Minority-Serving Institutions, Race-Conscious “Dwelling,” and Possible Futures for Basic Writing at Predominantly White Institutions

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ABSTRACT: This essay looks to Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) for strategies that can be implemented in order to combat contemporary neoliberal attacks against the programmatic and institutional spaces of basic writing within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Working from Nedra Reynolds’ notion of thirdspace-oriented “dwelling” and Derrick Bell’s notion of “interest convergence,” it identifies four race-conscious “dwelling strategies” currently employed by MSIs to promote student success. It then offers four complementary suggestions regarding specific ways in which we in BW might adapt similar race-conscious dwelling strategies in the effort not only to defend our programs against contemporary attacks, but also to grow and cultivate new BW spaces within PWIs.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; space; racism; race-consciousness; Minority-Serving Institutions; Predominantly White Institutions; dwelling; interest convergence

RACE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL SPACES OF BASIC WRITING

Many of us who work in basic writing (BW), and especially those of us who work in BW programs within the context of predominantly white institutions (or PWIs for short), consider our programs to be “race-conscious” spaces—that is, spaces where relationships between and among issues of race, racism, language, and literacy can be openly interrogated, challenged, and reformed when students learn how to write. In this sense, many of us are inspired by assertions like those of Deborah Mutnick that “basic writing[,] for all its internal contradictions, has played a vital role in increasing access to higher education, in particular for working-class people of color” (71–72). Unfortunately, many of us working in BW also know only too well
that race-conscious BW spaces have been disappearing with increasing frequency during the last fifteen years or so. BW has been eliminated across the four-year CUNY campuses as part of the termination of its Open Admissions program, fundamentally redefined at the University of Minnesota as part of the dismantling of the General College program, undermined at the University of South Carolina (along with Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson’s important “Studio” model for BW), and lost within a number of other institutions described within Nicole Greene and Patricia McAlester’s book *Basic Writing in America*. Additional losses within the context of two-year institutions also seem imminent: Pima Community College, one of the largest community colleges in Arizona, is currently attempting to establish baseline placement scores for all of its programs, thereby limiting its longstanding open admissions mission (see Pallack); meanwhile, legislation in Connecticut is currently being debated that would eliminate all remediation from two-year and four-year schools alike (see Fain).

Certainly, this widespread loss of BW space has a great deal to do with the increasing influence of neoliberal impulses that are reshaping higher education, especially PWIs. BW spaces are being or already have been eliminated from four-year and two-year PWIs as these institutions increasingly compete, both nationally and internationally, for ranking and prestige as a function of variables such as faculty research productivity, grant money, student ACT scores, and the like (see Hazelkorn; Ward). The logic driving BW elimination seems to be that institutions cannot compete for prestige if they support supposedly “illiterate” students who do not belong within their walls in the first place.

BW spaces are also being eliminated from PWIs in keeping with the sense that these “remedial” programs can be repackaged and resold as part of larger for-profit educational entities. For instance, one of the individuals responsible for making the decision to end Open Admissions within CUNY four-year schools in 1999 was Benno Schmidt, a former president of Yale and then-chairperson of the Edison Group, a for-profit K-12 charter school manager. Higher education critics Patricia Gumport and Michael Bastedo point out that Schmidt, along with many other members of the Task Force that decided to terminate Open Admissions on CUNY’s four-year campuses, stood to generate a good deal of profit once responsibility for remediation could be shifted away from CUNY and toward the companies that they were associated with (343). And, certainly, Schmidt and his Task Force colleagues were enacting a kind of logic in 1999 that has become increasingly prevalent since. Andrew Rosen, CEO of Kaplan University, has recently argued that for-
profit higher educational institutions can and should target underprepared and underrepresented students as an increasingly important “down-market” group that is largely uninterested in traditional educational institutions. For-profit institutions should target this down-market, Rosen says, in much the way that “Wal-Mart and Target [aim] at mass-market consumers who’d prefer to save money rather than shop in a pricey department store” (34-35). In this sense, transforming “remedial” programs such as BW into down-market profit generators seems to be increasingly attractive, especially in a world where higher education increasingly resembles a big-box superstore.

It is certainly worth recognizing, however, that there are other types of higher education spaces outside of the PWI that seem able to maintain a focus on providing effective race-conscious instruction—including race-conscious literacy and writing instruction—even amid contemporary neoliberal pressures. One such space is that of the Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), which is composed of the Historically Black College and University (HBCU), the Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), the Tribal College and University (TCU), and the Asian-American-Native-American-Pacific-Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). More than 430 MSIs are presently operating throughout the U.S. to educate roughly 2.3 million students (Harmon 4), including 16% of all African Americans, 42% of all Hispanics, and 19% of all Native Americans enrolled in U.S. higher education (Harmon 4). Furthermore, more than half of these MSIs possess an open admissions mission (Cunningham and Leegwater 178) while most serve “a large number of economically and academically ‘at risk’ students” (Gasman, Baez, and Turner 6). But especially important to my point here is the fact that most MSIs perceive issues of social and racial justice as central to their missions, even as they serve students from all racial and cultural backgrounds (Gasman, Baez, and Turner 3), and even as they receive significant amounts of federal funding, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars annually, to perform their work. In a crucially important sense, then, MSIs operate as explicitly race-conscious (as well as class-conscious) higher education spaces that are managing to thrive, despite the many pressures that they face within our contemporary higher education climate.

In the hope of addressing and ultimately reversing the troubling loss of race-conscious BW space within the PWI, I analyze here some of the specific strategies and techniques through which contemporary MSIs successfully cultivate and promote race-conscious education for their students. I then discuss some of ways in which we in BW can begin to adopt these MSI strategies and techniques in order to preserve—and perhaps even to expand and grow—the operation of our own race-conscious spaces within PWI contexts.
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To help me do so, I draw directly on two theoretical concepts: Nedra Reynolds’ notion of “dwelling” and Derrick Bell’s notion of “interest convergence.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: REYNOLDS’ “DWELLING” AND BELL’S “INTEREST CONVERGENCE”

Composition theorist Nedra Reynolds defines “dwelling” as the process whereby embodied human beings—that is, human beings whose bodies are marked by differences such as race, gender, sexuality, and so on—interact with both the natural and built environments that they inhabit in ways that actively create and re-create new spaces. For Reynolds, dwelling constitutes the process whereby racialized individuals make choices about where, how, why, and how long to remain in, engage with, and / or reflect on particular spaces in ways that directly impact how these spaces are constructed. She writes:

People’s responses to place—which are shaped in large part by their bodies, by the physical characteristics they carry with them through the spatial world—determine whether they will ‘enter’ at all, or rush through, or linger—and those decisions contribute to how a space is ‘used’ or reproduced. (143)

Reynolds further stresses that dwelling is intimately tied to the construction of discursive space, arguing that

Discourses don’t have roofs or walls or provide shelter, but as many of us recognize from favorite books or stories, discourses can hold memories or represent a meaningful time and place; if familiar, they invite us to dwell within them. If unfamiliar or strange, it takes much longer, and dwelling doesn’t happen when people feel excluded or that they don’t belong. (163)

Finally, Reynolds stresses that dwelling serves as a mechanism by which to analyze how individuals can create both physical and discursive spaces of “resistance to the dominant culture” (141)—or what she later terms “third-spaces” in ways resonant with the work of critical geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Doreen Massey, and others. Reynolds thereby argues that, during the course of actively dwelling within various physical and discursive spaces, racialized individuals can also dwell upon unfair and
unjust practices and relationships within those spaces in ways that can foster thirdspace-oriented change—including change aimed at remedying the troubling effects of racism.

Reynolds’ notion of dwelling sheds important light onto some of the key practices—what, for the purposes of this essay, I will call “dwelling strategies”—through which Minority-Serving Institutions are ultimately able to create and maintain race-conscious institutional spaces in the ways that they do. By employing various dwelling strategies, MSIs create thirdspaces in which students are invited to consider how issues of race and racism profoundly shape their educational and literate lives. Furthermore, by employing these dwelling strategies, MSIs challenge the loss of race-conscious space within our contemporary neoliberal higher education climate: these strategies help MSIs to insist that issues of race and space matter fundamentally to educational success in ways that cannot easily be dismissed amid the neoliberal rush for prestige and profit. Or, to put things more simply, MSIs use dwelling strategies to assert that race-conscious educational spaces must be preserved, not eliminated, within contemporary higher education.

In turn, critical race theorist Derrick Bell’s notion of “interest convergence” is important for understanding how and why MSI-sponsored dwelling strategies can serve as models to those of us seeking to preserve BW in the context of the PWI. Bell argues that mainstream race-based educational reform efforts (and we can certainly include BW programs among such efforts) need to be perceived as benefitting mainstream white institutions in order to have long-lasting effects within the larger U.S. educational system. Specifically, Bell contends that these efforts need to be perceived as operating within a system where race-based reform “where granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle- and upper-class whites” (“Brown” 22). Bell does acknowledge the glaring irony in this situation: if racial justice efforts ultimately depend on and require the approval of the white mainstream in order to be deemed worthwhile, then such efforts may end up being “of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system we are trying to help” (“Racial Realism” 308). Nonetheless, he ultimately concludes that, if we can attend to interest convergence dynamics carefully and critically, we can foster successful institutional change in the form of “policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen conditions for those we are trying to help and more likely to remind those in power that there are imaginative, unabashed risk-takers who refuse to be trammeled upon” (308).

Interest convergence offers us a particularly important tool with which to understand how and why MSI-style race-conscious dwelling can ultimately
Minority-Serving Institutions prove appealing within the context of the contemporary neoliberal PWI. Its principles suggest that race-conscious dwelling will be perceived as important and worthwhile within the PWI to the degree that it forwards PWI goals and interests—goals and interests which do still include the cultivation of at least some level of diversity within the PWI student body. As a quick illustration of this, consider the rhetoric currently being employed by Michael Crow, the well-known current President of Arizona State University and self-described “academic entrepreneur.” In the midst of describing his institution as a model for the entrepreneurial (read: neoliberal) PWI of the future, Crow insists that Arizona State must seek to “champion diversity and . . . accommodate the many gifted and creative students who do not conform to a standard academic profile, as well as those who demonstrate the potential to succeed but lack the financial means to pursue a quality four-year undergraduate education” (5). He further insists that Arizona State must “advance global engagement” (3) by serving the needs of international students as well as students from “immigrant households where the primary language is not English” (8). Through such rhetoric, Crow espouses a kind “neoliberalism for PWI diversity” stance, one asserting that prestige, profit, and diversity all fit neatly together. To be sure, we in BW ought to approach such neoliberal rhetoric with great caution, especially given the ways in which it threatens to conceptualize racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity as nothing more than assets to be traded by powerful PWIs in the pursuit of their own interests. But we can nonetheless view this sort of rhetoric as offering an important opportunity to assert that our BW programs and the race-conscious dwelling that they promote are fundamental to PWIs’ collective ability to achieve their goals of diversity and globalism. In other words, we can assert that the proclaimed diversity interests of PWIs converge directly with our own BW interests in race-conscious dwelling in ways that ought to be recognized and embraced.

**MSIs, DWELLING STRATEGIES, AND THE CREATION OF RACE-CONSCIOUS INSTITUTIONAL THIRDSPACES**

With this combined framework of Reynolds’ dwelling and Bell’s interest convergence in mind, I turn now to four specific types of race-conscious dwelling strategies that MSIs routinely use to help interrogate and reform racist social and educational spaces both within and beyond the academy. These include cultivating and supporting explicit race-conscious educational ideologies and practices, offering race-conscious and spatially-oriented writ-
ing pedagogies, emphasizing race-conscious service-learning and community service activities, and documenting race-conscious institutional success. Each of these dwelling strategies helps to transform the MSI into a thirddspace of critical reform and change that opposes the neoliberal elimination of race-conscious space within higher education.

**MSI Dwelling Strategy #1: Cultivating and Supporting Explicit Race-Conscious Educational Ideologies and Practices**

One of the first important ways in which MSIs promote dwelling is by proclaiming both explicitly and publicly the relationship that they imagine between their work and issues of social and racial justice—by proclaiming, that is, a kind of overt race-consciousness in terms of their institutional missions, goals, and values. MSI researchers Terrell Strayhorn and Joan Hirt describe such race-consciousness as a “defining characteristic” of MSIs (210). Meanwhile, other MSI scholars suggest that this defining characteristic is expressed in somewhat unique ways across different MSI contexts. Within HBCUs, for instance, Elaine Copeland finds a particularly close relationship between race-consciousness and community engagement, arguing that the “Emphasis [at HBCUs] has been and continues to be on cultural values, ethics, character development, civic responsibility, leadership, and service to the [African American] community” (53). In the context of HSIs, Christina Kirklighter, Diana Cardenas, and Susan Wolff Murphy suggest that there is often an explicit emphasis on race-consciousness within the space of the campus: they describe this as the HSI desire to “educate all students, particularly Latino/a students” (3) as part of a larger effort to develop spaces of “difference and educational activism” (1). With respect to the TCU context, Justin Guillory and Kelly Ward argue that there is often a particular stress on Native American languages and cultures which is designed to promote “cultural pride and hope” (91). Finally, with regard to AANAPISIs, Julie Park and Robert Teranishi contend that there is a conscious effort to subvert the stereotype of the Asian American as “model minority,” especially given the tendency of this stereotype to “overshadow the unique needs of the broader [Asian American] community and underserved groups” (122). MSI operation and race-consciousness thus go hand-in-hand, even if the expression of this race-consciousness may vary slightly from institutional type to institutional type.

Accompanying this ideological emphasis on race-consciousness within the MSI is an explicit emphasis on student success—that is, on a “belief that
all students can learn, regardless of their entering level [of] preparation, and that the role of the institution is to do everything possible to ensure [this]” (Bridges, Kinzie, Laird, and Kuh 228). Such a success orientation is evident in the fact that so many MSIs have open admissions policies predicated on the idea that all students can succeed, regardless of past educational experiences or backgrounds. This orientation is further evident in the fact that many MSIs offer explicit student support mechanisms, especially during the first two years of the undergraduate experience. These mechanisms include first-year support and community-building programs (e.g., “First Year Experience” courses and sequences, bridge programs, and intensive mentoring programs) as well as other advising and feedback programs providing support from faculty and staff. HBCU researcher and administrator Henry Ponder suggests that, on the whole, these kinds of support programs attempt to ensure that “first-year [MSI] students...[possess] the necessary motivation to maximize their efforts and take responsibility for their own learning” (127). MSI researchers Terrell Strayhorn and Melvin Terrell echo this point, suggesting that these mechanisms, especially when staffed by faculty members who work closely with undergraduate students, aim to establish “a close-knit community where students [feel] part of the institutional fabric of the campus” (147).

By espousing an explicitly race-conscious mission, and by coupling this mission with specific race-conscious student support mechanisms, MSIs directly encourage students’ successful dwelling. MSIs serve, in other words, as race-conscious “safe spaces” from which students can spend significant time reflecting on the important relationships between a larger racist U.S. culture and their own education as college students. At the same time, MSIs routinely offer race-conscious institutional and material support to students as they dwell, especially in the form of small courses where students are likely to feel a sense of community and belonging, mechanisms that monitor students’ academic process and offer extra assistance as needed, and a climate that values frequent and meaningful contact between students and faculty. Furthermore, in stark contrast to many mainstream PWIs, which tend to marginalize student support mechanisms into “remedial” programs or other ghettoized activities in ways that are frustratingly familiar to those of us in BW, race-conscious support mechanisms are viewed as absolutely central to the MSI experience. By stressing race-conscious dwelling in these ways, MSIs ultimately challenge the neoliberal contention that contemporary race-conscious spaces ought to be eliminated from the academy. Instead, MSIs insist, race-conscious spaces need to be preserved and expanded because they are absolutely essential to students’ success within higher education.
MSI Dwelling Strategy #2: Offering Race-Conscious and Spatially-Oriented Writing Pedagogies

A second means by which MSIs promote dwelling is by providing race-conscious and spatially oriented writing pedagogies and curricula. Carmen Kynard and Robert Eddy argue, for instance, that MSIs in general and HBCUs in particular foster at least three important race-conscious writing pedagogies, each premised on identifying and integrating of various types of institutional and discursive spaces. The first of these involves cultivating “Trans-school literacies” (W38), which arise when students integrate and transform home literacies and school literacies into new hybrid thirddspace literacies. The second involves “Collaborative-community teaching and learning” (W38) practices, which require students to bridge classroom and community spaces through various types of race-conscious service-learning and community engagement activities. The third involves fostering “Critical local-national understandings” (W38), which arise from “interrogat[ing] the politics of [students’] institutions, the social crises of their neighboring communities, and their own experiential knowledge as co-terminous realities” (W38). In these ways, Kynard and Eddy argue that HBCUs encourage a focus on the racialized nature of literacy “standards” as they are manifest within and across different spaces, from local to global, in ways that promote thirddspace interrogation and transformation.

A similar relationship between and among issues of race, space, and literacy is posited by Christopher Schroeder within the context of HSI writing pedagogy. HSIs promote, he says, “an alternative model of literacy that can authorize the locations that [their] students and others must negotiate as they write and read” (280). Furthermore, by focusing this issue of “location”—the issue of where students write, for what purposes, and to what audiences—HSIs ultimately concentrate

less upon approximating a target discourse or upon producing a product and more on the act or performance of negotiating...differences....[HSI writing pedagogy moves] beyond the rejecting of deficiency and embracing difference to seeing difference, particularly the negotiation of differences—linguistic, cultural, epistemological, institutional—as a basic practice of intellectual work. (280)

For Schroeder, then, HSI writing pedagogies demand that students engage carefully and critically with what it means to write and read across spaces
in ways that enable them to recognize, negotiate, and transform the problematic power differentials that they encounter.

Still further, Beatrice Mendez-Newman describes some of the key race-conscious pedagogical attitudes and practices that she believes are frequently fostered within the space of HSI writing courses. In particular, she argues that these courses emphasize the need for Freireian critical awareness on the part of teachers: “It is difficult not to rely on Freireian constructs in attempting to understand the HSI environment. There is, when the instructor is white, a profound difference between the teacher / authority figure and the learners” (19). As well, she says that HSI courses demand a race-conscious and supportive teacher attitude toward student literacy learning, asserting that “pedagogical content is far less important than pedagogical attitude. If an environment of trust and respect is not established in the classroom, little if any learning will occur” (19). Finally, she describes a number of specific pedagogical orientations that she sees as crucial to the HSI writing classroom, including 1) critical engagement with the label of “ESL” student as it often fails to apply to many students at HSIs, 2) careful engagement with patterns of error in the context of students’ writing, 3) envisioning classrooms as promoting race-conscious “communities of learners,” and 4) ensuring that teachers are as accessible to HSI students as possible (23). Thus, for Mendez-Newman, the HSI writing classroom effectively requires race-conscious teaching of many varieties.

Through these types of race-conscious pedagogies and teacher orientations, MSIs posit that dwelling is a decidedly literate practice that spans the spaces of home and school simultaneously. At the same time, MSIs characterize literacy as one of the most important products of successful MSI-centered dwelling—that is, as a set of skills, practices, beliefs, and habits of mind that can be used within, across, and beyond university spaces to do substantive race-conscious work in the world. MSIs thereby challenge neoliberal logic once again: rather than conceding that “remedial” writing instruction does not belong in the contemporary college or university, MSIs insist that spaces for race-conscious literate dwelling are indispensable to any college or university setting that purports to educate students for a diverse and global world.

**MSI Dwelling Strategy #3: Emphasizing Race-Conscious Service-Learning and Community Service Activities**

MSIs also promote dwelling through race-conscious service-learning and community engagement programs, especially those focused on writing
and literacy instruction. The value of these programs is evident within a recent special issue of the journal *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Community Literacy, and Service-Learning*, which focuses on a range of programs currently being offered by faculty at HBCUs. This issue highlights, for instance, service-learning activities and curricular options currently being enacted at Spelman College in Atlanta, including a linked “First-Year Experience Seminar” and “Sophomore Experience Seminar” requiring participation in and writing about a sustained local volunteer commitment of students’ choice (Jordan 47-8), student volunteer work with and research at a local library dedicated to African American history and culture (49-52), tutoring work with a local middle school (52-55), and work with local teen drinking and drug prevention programs (56-7). It highlights similar initiatives at Jackson State University in Mississippi: as part of the first-year writing curriculum, students are required to participate in a local grade-school tutoring program during one semester (McDaniels, Harrion, Glenn, and Gentry 115-19) and to work with a number of local women’s groups during the next semester (120-22). Still further, it describes efforts at North Carolina Central University requiring first-year writing students to engage in a letter writing partnership with a local high school designed to “unite and empower [these] two academic communities” (Faulkner-Springfield 66).

Central across these types of HBCU service-learning and community engagement efforts is the way in which they view literacy as bridging the spaces of classroom and community: as Riva Sias and Beverly Moss summarize, these efforts “reveal the close, even ‘seamless,’ historical, political, and cultural relationship of African American literacy practices and African American community partnerships” (2-3). Also notable is the fact that these HBCU efforts are being mirrored in other MSI contexts, including HSIs and Tribal Colleges, in ways suggesting that the integration of school and community spaces is central to much MSI writing and literacy instruction. And, finally, these MSI service-learning and community engagement efforts offer an important contrast to the more superficial versions of such programs that sometimes arise at other types of institutions, including many mainstream PWIs. Angelique Davi characterizes such uncritical programs as “often populated by white students who are asked to go into poor urban areas to work with diverse communities, and there is a tendency for these students to view community service as [solely] an opportunity for self-fulfillment” (74). Davi’s point here is not, of course, that middle-class white students cannot engage in successful or worthwhile service-learning or community engagement activity in the context of a writing course. Rather, her claim is
when mainstream whites and others engage in this type of activity in uncritical fashion, they run a serious risk of letting the desire to feel good trump the actual doing of good for communities of color, a problem that threatens to reify the very social and racial order that these programs claim to be reforming. MSIs, in contrast, seem well prepared to avoid these problems: because they possess race-conscious missions, support mechanisms, and pedagogies, these institutions are explicitly committed to creating authentic race-conscious thirdspaces that seek to challenge the extant social order directly through writing and literacy work.7

In these ways, MSI-sponsored service-learning and community engagement programs do a great deal to promote race-conscious student dwelling. They focus not only on students’ dwelling activities within the context of MSI writing classroom but also at the intersection of MSI writing classrooms and community spaces. Or, to phrase things differently, MSIs try to replace divisions between “town” and “gown” with a kind of town-and-gown thirdspace that is explicitly dedicated to reforming the social order through literacy instruction. MSIs thereby insist that contemporary colleges and universities have a responsibility to preserve and expand spaces for such race-conscious literate dwelling, both within their walls and within the larger community, rather than simply allowing these spaces to be eliminated in the pursuit of neoliberal goals.

**MSI Dwelling Strategy #4: Documenting Race-Conscious Institutional Success**

Many MSIs are, lastly, attempting to document the positive effects of race-conscious dwelling on factors such as student graduation and retention. This documentation helps to offer “proof” that MSIs provide a worthwhile and effective education, especially for students of color.

Numerous scholars note, for example, that MSIs graduate students of color at considerably higher rates than their peer predominantly white institutions. Noel Harmon points out that MSIs award a far greater percentage of BA degrees in education than their predominantly white counterparts do, including 46% of such degrees nationally for African-American students, 49% for Hispanic students, and 12% for Native American students (6). He notes, too, that MSIs have especially strong track records in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields at the BA level, awarding approximately 41% of all STEM degrees for African American students and 54% for Hispanic students (6). Meanwhile, Jaime Merisotis and Kirstin McCarthy mention that
38% of TCU students initially obtaining an AA degree ultimately managed to obtain a BA, while less than 1% from mainstream schools did (53). These statistics suggest that MSI contexts are especially conducive to improving minority students’ overall graduation chances.

Another important issue that MSIs routinely highlight is that of undergraduate retention and transfer from two-year AA programs to four-year BA programs. This issue is stressed by Merisotis and McCarthy with respect to both TCUs and HBCUs. Regarding the former, they mention that TCUs had early 1990s retention rates of about 57%, contrasting starkly in with PWI retention rates hovering at around 1% (50). Regarding the latter, they mention that HBCUs increase the likelihood that students of color will initially enroll in and graduate from four-year BA programs rather than two-year AA programs by nearly 20%, an especially important statistic given that that “students who enroll in four-year schools are more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree than those who begin at a two-year school” (53). These figures further indicate that MSIs are having documented positive effects on students’ chances of remaining in school long enough to graduate with a BA.

Finally, a large number of MSIs are currently participating in research programs and activities designed to publicize their positive effects more widely. One such contemporary effort titled the “Lumina MSI Models of Success Program”8 is helping MSIs to demonstrate their efficacy with regard to graduation, retention, and satisfaction rates for students of color. This program presently involves more than twenty institutions and institutional consortia spanning HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and AANAPISIs, and it aims to describe the specific ways in which MSIs (which Lumina describes as “recognized leaders in educating and graduating students of color” [Harmon 15]), engage in practices that are relevant to all higher education institutions. Another effort titled the “Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students” (BEAMS) project seeks to demonstrate the value of MSIs in terms of educating students in the hard sciences, and it is currently operating at 102 MSIs nationwide (DelRios and Leegwater 3). Its goal is to ensure that MSIs can measure and broadcast their benefits despite the fact that many such institutions have traditionally had limited budgets and infrastructures for doing so.

By documenting their work in these various ways, MSIs are actively attempting to prove that their race-conscious dwelling activities produce measurable results, especially in terms of minority student graduation and retention rates. These documentation efforts further attempt to show that MSIs deserve continued funding and support for future student dwelling:
indeed, as Pegeen Riechert-Powell argues, data on topics such as graduation and retention rates are foundational to virtually all institutions’ “efforts [to] realize financial gains, in the form of tuition dollars, state funding, or future graduates’ support as alumni” (667). But it is also important to point out that these MSI documentation efforts, while certainly participating in neoliberal discourses of assessment and accountability as promoted by sponsors such as the Lumina Foundation, ultimately perform a kind of critically minded thirddspace work. MSIs are, in effect, using neoliberal measurement techniques and discourses to prove that their race-conscious dwelling activities are demonstrably beneficial. By doing so, they seem to be trying to “flip the script” of typical neoliberal assessment, using this assessment to prove quantitatively that race-conscious spaces need to be preserved rather than eliminated within the contemporary academy.

DWELLING STRATEGIES AND RACE-CONSCIOUS THIRDSPACES FOR BASIC WRITING

Having discussed these race-conscious MSI dwelling strategies, I now turn to the questions of what might it mean for BW programs to invite students to dwell successfully within the larger context of the PWI and how such dwelling might help to preserve BW spaces in the present and future. In the hope of answering these questions, I discuss four MSI-inspired dwelling strategies that I believe we can adapt for use in PWI-sponsored BW programs. These strategies include telling explicitly race-conscious stories regarding BW, developing and publicizing new race-conscious writing pedagogies within BW, developing new race-conscious BW program and support structures, and documenting the success of race-consciousness within BW. Each of these strategies posits that BW can and should operate as a type of race-conscious thirddspace within the context of the PWI. Each further posits that often-proclaimed PWI interests in student diversity and globalism converge directly with BW interests in promoting race-conscious dwelling—all in ways that render BW spaces indispensable to the future of the PWI.

BW Dwelling Strategy #1: Telling Explicitly Race-Conscious Stories

As a first MSI-inspired dwelling strategy, we should imagine ways to engage in race-conscious BW “story-changing” work of the sort advocated by Linda Adler-Kassner: this work is designed to afford us a clearer “voice in the frames that surround our work and the tropes that emanate from those
frames regarding our classes and students” (37). Specifically, we should imagine new ways to identify and publicize BW as an institutional space explicitly dedicated to success for the increasingly diverse populations that are entering PWIs in greater numbers. These populations include not only U.S.-born students of color but also speakers of English as a global language and “Generation 1.5” students. Speakers of English as a global language consist of individuals who learned English alongside their other native language(s), often in contexts shaped by colonialism: these students are “native speakers” of English in their homelands even though their native varieties and dialects of English may be different from “standard” versions spoken in places such as the U.S., Britain, or elsewhere (see Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; “The Place”). “Generation 1.5” students, meanwhile, consist of those who may have been born abroad but have had some amount of formal schooling in the U.S. (See Matsuda; diGennaro; Ortmeier-Hooper). They may well need some second-language writing assistance; however, they are also likely, “as a result of their experience in U.S. schools, [to be] familiar with U.S. education, teenage popular culture, and current slang” in ways that differentiate them from international ESL students (diGennaro 65-66). As Paul Kei Matsuda asserts, BW programs must try to serve these types of students in ways that overcome a “distinction between basic writers and second language writers [that] is becoming increasingly untenable” (83). Furthermore, because both of these populations are increasingly prominent within PWIs, we in BW need to stress our ability to serve them effectively: Ryuko Kubota and Kimberly Abels point out that these populations are often highlighted as central to PWI efforts to “internationalize,” and so PWIs are facing increasing pressure to provide them with new “educational opportunities and resources” (83).

What would such story-changing concerning race-conscious BW dwelling within the PWI actually require? Taking a direct cue from the work of MSIs, it would require our telling new BW stories that highlight our desire to serve all PWI students, but especially to serve diverse students. We could insist, in other words, that one of the primary missions of BW within the PWI is to offer race-conscious writing and literacy instruction for students of color, speakers of global Englishes, Generation 1.5 students, and others, to support these students with small classes that promote race-conscious dwelling explicitly, and otherwise to ensure students’ successful retention and graduation. By telling such stories, we would thus be working against the neoliberal claim that the sole contemporary function of BW is to provide costly “remediation” for “unprepared” students who have no place in higher education. Instead, we would be insisting that BW provides critical
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assistance that helps diverse students to dwell successfully within the PWI context until they graduate. Such new stories would thereby assert that PWI interests and BW interests in diversity converge directly, and that they do so to the clear benefit of students.

Such race-conscious BW story-changing would also offer a useful rejoinder to the arguments of a number of scholars who seem to perceive the telling of race-conscious stories regarding BW as outdated, or even somewhat regressive, within the contemporary academy. Greene and McAlexander take such a stance, for instance, when they assert that it is an “oversimplification” to continue viewing BW through explicitly race-conscious analytical lenses (8): they argue that, “although the basis for hostility to basic writing programs in the early years might have involved racism, that hostility was later more strongly fueled by intellectual elitism” (8). Greene and McAlexander then conclude that we in BW ought to stop focusing at length on issues of race and racism when we talk about BW, acknowledging instead that our programs “cut across race, ethnicities, and class” (7). I agree that essentialist thinking about issues of race and racism is problematic, especially when it serves to mask classism or intellectual elitism in ways that Greene and Alexander note. I also recognize that contemporary BW programs do serve students from a range of racial, cultural, linguistic, and social class backgrounds, including many mainstream and working-class whites (see Horner and Lu). But I nonetheless contend that it is worthwhile to tell new race-conscious stories regarding contemporary BW spaces and the kinds of dwelling activities that they promote in order to highlight convergence between the interests of PWIs and the interests of race-conscious BW programs.

**BW Dwelling Strategy #2: Developing and Publicizing New Race-Conscious Writing Pedagogies**

In order to encourage MSI-inspired BW dwelling further, we can begin to theorize and implement BW pedagogies that are explicitly designed to help diverse populations succeed within PWI contexts. Toward this end, we can examine the potential value of the writing pedagogies currently being employed by MSIs in various writing courses, including some of those described earlier. For instance, both Kynard and Eddy’s discussion of trans-school literacies and Schroeder’s emphasis on negotiating the “locations” of literacy seem quite helpful for fostering PWI students’ critical engagement with the world from the vantage point of BW thirdspace. Mendez-Newman’s suggestions regarding teacher attitudes also seem useful for ensuring that
PWI students are being given the chance to engage in race-conscious dwelling successfully within BW.

At the same time, we should investigate the value of other contemporary BW pedagogies aimed at encouraging race-conscious dwelling within the PWI. For instance, within “Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone,” Min-Zhan Lu discusses the various ways in which written “errors” on the part of students from multicultural backgrounds can become the focus of explicitly race-, culture-, and class-conscious BW instruction. Her “can able to” example, which discusses a seemingly simple ESL mistake written by a Chinese-speaking student, illustrates how talk of error, authorial agency, and meaning can become central to any BW space. By exploring ways to adopt this kind of pedagogy more widely within the context of PWI-situated BW courses, we can ensure that all students are encouraged to use our courses as dwelling spaces from which to investigate, understand, and draw on their existing linguistic strengths, cultural backgrounds, and individual agency.

We should pay further attention to “translanguaging” pedagogies as tools for promoting race-conscious dwelling within PWI-situated BW courses. Suresh Canagarajah defines translanguaging as the capacity of the multilingual and multidialectical individual to “shuttle between diverse languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (“Codemeshing” 401). He also implies that pedagogies rooted in translanguaging are likely to promote race-conscious dwelling for at least two reasons. First, these pedagogies are profoundly concerned with spatial dynamics (“The Place” 598) in ways that resonate strongly with the creation of race-conscious BW thirdspaces within the PWI: they are centrally concerned, in other words, with the question of “how we can accommodate more than one code within the boundaries of the same text” (598) in “rhetorically strategic ways” (599). Second, these pedagogies promote important emotional and ethical orientations from both students and teachers that fit squarely with race-conscious dwelling in BW. They assume that multilingual people always make adjustments to each other as they modify their accent or syntax to facilitate communication with those who are not proficient in their language. Furthermore, they come with psychological and attitudinal resources, such as patience, tolerance, and humility, to negotiate the differences of interlocutors. (“The Place” 593-594)
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Translanguaging pedagogies thus clearly posit that students should attempt to understand and respond to their world using all the racial, cultural, linguistic, and attitudinal resources at their disposal.

By theorizing and implementing these sorts of race-conscious pedagogies, we can insist that diversity interests within the PWI will be promoted directly by the type of race-conscious dwelling that we espouse within BW—especially as we focus on issues of race, space, and literacy simultaneously, as we interrogate notions of student “error” to promote metacognitive and rhetorical awareness of writing and language skills, and as we promote the kind of patience, tolerance, and humility that characterizes positive learning for all manner of diverse students. Furthermore, we can insist that, because we in BW have been engaged in this kind of race-conscious pedagogy as a field for more than forty years, we possess a uniquely successful track-record and knowledge base that deserves to be preserved and supported within the PWI.

**BW Dwelling Strategy #3: Developing Race-Conscious Programs and Support Structures**

As a third possible BW dwelling strategy, we need to continue developing and implementing MSI-inspired program and support structures that translate race-conscious BW ideologies and pedagogies into institutional action within the PWI. Fortunately, it would seem that BW already has a good start toward such development, especially given our long history of offering literacy learning support to students.

As one example of such a structure, consider Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson’s Studio model for BW, which was originally developed at the predominantly white University of South Carolina but has since been adopted at a number of locations across the U.S. This Studio model provides small group meetings where students from across a number of first-year courses meet to talk about their assignments, to engage in peer review of one another’s work, and otherwise to discuss the demands being placed on them by writing courses across the space of the university (12-13). The Studio thereby prioritizes the explicit support of students in their other classes, forming a kind of instructional third-space: the “students and their work, not any course instructor’s plan, provide the ‘curriculum’ of the studio sessions” (10). Furthermore, the specific version of the Studio developed by Grego and Thompson ended up supporting a good deal of race-conscious instruction at both the University of South Carolina and Benedict College, a nearby HBCU. In particular, it helped students and teachers to understand and respond to implicitly racialized university expectations.
about course requirements at USC (104) as well as to examine various racialized disciplinary expectations about writing and knowledge making (134-140); it also prompted instructors at both South Carolina and Benedict to draw critical conclusions regarding issues of race, schooling, and their own teaching practices (188-199).

Even while recognizing these successes of Grego and Thompson’s Studio, however, we can imagine ways to expand its race-conscious work even further, perhaps with the aid of something like the aforementioned translanguaging pedagogies. For instance, we might try to modify the Studio model slightly so that it offers some sort of “mini-curriculum” designed to have students rewrite assignments for other courses using various translanguaging techniques. Or, we might have the Studio engage all of its students, whether U.S.-born, foreign-born, Generation 1.5, or otherwise, in explicit discussion of the language politics undergirding the writing assignments that they receive across the PWI. Developing explicitly race-conscious versions of Studio programs like these would certainly help to increase BW students’ chances for effective race-conscious dwelling.

As another example of a worthwhile BW support structure, consider the race-conscious BW service-learning program currently operating within the predominantly white space of Bentley College under the direction of Angelique Davi. Davi argues that this course, which encourages BW students to tutor nearby elementary school students, offers a unique dwelling space from which students of color can examine racialized educational practices and power relations:

In a service-learning composition course [like the one at Bentley] . . . students of color may find themselves with opportunities to think critically about their lived experiences both inside and outside the classroom, [as well as about] systemic oppression . . . and dominant ideologies. For example, students of color may find themselves recognizing more subtle forms of racism embedded in the educational system that may have contributed to their sense of their academic performance. (76)

Davi’s service-learning course clearly encourages students to dwell upon the ways in which their existing racialized literacy practices are identified as “remedial” in one spatial context (i.e., the mainstream PWI) and as “expert” in another spatial context (i.e., that of their mentoring relationship with younger students) in ways that ultimately promote thirddspace awareness of the shifting nature of literate activity. In turn, this type of course might be adopted for use in other PWI contexts, thereby inviting a greater number of BW students to engage in
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careful analysis of how issues of race and racism directly impact multiple literate and educational contexts simultaneously.15

By stressing race-conscious BW structures of various kinds—whether Studio programs, service-learning/community engagement writing programs, or others—we can emphasize yet again the central importance and value of the kind of dwelling that BW promotes. We can stress, that is, that PWIs’ interests in promoting a diverse and global campus are clearly furthered through the kinds of support programs that we in BW already offer. We might argue as well that the PWI need not reinvent the wheel by developing new kinds of race-conscious student support mechanisms; instead, it ought simply to support the race-conscious BW spaces that we have already been offering (and can easily offer more widely if provided with the proper support).

**BW Dwelling Strategy #4: Documenting the Success and Value of Race-Consciousness**

Mentioned earlier in this essay are some of the specific ways in which MSIs have begun to document their successes with respect to issues of race-conscious dwelling. Drawing inspiration from this MSI activity, we in BW should seek to document the relationship between race-conscious BW spaces, the specific types of dwelling that we promote through them, and factors such as graduation and retention rates. And, certainly, we should use this documentation to make persuasive arguments to our PWI sponsors that BW programs deserve their continued and unequivocal support.

Some in BW have certainly already begun this work. Greg Glau, for instance, has recently examined enrollment, pass rates, and retention rates for various groups involved in the Stretch program at Arizona State (during a time before President Crow’s tenure), focusing in particular on students of color (37). He notes that students from these groups who have enrolled in Stretch are more likely to pass freshman composition than those who take regular courses (38), that retention rates have improved since Stretch was implemented (38), and that these findings have proven useful in opposing last-minute administrative proposals to raise class sizes or otherwise compromise the kind of important work that the Stretch program performs (44).

Matthew McCurrie has similarly analyzed the value of the Summer Bridge program at Columbia College in Chicago, a program that primarily serves underrepresented minority students. His preliminary work indicates that students have a freshman fall-to-spring retention rate that has improved from 61% in 2004 to 68% in 2008 (although he also notes that this rate still lags behind
the 84% retention rate for regularly admitted students) (44). From this data, McCurrie concludes that “summer bridge programs can play an important role in improving the learning experiences of at-risk students when they give prospective students a challenging college experience that prepares them for real college-level work and thus builds confidence” (44).

Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts have also been tracking the course completion, retention, and graduation rates of students involved in the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) at their home institution of the Community College of Baltimore County. They find that ALP “doubles the success rate [for course completion], halves the attrition rate [from the first year course], does it in half the time [to graduation]...and costs slightly less per student than the traditional model” (64). They are also currently involved in new research being conducted by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University that will track ALP pass rates, rates of overall college persistence, and other similar data for students from across varying racial and economic backgrounds (65). And their ALP program seems to be generating a great deal of enthusiasm: more than 80 schools nationwide are currently using some form of this program (Adams, personal communication), and interest in the program continues to grow on the basis of the kind of data that the ALP movement has generated thus far. Although ALP has not yet generated considerable amounts of race-conscious data per se, its current activities and popularity suggest that it is likely to do so soon.

Each of these current BW documentation efforts use the discourses and tools of neoliberal assessment to demonstrate that race-conscious dwelling has positive effects within the PWI. However, in order to engage in a kind of critical “script flipping” similar to that of our MSI counterparts, we need to provide even more of this type of work. By documenting our successes with race-conscious dwelling more fully, we can effectively stress the convergences between PWI interests and our own. We can also effectively demonstrate that PWIs are already reaping important benefits from BW in terms of minority students’ graduation and retention rates—and that they stand to reap even more of these benefits if they expand their support for our work.

CONCLUSION

I want to end this discussion on a hopeful note. While it is true that many BW spaces have been lost within the context of the PWI over the last 15 years, it is also true that we are well-positioned to rebuild and strengthen these spaces with the help of MSI-inspired dwelling strategies that promote
convergence between PWI and BW interests. It also seems clear that we can capitalize on growing disciplinary and national interest in BW spaces and issues of PWI diversity to help us do so.

At the level of the discipline, for instance, both 2012 CCCC Chair Chris Anson and 2013 CCCC Chair Howard Tinberg have recently underscored the value and importance of BW space, in part at the urging of members of the Council on Basic Writing (CBW). Anson helped to facilitate a number of well-publicized 2012 sessions on the future of BW, including a particularly powerful session featuring BW luminaries Mike Rose, Lynn Troyka, and Peter Adams. Meanwhile, Tinberg’s 2013 CCCC “Call for Proposals” featured BW goals, missions, and students explicitly within the body of its text by stressing the ways in which “the novice or basic writer has been the subject of foundational work in composition studies” (par. 1). Also notable is the fact that the 2013 Council on Basic Writing (CBW) conference will be hosting an event at CCCC 2013 titled “Basic Writing and Race: A Symposium” featuring scholars and teachers from a number of MSIs and PWIs. These individuals will be discussing BW activity within their respective institutions as well as imagining new hybrids of BW, MSI, and PWI scholarship. Issues of race-consciousness and dwelling, as well as possible convergences between various institutional goals, will certainly be discussed at length during this symposium.

This resurgence of disciplinary interest in BW and its race-conscious spaces can certainly help our efforts to understand, enact, and publicize race-conscious dwelling strategies for use in the PWI. This resurgence might inspire us, for instance, to take a cue from Reflections and its special issue on HBCU service-learning and community engagement by producing our own special issues and edited collections (perhaps even within the pages of JBW) that are explicitly dedicated to issues of race, thirdspace, and MSI-inspired dwelling within PWI contexts. This resurgence might also inspire us to facilitate more regular networking and interaction between faculty teaching BW in both MSIs and PWIs, whether through organizations such as CCCC or CBW, through new conferences and symposia, or through new kinds of professional and institutional networks spanning MSIs, PWIs, and other spaces.

Meanwhile, at a more national level, neoliberal administrators like Arizona State’s Crow have been garnering increasing media attention for their ideas about the role of racial and ethnic diversity within the PWI. In particular, Crow was named by Time magazine in 2009 as one of the ten most important administrators currently working in higher education, and he was
praised in particular by the magazine for his attempts to serve “students with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities while giving elite public schools a run for their research money” (Fitzpatrick par. 1). While we in BW obviously need to interpret such praise critically, we can nonetheless use it to help us call public attention to how we in BW have played, and must continue to play, a central role in ensuring that “students with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities” are ultimately well-served by the PWI of the future.

Such media attention might encourage us, for instance, to generate and circulate public responses from groups like CCCC and CBW that stress the central role of BW within the diverse PWI of the future. It might also prompt us to partner (albeit in decidedly critical ways) with neoliberal sponsors such as the Lumina Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and others to document further our successes with race-conscious dwelling within the PWI. It might even inspire us to try capitalizing on the very recent mainstream discourse tying President Obama’s recent re-election to the increasingly diverse and global nature of the U.S. population. If groups such as CCCC or CBW could discuss the importance of race-conscious BW dwelling with the (admittedly neoliberal) U.S. Department of Education, thereby emulating recent actions of the Council of Writing Program Administrators in its own meeting with Arnie Duncan’s staff, then we might make the case that BW supports diversity in ways that will benefit the Obama administration’s educational agenda directly. Each of these strategies would stress convergence between national educational interests and the work of BW in ways that we have not yet fully explored or exploited.

We need to take advantage of our current moment, then, by thinking in race-conscious spatial terms about the future of BW space within the PWI. In particular, we need to recognize the important race-conscious dwelling work currently taking place within MSIthirdspaces and examine how this work directly challenges contemporary neoliberal thinking about the future of higher education. We also need to imagine ways to employ MSI-inspired race-conscious dwelling activity within our own BWthirdspaces—ideologically, pedagogically, materially, and rhetorically—in ways that can directly challenge neoliberal pressures to eliminate BW. And, finally, we need to make effective interest convergence arguments that can persuade PWI stakeholders that their interests and our BW interests align in ways that are profoundly important to our collective futures.
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Notes

1. HBCUs are funded by Title III, “Institutional Aid,” of the Higher Education Act (Gasman 23), receiving approximately $235 million during FY 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, “Title III Part B” n. pag.). HSIs are funded under Title V, “Developing Institutions,” and received approximately $150 million during FY 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, “Developing Hispanic-Serving” n. pag.). TCUs are funded under Title III, receiving just under $27 million in FY 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, “American Indian” n. pag.). Finally, AANIPISIs also receive federal Title III funding, obtaining about $13.5 million in FY 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, “Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian” n. pag.).

2. This is not to say, of course, that MSIs operate outside of the influence of neoliberalism: these institutions certainly face their own pressures to cultivate particular kinds of prestige and profit. (See Gasman, Baez, and Turner; Harmon; Merisotis and McCarthy). But these institutions have nonetheless held fast to their central race-conscious goals and missions, even in response to these pressures, in ways that are worth understanding and emulating.

3. See also Taylor; Taylor and Helfenbein; Sias and Moss.

4. See also Schroeder; Contreras, Malcom, and Bensimon.

5. See also the many informative chapters within Kirklighter, Cardenas, and Wolff Murphy’s volume on teaching writing in MSI contexts, especially Millward, Starkey, and Starkey; Ramirez-Dhore and Jones; Baca; Jaffe; Artze-Vega, Doud, and Torres.

6. See Kirklighter, Cardenas, and Wolff Murphy; Gasman, Baez, and Turner.

7. See also Deans.

8. I recognize that Lumina and other higher education foundations have been rightly critiqued for contributing directly to neoliberal pressures toward particular kinds of “accountability” (see Stuart). But, as I will articulate momentarily, MSIs possess the potential to work with Lumina and other similar foundations in decidedly critical ways.
9. I recognize that a number of contemporary BW scholars, including William Jones, Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu (see especially Representing the Other), Victor Villanueva (see especially Bootstraps; “On the Rhetoric”), Keith Gilyard (see especially Voices; “Basic Writing”), Deborah Mutnick, and others, have long been telling crucially important race-conscious stories about BW spaces past and present. I also recognize that other important BW work from the late 1960s and early 1970s from authors including Geneva Smitherman (see especially “God Don’t Never” and Talkin’), Harvey Daniels (see especially “What’s Wrong”), and Mina Shaughnessy (see especially “The Miserable Truth”) has also featured explicitly race-conscious stories of student access to higher education. However, these particular race-conscious stories have not frequently been referenced within contemporary accounts of how and why BW spaces are disappearing from the PWI.

10. For a useful critique of this type of colorblindness, see Kynard, “I Want To Be African.”

11. Lu engages in additional analyses of the power dynamics of language and literacy learning within some of her other most well-known articles: see especially “Conflict and Struggle,” “Living English Work,” and “An Essay on the Work of Composition.”


13. Canagarajah defines “codemeshing,” meanwhile, as the “the realization of translanguage in texts” (403)—that is, the ways in which individuals treat multiple languages and dialects “as part of a single integrated system” that also “accommodates the possibility of mixing communicative modes and diverse symbol systems (other than language)” (403).


15. See also Gabor; Pine.
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