approach was successful in helping to draw forth unseen forces that were weighing in on their individual lives. In one student's first piece of writing for the semester, for example, he declared himself a "soon-to-be-bankrupt American" and then told a story of his steadily decaying credit rating and the ghost of keeping up with stylish clothing trends. He hated working retail, but he liked and, to a degree, depended on, the employee discounts. As he noted, college students were at the "bottom of the economic ladder" in dealing with this kind of situation. Though he had been working retail for some five or six years, he saw his situation as temporary and looked forward to a career in sports management. Another student, voted "best dressed" in junior high school, wrote about how she had learned to deal with a similar pressure of adhering to current style by becoming a devotee of the consignment shops. Her awareness was raised after a tearful conversation with her mother in which the mother expressed sadness about how she had taught her daughter to care so much about keeping up with current fashions and not about more important virtues. By choosing from among used clothes and "dressing against" some of the current fashions, the student had felt that she gained some meaningful control over how she styled herself. Students wrote stories, then, about how living a "normal" life led them into complex, sometimes contradictory situations.

Writing within the framework provoked by the project did not always succeed in getting students to see their own literacy narratives outside of the dominant narrative in which success is figured apart from, and invisible to, race, gender, class, and other factors. Students were often

unable or unwilling to recognize that their literacy development could or would be shaped by forces outside of their individual efforts. Students most often imagined the future as a time when complications would be resolved and they would be firmly, happily seated in a life of easy consumption. Whatever forms literacy would take would be fine, it sometimes seemed, as long as individual social and economic goals were met. Some of the difficulty students found in responding fully to the assignments was due to the instructor's underestimation of the power that dominant success narratives hold for students—in fact the assignments sometimes confused them in this regard. Were they being asked to depart from an imagined success story? Were they merely being asked to be aware of the many forces that play a determining role in how individual stories play out? Also, wasn't a writing class really just a part of the individualist narrative, a minor first-year stop on a four- or five-year trek that would certify them as ready for the market? And how does one write about jobs and careers not yet largely experienced? These were fair questions raised by students as they struggled with the tasks given them. At times, Reynolds felt that he was asking them to consider issues that countered their very reasons for being in school.

Still, students advanced their understandings of themselves as writers in some important ways. One of the more significant results of the ghost story assignments, for example, was that some students were able to take on a different academic voice in carrying out their writing. Stretching herself in a way that she reported as fun, Jenna (all names are pseudonyms) wrote a fairly conventional, if short, paper about herself as a consumer heavily influenced by her weekend practice of "hop[ping]" stores with her boyfriend and buying on impulse. She also included a ghost story written in a voice more usually associated with dramatic tellings of such stories:

> There is a phantom that plagues our society. An unworldly being that torments our souls whenever a foot is placed into a department store or whenever our eyes wonder upon a great purchasing desire. You cannot run, you cannot hide, for it is an impulse that flows through your very blood. That my friends is the compulsory of capitalism.
>
> Capitalism is the lifeblood on which our country feeds. The constant flow of the stock market is the very pulse of this nation. One in which the all mighty dollar will give you warmth and shelter for the night only to through you out the next morning, like the crewel mistress she is. All have fallen victim to desires, and debt of great proportion. Flashy lights and terms like "No Money Down," or "No Payments For A Year" are it's evil Siren song, and like the Sirens, luring unsuspecting victims into death.

> Heed my warnings and listen to what I have told for I know far more
> than you. Stay away from flashy cities and off their drunken streets
> at night. Listen not to their beautiful Siren song which, will be the
> death of yea.

As a student who had trouble producing much prose early on in the
semester, Jenna was able to write a significant amount here by taking
on the voice of a dramatic ghostly warning. In a conversation about this
assignment, she also revealed that she was reading *Hamlet* in another
course and had in mind Hamlet's father as she wrote this. For the pur-
poses of the writing course, she succeeded in making use of the ghostly
voice in order to connect her own consumer experiences with her writ-
ing life as well as another course.

Students also took on, in an assignment at the end of the course, the
idea of the ghost story in order to assess themselves for their course
portfolios. By this time, students, more accustomed to the idea of in-
cluding experience beyond the writing course as part of their reflec-
tion on their writing, moved in wider directions that showed a deeper
understanding of literacy as a "material" matter. In final reflections on
the course, students realized that course writing was not only about
drafting a paper, but also about feelings, home life, work, and how all
this plays into that drafting process. For one student, Jean, the language
of ghosts became a way for her to talk about her ghosts of "self-doubt"
at the beginning of writing papers and the lack of confidence at having
enough to say, but then she also noted the "friendly ghost" that was
with her for her final paper, in which she was able to find an appropri-
ate number of sources and stay on topic with them. She had become
more aware of the need for keeping the process of writing going, even
as doubts about the feasibility of a project were raised. Her language
about writing also extended to how the "ghost of work" had become an
increasingly difficult problem for her, both in terms of how her job's low
pay for increased responsibility was distracting her and of sheer time
spent at work as opposed to school. Jean's final reflection showed that
she understood herself as a writer whose writing performance in school
was often made difficult because of the demands of her job. At the end
of her reflection, she announced that she had made a decision to make
school a higher priority even if it meant losing her job.

Overall, the ESP opened up possibilities for students to write differ-
ently than they usually do in a composition course. For some, this meant
building new understandings about writing and how their lives outside
of school sometimes collided with the success narratives that drove
them to enter and do well in school. The project also injected a lot of
fun into the course, something students reported in course evaluations
as valuable to their writing development.

Jacobs' Sociology Class: Performing the Sociological Imagination
Jacobs' sociology students also reported that they had fun with the ESP in his "People and Problems" course. This course is used to introduce students to basic sociological ideas and practices, and is predominantly taken by first-year students. When Jacobs assigned the ESP, the second semester class of 74 students was a bit unusual in that 14 sophomores, 2 juniors, and 1 senior joined the 57 first-year students. Class standing, however, did not affect participation (or its lack) in the ESP.

A primary goal of sociology instructors is to keep people from uttering all kinds of nonsense about the social world (Bourdieu, 1983), but this is most often accomplished through tedious chores such as reading dense primary sociological texts and trying to discern what the heck the "dead white guy" authors were trying to say. Working with ghost stories provided students with an interesting way (for many) to push through their taken-for-granted, common sense ideas rather than simply regurgitating nuggets of information for tests. In conjunction with the concept of "the sociological imagination" (Mills, 1967), ghost stories helped students develop the skill of connecting the abstract to the observable, a skill that can be developed simultaneously with reading and writing skills. The sociological imagination is the notion that people, when considering their personal troubles, seldom look to explanations outside of the individual. According to Mills (1967), individuals rarely connect what is happening in an individual life to history, historical change, and institutions within society. The sociological imagination is the process of making those connections:

> The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him [or her] to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with the public issues.... The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. (Mills, 1967, pp. 5-6)

Jacobs used the ESP as a means of facilitating the development of students' sociological imaginations. Specifically, Jacobs had each student (a) write a short ghost story, (b) read it orally in a small group, and (c) write a reflection on another student's story and oral presentation. Students also had the option of presenting their story to the entire class.

Finally, the class collectively analyzed the project in an instructor-led discussion.

One ghost that many students investigated was that of language, how we often unconsciously use certain words or phrases to stigmatize groups (prevent them from obtaining full societal acceptance and participation). For instance, students will use the phrase "that's gay" to signal disapproval or dislike. One student, John, "came out" in one of Jacobs' classes as a gay man in his ESP presentation to the entire class, focusing on the pain he feels when reminded about his marginalization. In his reflection John noted,

> When each of us is pulled apart for some factor that we have no control
> over, it makes us debate many things, including how valuable we are
> as people. From writing stories like these people have to think how
> deep they would like to go in their writing, and what may be too per-
> sonal for the reader versus what might be too personal for the writer
> to talk about.

John went on to talk about how he wanted to explicitly use his story to raise awareness about issues of difference, specifically related to sexual orientation. Many students are reluctant to consider life experiences of those different from themselves, so they will often grudgingly read assigned articles about various minority groups and only a few will participate in class discussion (and usually these students are members of the topic group). The ESP provided a framework in which students could get outside of themselves and stretch their sociological imaginations. In reflection papers several students commented on John's "coming out" experience. One student wrote, "this ESP project allowed me to look into myself and find socializing agents that make me who I am today. And, it also caused me to gain a newfound respect for gays and lesbians," while another believed:

> Thinking about social ghosts makes me want to be more understanding.
> I have so many social ghosts that it makes me sure that everyone has
> at least a few that affect them all the time. I think it would be good for
> everyone to realize that everyone has these issues and to be aware of
> them and treat people accordingly.

In other words, students gained an understanding of stigma and its effects, which may be especially important for developmental education students. Pedelty (2001) argued that many developmental education students feel stigmatized as learners, thinking that their peers hold negative perceptions about them and their academic programs. Among other things, they are labeled as "slow" or "dumb," and "not real students." Using their own stigmas as springboards to connections with larger social forces can help students see themselves as valuable members of the academic community:

> There is very little written about [stigma] in the developmental educa-
> tion literature.... I believe it is crucial that we make the discussion of
> stigma and other important cultural realities part of our research and
> teaching agenda. How can we hope to positively transform our institu-
> tions if we do not fully explore the students' experience within them
> and attitudes toward them? (Pedelty, 2001, p. 67)

John concluded his reflection by stating, "in my ESP story, I thought
a lot about what I've learned from being a homosexual male, and tried
to talk about my schooling, and the many ways and things I learned
throughout because of it." Jenna (the same student who crafted the
dramatic story Reynolds analyzed) wrote, "to be honest I never really
looked at how my social status affected my writing or my performance
style. Now that I've had a chance to look and analyze this concept I
noticed a lot about myself and my creative expression." Many other
students sounded similar themes of educational introspection in their
papers. Indeed, the use of reflective tools such as the ESP can encour-
age all students to take more responsibility for their learning, and in the
process help each other create powerful learning strategies.

Choy's Literature Class: Writing Countermemory
The GC is somewhat unique in developmental education with its in-
clusion of literature courses in its humanities curriculum. GC openly
resists the preconception that reading skills acquisition courses ought
to be offered as primers for literature courses, and instead incorporates
skills-building components into the contexts of content courses. How
educators address perceived academic inadequacies in students lies
at the heart of the distinction between "developmental" approaches
and "remediation." Whereas the latter presumes a fundamental lack
of academic skills, and employs the requisite "skills-building" regimen
of shopworn approaches (e.g., credit-based courses entitled "Reading
Skills 1A"), the former engages a multitude of pedagogical strategies to
address diverse learning styles. In addition to what has already been
mentioned about the intent of the ESP, Choy, in his "Introduction to
Asian American Literature" course, expected that students would gain
not only a deeper appreciation for the formal aspects of storytelling by
applying them, but also that they would gain a deepened understanding
that such aspects have been inculcated into them since they learned
to read. The ESP offered students a number of openings to enter the
discursive study of narrative.

Choy implemented the ESP as a "risk-free" component of his Asian
American Literature course. That is to say, students were informed that
if they participated in all aspects of the project and produced a story,

they would receive full credit for the assignment. The parameters of the assignment were as follows: incorporate the theme of "ghostliness" as it was discussed in application to the works students had read up to that point in the semester into a three to five page "story"; in first-draft peer editing groups, read the story and discuss/explain how the theme works in the story; offer and solicit feedback; submit a polished draft of the story; and post an anonymous evaluation of the project on the course Web site by the end of the semester. The ESP was engaged during two weeks in the middle of the second semester and as the third of five out-of-class writing assignments. The ethnic breakdown of the 26 student class was as follows: Sixteen 1.5 or second generation Southeast Asian Americans (in this case, "1.5 generation" refers to foreign-born students whose formative years—either pre-adolescent or adolescent—were balanced between life in their birth country and the U.S.), 2 Korean adoptees, 1 Chinese national, and 7 White students.

Application of the ghostliness themes was modeled in discussions of Asian American works. To that point in the semester, students had viewed three videos on Asian American cultural topics (Byrd, 1991; Fulbeck, 1994; Tajima & Choy, 1988) and had read three Asian American literary works (Bishoff & Rankin, 1997; Galang, 1996; Park, 2000). The class discussed how the theme worked contingently with tropes considered, by the students at least, to possess more primacy to the meanings of the works. For example, students noted that ghostliness worked in relation to the theme of memory, not only memory of place and culture left behind, but also of sights, sounds, and smells of "home," in the narratives of the first generation immigrants in the video news clip *Asian Minnesotans* (Byrd, 1991). In Galang's (1996) short stories about primarily second generation Filipina Americans, ghostliness worked in the failures of protagonists either to conform to first generation cultural mores—which characters understood well enough but which they simply could not abide by in America—or to fully "assimilate" to the mores of an America that abided by a hierarchical racial stratification that saw "Asian women" as two-dimensional racial and gendered stereotypes. Desire (for attainment, for escape) became an overarching theme that students read as an unseen but palpable presence throughout Galang's (1996) stories. *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (Tajima & Choy, 1988) presents the specter of anti-Asian violence along with the theme of mistaken and conflated identity. Even though Vincent Chin was Chinese American, his murderers rationalized their motivation on the assumption that he was Japanese, and therefore in large part responsible for the state of the depressed economy in Detroit, where the murder took place in the early eighties.

By far, however, the most influential of the works students read and upon which they modeled their stories was the Korean adoptee anthology *Seeds From a Silent Tree* (Bishoff & Rankin, 1997). From the outset, students picked up on themes and tropes of ghostliness. The first sentence of co-editor Tonya Bishoff's introduction resonated with the theme: "*Seeds From a Silent Tree* emerged from absence searching for presence." An anthology of poetry and prose memoirs written by Korean adoptees, many of the pieces utilized familiar and familial themes of racial identity. Also, few of the entries were authored by self-proclaimed writers; many of the writers were or had recently been college students themselves and their work in the anthology represented their first publication, a fact that, when coupled with the themes of racial identity, helped bring the authors into even closer familiarity with the students in the class. The following excerpts are exemplary of the recurrent theme of racial otherness expressed by many of the entries in the anthology:

> I was convinced I was going insane because I felt so inauthentic. I did not feel white, as I had been raised. I did not feel Asian, as I clearly looked and was.... Adolescence is traumatic enough without being targeted for being racially different, culturally identified as 'alien' & looking like no one else—peer, child, or adult. I was stared at, harassed, bullied, called names, insulted, threatened & verbally abused by other kids—younger & older—on a daily basis—on the school bus, in school, stores, restaurants, & many other public places in Rhode Island. (Bruining, 1997, p. 66)

> Growing up in a large Swedish community in the Midwest introduced me to the first criteria of what was considered the norm. Fair skin and blond hair were the standards I measured myself against. Honestly, I had no idea I didn't fit that description unless I saw my reflection in the mirror. I thought of myself as Caucasian. What a shock to find out that I wasn't.... At the age of four, I discovered that being different was not the same as being special. Being taunted and teased by my peers was a rude awakening to how different I really was. (Smith, 1997, p. 106)

In discussions of these particular entries, students read the tauntings in these passages as symbolic of both nativist and racial ideology against which the young protagonists are persistently cast. The seemingly innocuous sites of teasing, the "public places" mentioned in Bruinings' excerpt, are the sites upon which the processes of "Americanization," that is, being naturalized to the point of being invisible, take place unseen and unconsciously. For the speakers of the passage, and for many of the Asian American students in the class, those processes were brought into stark relief, and out of abstractness as it were, through racist tauntings so as to raise consciousness of the very processes of abstraction into what

Berlant (1991) calls the "National Symbolic." The processes, or "social practices," as Berlant calls them, of Americanization come to a grinding halt for those whose racialized bodies resist being abstracted into an assumed and fluid identity—an identity that is informed by a contradictory nationalist credo that claims that the practices one engages in confer "Americanness." Students' stories resounded with the existential panic of what it is to be seen before they are seen, as is illustrated by a tale of a White student's surprise that "you speak such good English" when introduced to her Korean adoptee roommate. Another student wrote about an Asian American being "written off as a worthless 'gook'" during a seemingly innocuous encounter at a bus stop with a drunken white man. The phrase "written off" denotes a kind of ideological murder—the transmutation of the Asian American subject into a discursive ghost.

Whereas the majority of entries in *Seeds* (Bishoff & Rankin, 1997) are written as first-person memoir, all twenty-seven of the ESP stories were narrated in a third-person voice. This is interesting in that, aside from the directives stated earlier, there were no imperatives issued about narrative point of view. Twenty-five stories featured Asian American protagonists and all of the stories focused on Asian American themes, the majority of them, as previously mentioned, on themes of racist encounters and the difficulties, if not impossibility, of assimilation. That six of the seven White students chose to write stories of encounters between Asian American protagonists and White racists (for example, after getting a C on an assignment, a White student calls his Chinese American professor a "chink" and tells him to "get back on the boat") when they had the freedom to write about any subject of their choosing, demonstrated to Choy an engaged interest in at least that overt theme of the literature.

The act of writing stories is itself an integrative exercise bringing into tandem the various awarenesses of the story, the storyteller, and the audience. That all of the stories for Choy's Asian American literature course were written in the third person, without the directive to do so, assumed a self-directed poise perhaps based on preconceptions that stories are traditionally told from a third-person point of view. Consequently, one might assert that students lacked the sophistication to write from the ironic perspective of a fictionalized narrator. However, they certainly would have had models of such stories to draw from up to that point in the semester, and Choy had already reinforced to them from discussions of previous readings that readers ought not to naturally conflate the narrator's voice with the author's in any story.

In response to Choy's instruction about point of view in the stories, students said that it was "easier" or that they felt "more comfortable"

writing the kinds of stories they wrote from a third-person point of view. Such comments reflected a developing understanding of narrative point of view as well as how best strategically, and rhetorically, to write about personally sensitive topics such as racism. The confusion that Reynolds mentioned earlier regarding the power of dominant success narratives that holds sway over students' expectations was diffused in the case of students from Choy's class through two conduits: narrative perspective and an unstated assumption that the stories they were writing were fictional, though no less lacking in the very personal truths that Reynolds' and Jacobs' students touched on. The ESP allowed students to create a discursive space to give articulation, perhaps for the first time, to what not only Gordon, but also Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) call counter-memory, "a critical reading of how the past informs the present and how the present reads the past" (p. 124). Countermemory's expression, as a consequence of its construction through the writing and telling of stories in the ESP project, was transformed through the process of composition into counternarrative.

Conclusion

Students in all three courses enjoyed participating in the project. In each course, the primacy of grades was lessened. But more than the momentary abolishment of the institutional hierarchy in which grades are embedded, the ESP offered students a chance to critique the ghosts of social and institutional expectations that either trailed after them or which they found themselves in heretofore-uncritical pursuit:

> Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future. (Gordon, 1997, p. 22)

The countermemories that students from all three courses engaged facilitate the National Association for Developmental Education's (1995) "Definition and Goals Statement" goal of "develop[ing] in each learner the skills and attitudes necessary for the attainment of academic, career, and life goals" (p. 7). For example, the only student who was enrolled in two of the three classes ("Jenna," in Reynolds' "Communicating in Society" and Jacobs' "People and Problems") told Jacobs that her choice of major (film) was inspired in part by multiple opportunities to think about creative ways to engage social ghosts; she wanted to do "some-

thing artistic" with her life but didn't know which medium to choose until reflection on the media she encountered in her ESP classes. If there were any students jointly enrolled in our future classes we would encourage them to follow Jenna's lead and compare their experiences across the classes, in order to deepen their understandings of paths to self-discovery. We would also hold informal optional discussions at an off-campus coffee shop for these students. Whereas a student might normally forget an experience at the end of a class, encountering it again in another setting (in another class and/or in a non-classroom environment) would reinforce its importance. Like Jenna, students could use multiple exposures to the ESP to better grasp academic corridors and ponder life options in general.

In the reflection for Jacobs' class Jenna concluded, "performing in front of my peers is not easy the first time but after that it's smooth sailing (give us more chances to perform in front of class!)." Other students—in all three classes—were also nervous when conducting their ESP projects, and desired a repetition. While it would be difficult to repeat the entire process in already jam-packed courses, in future classes it is certainly possible to include more experiences where students explore ideas and practices without the pressure of grading. That is not to say, however, that other instructors cannot create projects that involve more traditional assessment. A goal of developmental education, after all, is "to ensure proper placement by assessing each learner's level of preparedness for college course work" (National Association for Developmental Education, 1995, p. 7). Educational storytelling is flexible enough to allow multiple interpretations and practical applications to help students acquire competencies needed to succeed in the classroom, and beyond. Additionally, when students engage techniques like the ESP across several disciplines, they can gain insight into how knowledge is socially constructed, helping them more fully perceive how their own experiences and ideas are built. Thus, we encourage teachers across the disciplinary spectrum to experiment with the ESP in their classes.

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