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Storytelling in First Year Writing

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a history of hakawati, the Arabic storytelling tradition, as well as offering a recent reassessment of storytelling in contemporary culture and first-year writing pedagogies. Authors DeGenaro and Hakim first theorize storytelling (hakawati, specifically) as a means to empower multilingual learners, drawing on our mutual experiences at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. We then model storytelling as a research method for students by providing our own stories as context for two assignment texts that operationalize hakawati and storytelling to achieve common learning outcomes in first-year writing curricula.

Keywords: hakawati, storytelling, multilingual learners, audience awareness, knowledge transfer

Introduction

Storytelling has an enormous capacity for facilitating learning, teaching, sharing knowledge, and making information accessible. This holds particularly true in the context of multilingual learners. In this article, we would like to tell a story that shares our experiences demonstrating storytelling's immense power to empower multilingual learners to consider the prior knowledge, experiences, and language practices they bring to the classroom as relevant rhetorical strategies. Our mutual story begins at University of Michigan's branch campus in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, realizing the value of storytelling and its continued development through our individual teaching practices. University of Michigan-Dearborn (UMD) is a unique institution because while it is the size of a typical regional campus, it is a fully autonomous and *Open Words: Access and English Studies* is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal, published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by Colorado State University and Georgia Southern University. Articles are published under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs). ISSN: 2690-3911 (Print) 2690-392X (Online). Copyright © 1997-2019 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

degree-granting institution with a vastly diverse population who come from unique backgrounds. According to the University's self-published enrollment data, UMD serves a student body representative of Dearborn, Michigan's unique and diverse population, home to about 42% Arab-Americans and immigrants from the Arab world, primarily Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. If you drive down either of the major thoroughfares in Dearborn and adjacent Dearborn Heights, you will find ties to these places: advertisements in Arabic script, mosque minarets reaching above Warren Avenue, restaurants like Cedarland painted all green as an homage to the fine Lebanese cuisine served. Within many of these Dearborn spaces, you can hear the various dialects of Arabic mixing in with English colloquialisms, just almost drowned out by the Arabic music playing overhead. Dearborn is unlike the rest of Southeastern Michigan, and really, unlike almost everywhere in the world.

We are Dr. Anthony DeGenaro, instructor of multilingual students, and Lena Hakim, multilingual graduate student. We both have taught at Wayne State University, also located in Southeastern Michigan, where Lena is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. However, we first met at UMD, where Anthony was an adjunct instructor and Lena was a student and Writing Center consultant. Our previous shared campuses and love of creative writing and storytelling connect us across new institutions at new points in our careers as writing teachers. At UMD, our students and classmates were largely coming to the university from Arab American-populated high schools in Dearborn and the rest of Southeastern Michigan, or had recently completed international baccalaureate programs. Students there have uniquely diverse backgrounds and with them come their own unique experiences with languages, education, and writing. This is the context for our shared story about teaching and learning writing, and how stories create a rich narrative that highlights the necessity to implement writing and communication traditions, specifically the hakawati tradition, that support multilingual learners.

We argue that the hakawati tradition provides writing instructors a strategy through which they can empower and enrich the experience of multilingual students in first-year writing (FYW). The hakawati tradition implemented in FYW can allow students to consider their respective language experiences and skills as valid rhetorical strategies to be implemented into their individual writing ethos. We begin by first detailing the history of the hakawati tradition and what the tradition looks like in today's world in order to identify possible elements of the tradition that might be useful in the first-year classroom. Then, we move into an analysis of what the hakawati tradition specifically offers FYW multilingual learners, as well as writers of all language backgrounds in the FYW classroom. The oral storytelling tradition of the hakawati,

we argue, is a pedagogical activity and disposition that promotes audience awareness skills among writers, as well as introspective personal reflection. We believe that implementing oral and written storytelling assignments in the FYW classroom means students have an opportunity to learn how to draw on previous writing experiences and knowledge on communication to better inform their audience. We lastly offer model assignments based on each of our individual instructor experiences that incorporate written and oral storytelling that we believe may empower multilingual writers to become more informed and reflective communicators.

Hakawati: A History

The following section overviews the characteristics of the hakawati tradition, both in its historical and current form. Given the marginalization of Arab experiences and traditions, beginning with defining what the hakawati tradition is for instructors is an integral part of the conversation. Additionally, overviewing the history of the hakawati tradition in order to eventually identify its relevance towards multilingual learners in the writing classroom is important for three reasons. First, as instructors of increasingly diverse student populations, learning of representative cultural experiences that may inform some of our students' writing and communication practice should be an exciting and significant endeavor towards becoming more informed and supportive instructors to our students. Second, there are so few mainstream records of the history and description of the hakawati tradition that in order to have a sense of its application in FYW courses for multilingual students, it becomes necessary to describe the tradition. Lastly, to discuss the audience-awareness elements that the tradition provides, it is important to see how audience and kairotic decisions are a mainstay of the tradition throughout history. We begin with an overview of the history of the hakawati, tracing its significance within historical Arab culture and concluding with a discussion of current attempts at a mainstream revival in the Arab world and beyond. We round back by highlighting how throughout history, audience awareness and an understanding of the speaker's rhetorical toolbox are necessary characteristics among any hakawati.

Hakawati: Community Entertainment

Literally translated, hakawati means "storyteller": "Hekaye in Arabic means the story and haki means to talk. The one who talked and told a story was a hakawati" (Chaudhary, 2014). Historically, Arab villages oftentimes included a member who held

the position of community oral storyteller. According to “The Endangerment and Re-Creation,” the hakawati also took the position “of being the source of news and information in the community,” often becoming a “public figure” because of the hakawati’s informative position (Malabonga, 2019, p. 37). Shalabi (2019) discusses how historically in the public sphere, male storytellers would share to groups of other male villagers in “cafes and they roamed from village to village” reciting “epics...[and] heroics.” In “the private sphere”, women also took on the hakawati role, sharing to other women “stories that held values, that held lessons...folk tales that had women’s wisdom” (Shalabi, 2019). As evident in the history of the hakawati tradition, oral storytelling held a sort of “writing across the curriculum” ethos we strive for in writing courses: multiple speakers doing storytelling in multiple and transferable contexts. Moreover, hakawatis were integral in connecting members of the community together, as well as to their cultural and ethnic identity. Nasser (2006) in “Stories from under occupation: Performing the Palestinian experience” discusses how many of the hakawatis’ tales often related “stories of a glorious past buried deep in the memory of the listeners” in order to revive a “collective experience” (Nasser, 2006, p.22) among community members. Overall, at the heart of the hakawati’s role lies a similar significance regarding writing that instructors try to relate towards their students: to narrate information, news, stories, and entertainment in order to create a more informed and culturally-appreciative community.

Other scholars also highlight how at the heart of the hakawati was an understanding of audience awareness. Tabačková (2015) establishes the importance of the hakawati’s audience and the connection forged between storyteller and audience member, highlighting that “every hakawati needs both a story and a recipient for this story. Without the listener (or the reader) longing to belong to a story...the story would not be able to survive” (Tabačková, 2015, p.203). Furthermore, Semaan et al. (2015) discusses the necessity for the hakawati to possess a plethora of rhetorical strategies to keep the audience engaged. Often, the audience gathered in “the qahwe (coffee shop),” the parallel to the Greek Agora, to hear the town’s hakawati “recite stories and long tales” (Semaan et al, 2016, p. 99). The hakawati’s tales usually “included conflict, which served to deepen audience involvement” (Semaan et al, 2016, p. 98). The storyteller might draw out the story over periods of days “to keep the audience engaged as they...hear how the story developed?” (Semaan et al, 2016, p. 99). The conflicts in stories usually encouraged audiences to take “sides, experiencing the characters’ actions vicariously. Sometimes real fights broke out between listeners identifying with opposing factions in these imaginary conflicts” (Semaan et al, 2016, p. 98). Raven and O’Donnell (2010) underline that hakawatis had “the ability to create an emotional

connection with others, to educate, to communicate perspective, to enable others to learn and understand from the experiences of others” (Raven, 2010, p. 205) in a time period before technology touched Arab villages. Yet, as evident in the following section outlining the revival of the hakawati in the modern-day, the core of establishing a connection between audience and storyteller, as well as audience and culture, is always at the core of the hakawati tradition.

Hakawati: A Modern Revival

Many sources regard the decline of the hakawati as a result of the shift towards technology in the Arab world. Britannica (1998) discusses that “until the advent of broadcast media, the hakawati...remained a major fixture of Arabic-speaking countries” (Britannica, 1998). In a news article on hakawati revival in the Arab world, Chaudhary remarks that the global shift to technology resulted in hakawatis “being sidelined” in favor of other forms of entertainment now more readily available (Chaudhary, 2014). Individuals like Shalabi agree with Skieker that the hakawati tradition has died out due to oral storytelling on community platforms being taken on in different mediums, such as television. However, both individuals fail to see how the hakawati tradition is being revived in new spaces beyond coffee houses, from classrooms to festivals, where the Arab population believes that oral storytelling still serves the community.

Chaudhary remarks that the Arab world is currently seeing a revival of the hakawati in the form of hakawati “festivals”: “the hakawati is now reclaiming his pride of place.” In Abu Dhabi, a popular theatrical performance of oral storytelling put on by modern-day storyteller Yousef is described as “inspiring the next generation of Emiratis to appreciate and engage with their heritage” (Chaudhary, 2019). In this modern revival where oral storytelling has become a theatrical artform, connecting community members to their heritage remains at the core of the hakawati tradition’s characteristics. In Lebanon, Sewell remarks how “today, [hakawati] events” are reviving in parts of the Arab world “as public forum” in “Moth-like events” where individuals can share their experiences and stories with others around the community (Sewell, 2019). The Hakawati Project is taking a different approach, collaborating with “The Sundance Institute” to highlight “alternative narratives to the ones mainstream media amplifies” of how the Syrian War has impacted individuals. Additionally, instructors across the Arab world are also transforming the oral hakawati tradition into a multimodal experience. Semaan has turned oral storytelling into a technology-based art, describing “Digital storytelling...[as] a modern descendant of the ancient art of

storytelling” (Semaan et al., 2016, pp. 97) used to engross “students in each of the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking” (Semaan et al., 2016, pp. 98). Raven et al. (2010) highlight a classroom study in the UAE geared towards turning students into “digital hakawati” (p. 201) where instructors encouraged students to hear the stories of their family members and create digital narratives of their family’s history in order to increase a “national identity among Emirati students” (Raven et al., 2010 201). The researchers conclude that curating digital narratives pushed students towards “actively investigating social issues...by presenting their work in an interactive way to a wide audience using modern multimedia and web applications” (Raven, 2010, p. 205). Both works demonstrate how modern-day forms of empowering students to story-tell benefits all aspects of their writing skills, as well as empowering their cultural understanding. In the coming sections, we will demonstrate how the hakawati tradition further asks first-year writers to consider a development of kairos and audience awareness.

Hakawatis in First-Year Writing, Audience Awareness, and Multilingual Students

To be clear: every culture of language has storytellers. Given the characteristics of the hakawati tradition overviewed above, we believe that applying the hakawati tradition is one method to amend the obstacles in FYW that continue upholding singular structures of knowledge-making and communication, limiting the development of multilingual learners (Sewell, 2019). Having provided a robust and critical understanding of what the hakawati tradition is historically, we now continue by analyzing the benefits of adding the hakawati tradition into a FYW curriculum. Our goal is that instructors and scholars will be inspired to reconsider their current curricular designs to include more storytelling to achieve more inclusive practices in FYW classrooms, especially at learning sites that have populations of multilingual learners.

One of the main aspects of the hakawati tradition is the audience, as the audience is encouraged to come alive with the story and the feelings of the characters (Semaan et al, 2016). The hakawati tradition is rooted in the development of audience awareness and critical understanding of kairos in order to keep audiences engaged. To articulate why the hakawati tradition can be a valuable inclusion in FYW curriculum, we believe it necessary to first articulate why we need a better response for the development of students’ audience awareness skills. Scholars such as Zakaria and Mugaddam (2014) in “Audience Awareness in the Written Discourse of Sudanese EFL University Learners” agree that “the purpose of writing is to communicate with an

audience” (11-21). Zakaria and Mugaddam also highlight, however, that often, student writers only consider their instructor as an audience member, rather than considering beyond-the-classroom audiences as well (pp. 11-21). Furthermore, Liu and Gua (2018) in “A survey on the cultivation of college students’ audience awareness in English writing” highlight that writing studies does not focus enough on the development of students’ audience awareness, focusing more on grammatical and linguistic details. Moreover, in their study of students’ writing habits, Liu and Gua notice that students admit to focusing more on writing utilities rather than focusing on an emotional connection with their reader (Liu and Gua, 2018, p. 1736). Thus, in alignment with recurring research, writing classrooms can do more to help students develop audience awareness skills in order to be more well-rounded writers and thinkers.

Oral storytelling should therefore become a normalized genre for students to write in for them to better develop audience awareness. Among the benefits of the hakawati tradition is that it provides orators the opportunity “to create an emotional connection with others, to educate, to communicate perspective, to enable others to learn and understand from the experiences of others” (Raven, 2010, p.205). FYW courses that embrace the hakawati tradition offer an occasion for students to not only think more critically of the audiences they are writing to, but also encourages students, especially multilingual learners, to value linguistic practices beyond standard academic English and rote grammars. As students learn to construct their written stories, they should also be asked to take on the role of hakawati: present their research and writing in order to develop an understanding of audience awareness beyond only focusing on writing utilities. Asking students to construct a presented narrative, for example, in one assignment, by exploring their positionality in the world and sharing it with the class has the potential for students to consider genre awareness, audience, and reflect on self-positioning. Students have to consider how to best construct a narrative, story, or piece that ultimately does what the hakawati is trained to do: “keep the audience engaged” (Semaan et al, 2016 p. 99) at the same time as they “educate...[and] communicate perspective” (Raven, 2010, p. 205). Oral storytelling also allows students role-playing as their peers’ audience to practice rhetorical listening, as they listen carefully and consider how to respect other perspectives. If one of the FYW goals outlined by the WPA is the further development of students’ communication skills through writing (“WPA Outcomes”), then it only makes sense that students also consider how to respond to perspectives as well, a fundamental part of real-world and academic communication.

Additionally, we believe that the hakawati tradition is a prime communitive tradition to aid students in considering the value and applicability of their prior

communication and language skills. NCTE highlights the importance for FYW students to engage directly with the transfer of knowledge in “First-Year Writing: What Good Does It Do” (NCTE). Knowledge transfer is developed by first developing students’ metacognition skills (NCTE), which we believe storytelling provides a robust opportunity for explicit discussions on writing transfer and the integration of prior knowledge. The assignment texts we share in the following section are informed by DePalma and Ringer’s (2011) adaptive transfer framework, which they define as “the conscious or intuitive process of applying or reshaping learned writing knowledge in order to help students negotiate new and potentially unfamiliar writing situations” (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p.135). Like this theory of adaptive transfer, we see a similar limitation in how conversations around transfer of writing often stop at reuse. We share DePalma and Ringer’s assertion that the text is “simply a linguistic representation of the discourse-level organizational patterns that a writer has internalized” and that for L2 students “reading thus becomes a process of ‘code-matching’ wherein communication succeeds only if the writer and reader have similar expectations and commensurate codes” (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p.138). We believe *hakawati* offers a path towards what DePalma and Ringer call “‘reshaping’ prior knowledge in order to achieve adaptive transfer which is/can be dynamic, idiosyncratic, cross-contextual, rhetorical, multilingual, and transformative” (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p. 141). For example, Perez et al. (2021) highlight that students’ work on their own stories and empowering themselves with their voices in a first-year writing class can help students develop “agency...[and] cultivate increased self-awareness, confidence in their writing, and awareness of their cultural strengths” (2021, p. 627). More importantly, writing narratives “prompts reflection” (2021, p. 628) which can “promote transformative learning” (Perez et al., 2021, p.628). Therefore, offering students the opportunity to write their own stories within the classroom allows them to reflect both on their cultural and prior experiences, which can then be used to inform their individual writing ethos.

From the vantage point of an adaptive transfer, then, curricular designs adapting *hakawati* traditions open up better, more robust, and more accessible reflection for multilingual students to not only activate prior knowledge, but begin to transfer knowledge. FYW, often a core requirement for students regardless of language status, is already burdened with the responsibility of instruction oriented towards writing across the curriculum. The dynamic view of writing provided by this theory mirrors our impression of:

student writers are also likely to shift when discussing students' conscious or intuitive processes of reshaping learned writing knowledge in novel situations. Rather than viewing students as novice writers, adaptive transfer allows for students to be perceived as agents who possess a variety of language resources and a range of knowledge bases that they might draw on in each writing context (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p. 142).

As such, we can imagine students as capable storytellers but also participants in their own academic narratives. We might consider how storytelling is a recurring theme in conversations on transfer of knowledge with scholars such as Wardle, Beaufort, Robertson, and Taczak, or how adaptive transfer might influence an interpretation of Yancey's theories of reflection, but it all boils down to storytelling.

In the following section, we reflect on our own individual stories and how our shared ethos as storytellers informs our approaches to writing instruction. Then, we present writing instructors with two model assignments they can implement together or separately into any FYW syllabus. These draw on elements of the *hakawati* tradition to empower multilingual learners towards becoming both more audience aware as well as drawing on their personal writing and communication skills as rhetorical strategies.

Modeling Hakawati as a Method: Two Assignment Designs for Oral and Written Storytelling in FYW

Kan ya makan, fee kadeem al zaman - Lena's Story

My story begins in Metro Detroit, a hub of Arab America. I chose Metro Detroit to study writing as influenced by the local ecologies and cultural traditions of the area. However, evident from the FYW classes myself and my peers stepped into and taught, FYW curriculum in universities across the whole nation have yet to widely consider the rich rhetorical and literary traditions of the Arab world in the writing curriculum. FYW curriculums typically reflect and teach the writing and literacy conventions from canonized Greco-Roman traditions, instead of attempting to be informed by rich literacy and writing traditions of the members of its locale.

I began my education at a university known for its large Arab American population. Fellow peers and faculty commonly celebrated and respected the rich culture of the city, using the city to inform classroom discussions, assignments, and university events. Watching peers embolden themselves with their Arab backgrounds taught me to utilize the language practices of my Lebanese background. I began

implementing Arab traditions of writing and language: Arab words, sometimes with translation footnotes and sometimes without, popped up in many pieces I composed; narrative, or *hakaya* in Levantine-Arabic dialect, a common Arab communicatory tradition, became a common genre in written assignments, allowing me to explore my connection with the topic at hand. Experimenting with my second language and the traditions of my Arab ancestors led me to become a stronger and both more informed and more excited writer, and I realized I wanted more students who come from multilingual backgrounds to have a similar experience.

I am ultimately a byproduct of the *hakawati* tradition, an ancient Arab communicatory tradition that has imprinted oral storytelling and narrative sharing as a prime mode of communication, one that relies less on sharing perspective with an audience as a means of knowledge building and communal assembly. I am like many students across Michigan and the United States at large – my life is informed by my ethnic background. But with my knowledge of writing studies and communication, I became curious as to how one writing tradition of my local Arab American community might be applied to the local writing studies curriculum.

Lena's Assignment: The Student Hakawati

The assignment I describe asks students to consider how best to engage with audience members using writing, linguistic, and literacy skills they already possess and are also learning in the classroom. This project arrives in the middle of my FYW course at Wayne State University, and builds on a research argument essay. Drawing on the traditional research assignment that students are asked to write in class by considering their ethos as researchers, as well as how to communicate their research with their audience, the assignment sequence I provide here is in response to research that expresses a lack of audience engagement skills developed by students. As already discussed, students come to class with a wide range of writing skills but are often unsure of how to implement these previous writing skills with the research and rhetorical skills FYW teaches students. The following four-part assignment asks students to consider implementing existing writing and communication skills into a project that also develops audience awareness. The assignment is meant to take place before the major research project the majority of FYW courses have students construct.

In the *Oral Research Narrative*, students are asked to choose a research topic of their interest, or use existing research from previous written assignments. Instead of students writing with the instructor in mind, students are asked to compose their

research into an oral narrative meant to communicate the information to their peers, similar to the role of the hakawati. This differs from the traditional research presentation because students are asked to first reflect on what existing communicatory traditions they already possess or notice others around them possess. Moreover, many classes have students present their research to their peers only after they have typed their research into an essay. However, Zakaria and Muqaddam discuss how “to write to particular audience is far better to write with no audience in mind...writing programs should foster and enhance students’ ability to generate ideas, and organize and transmit information to the reader” (2014). Therefore, providing students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of writing for an academic audience, allowing them to first practice writing for their peers and learning to effectively “make assumptions of what the audience knows and what they do not” (Zakaria, 2014) can help to strengthen their consideration of audience when writing for distant academic audiences. Lastly, part of the reading asks students to learn about the hakawati tradition, thereby also diversifying their knowledge of different communicative traditions across the globe.

The Oral Research Narrative:

This project is a bit different than other “research essay and research presentations” that you have done in other classes because we will be flipping the order. This project asks you to first consider how you will construct your research findings for a close audience - your classmates! We will be drawing on the hakawati method to communicate vital information that we are interested in researching and investigating to our classmates by presenting your research findings to your classmates. Then you will reflect on your classmates’ response to your research presentation by considering how you can make your discussion more effective based on their responses and reactions.

Part 1: Pre-reflect and respond!

Watch Sally Shalabi’s discussion of the hakawati tradition - Link found here: https://youtu.be/9lh7_THPZP4. After watching, write a discussion post in which you reflect on the power of oral communication and storytelling: how can discussing with others help to enhance your connection with people? How might discussing with others about your research make you a more effective writer and communicator? How does the hakawati tradition in the Arab world

seem different from the way we share stories and information in the United States?

Then, think about how we are all hakawatis in our own ways - we are always sharing stories and information! What are some unique ways you communicate with others in your own life? What are effective methods you notice others around you use to discuss research and information that you want to adopt?

Part 2: Choose your research topic

Is there a topic that seems particularly interesting to you as a university student? Construct a research question that you would like to investigate through the research methods and research process lesson we have previously discussed. Compose an annotated bibliography of five sources on this topic. At the end, reflect on what new lens you would like to explore on this topic. Moreover, who is your audience - are you writing for an undergraduate journal? Are you writing for a conference presentation? Identify what that space is and predict who your readers will be. What is necessary to engage the readers of this genre? What makes you nervous about writing for this audience?

Part 3: Present your research to the class

Construct a research narrative where you aim to inform your classmates - an academic audience - about your research argument and findings. You may utilize the annotated bibliography you composed for Part 2, as well as any other scholarly and relevant sources you need to inform your audience about your research. As you are beginning to construct your research presentation, go back to your response for Part 1 and ask yourself what prior communication skills from yourself and those around you do you feel would be effective to utilize as you inform your audience.

Part 4: Reflect

After presenting and answering questions posed by your peers at the end of your presentation, answer the following questions:

1. How did presenting your research in front of a live audience enhance your understanding of writing for an academic audience? Did you feel you had to communicate information in different ways than you usually would when talking to a friend, for example?
2. Will you be changing anything about your research after receiving feedback from your peers?
3. What do you believe is now the importance of considering your audience when constructing research?

“Poets Don’t Wear Baseball Hats” - Tony’s story

I became a writing teacher by way of being a poet and, at first, that was a tortured shift. I foolishly thought in binaries: I couldn’t be a teacher, that would be a compromise. Poet or bust. A walking cliché, I remember a melodramatic session of introspection facing a sunset over the Pacific Ocean from a perch at Point Lobos in San Francisco, standing at the absolute edge of my world, telling some seagulls, “I didn’t get a poetry degree to become a teacher.” And yet, after finishing my M.F.A. (a program with no built-in teaching assistantship or emphasis on pedagogy) I ended up back in the Midwest, living with my parents, working at a nearby cafe. I’d become another cliché. I was hired as a manager under the auspices of my service industry experience in California to help the owner, who by her own admission was well out of her depth in the restaurant biz, train the high school-aged employees how to work. This was my first teaching practicum: substitute best practices on self-assessment for mop strategies in the bathroom, trade off generative end-comments on a rough draft for installing the virtue of calming a surly customer without sacrificing the dignity of the employee. It was brainless work, in the kitchen, at the counter, but it was rewarding with the staff as students. The highlights of any shift were those slow moments between afternoon and morning when the staff and I could talk stories, which began primarily with them seeking wild tales of California nights, but soon went deep into tales from all of our complex lives. One of the baristas was getting married, another’s parents had just divorced, and the owner of the restaurant became a grandmother to twins. Kim gave one of her kidneys to her twin sister, Melissa. We told a lot of stories in their place until they both returned happy and healthy, an unknowing family of hakawatis weaving tales between trips to the dish pit and walk-in freezer.

The real learning in the cafe did not happen in something resembling a workplace training session, infrequently as I “ran” them. Our boss, while well-

intended, was misguided in her thinking that the kids needed firm direction. On the contrary, they needed something that I would come to learn as mutual inquiry. At the time, though, I just thought it made more sense to talk to them like adults. Real learning or training doesn't happen as a series of hierarchies handing off doctrine. That's not how Ross, one of the young employees of the cafe figured out the best way to load the dishwasher. He got through trading concert stories with me during chance encounters in the kitchen while listening to Straight Outta Compton. He was a peer, and while he relied on me for certain information, the best way to meaningfully transfer that knowledge was through mutual respect, from which was born a mutual desire to find success and a best practice for getting a day's worth of soup, salad, and cheese off some plates. As a "manager" I felt that:

By embracing mutual inquiry, we gain at the very least a better understanding of what we warrant as belief-worthy; we gain also the humility that helps us to guard against such cynicism and doubt; very possibly, and more profoundly, we gain also the mutual respect and trust necessary to guard against misunderstanding, coercion, and violence. (Baker et; al, 2014, p.29)

Non-persuasion, valuing personal narrative, instruction vis-a-vis the subjectivities of learners, in a given context, was my approach to instruction at the restaurant. And it remained my approach to instruction when, at the end of summer 2015, I accepted a position as an adjunct instructor I'd applied to over the summer, wanting to do more with my terminal degree than make lattes. I would, instead, soon be teaching FYW at the University of Michigan Dearborn.

But the real story is this one: short and sweet, like a parable. The first weekend I lived in San Francisco I went on a walk with some fellow creative writers, also new to California. We walked, unknowingly, the exact route almost every tourist takes when visiting the city. We ate Cantonese, we saw a Pride parade, and we marveled at the majesty of the Golden Gate Bridge from the shore of the Bay in Ghirardelli Plaza. I stood with my back to the water, uncharacteristically wearing a Giants hat that was gifted to me as a going away present by my brother. My new friends and I took a picture. "Let's do another," I said, tossing the hat to the side, "Poets don't wear baseball hats."

Today, I can only find the picture of me wearing the hat. Today, I define myself—and by extension, students in my writing courses—not by what they aren't, can't be, or shouldn't be, but rather - by what they can. We begin to discover our

subjectivities from voice, and the best way to hear ourselves is by listening to the stories we share.

Tony's Assignment

In *The I-Search Paper*, Ken Macrorie (1988) introduces a genre that blends personal writing, narrative, and research; the result, as Macrorie says, is an essay that allows students to deploy their “natural curiosity” as opposed to their adherence to rigid correctness (p. 55). An I-Search essay builds a narrative around a central research question, one which is self-selected and tells a narrative about the finding of research or discovery of research literature. I believe that a successful I-Search should feature compelling storytelling that is engaging, reflective and productive for the author, and delivers some insights into the topic of their research and offers some metatextual conclusions about researching in general. Macrorie explains how this genre is useful: “in part, writing is designing or planning; in part, it’s watching things happen and discovering meaning” (Macrorie, 1988, p. 55). Seeing the value in an assignment that blends storytelling and research, Wayne State University adopted this assignment into their common curriculum for FYW, which was how I encountered it. As a poet and storyteller, an unknowing hakawati myself, this assignment was a dream to me. Typically, the I-Search is the second essay in a sequence of four: it comes after a shorter rhetorical analysis of an argumentative article that can be a popular or academic source, and is followed by a research essay where students utilize academic articles as secondary sources. The I-Search, among building confident authentic voices within my student writers as storytellers, sets up students for reflection and practice in using various academic research tools. Here is an example of the I-Search assignment text as it has evolved for me over the years:

I-Search Essay

This essay is a little different than Project One. Instead of being purely analytical, you are instead being reflective, both of the sources you’ll collect, and also your process in collecting them. A good way to think of this assignment, the I-Search, would be to consider it a “research narrative.” You’re going to tell me a story about the research you will conduct. Keep in mind, the sources you investigate for this essay, you can use in Project Three!

Ken Macrorie, in his book *I-Search*, describes this paper as a story where you search for answers and talk about the process of finding those answers. You'll write from the first-person perspective ("I" should show up many, many times!) to describe your research question, response to sources, and ideas about your subject as they develop.

Macrorie lists four parts of the paper (What I Knew, Why I'm Writing This Paper, The Search, and What I Learned), though, as he notes, this is flexible:

The Introduction (What I Knew and Why I'm Writing the Paper)

In the introduction you should:

- Present your research question (this will be like a thesis statement)
- State your topic:
 - Why you selected this particular topic (for example: it relates to your major, or a personal interest, etc)
 - What you know or think you know about the topic
 - What you hope to learn about the topic
- Your motivation for finding the answers to your question(s) or why you think this is an important question to answer

Your introduction may be one paragraph long but depending on your prior knowledge and interest in the subject, could also be longer. Think of the introduction as a section, not the first paragraph!

The Body of the Paper (The Search)

The bulk of your paper is the narrative (or story) of your search for answers and your reflection on this research process.

- In the beginning of the project, we will learn about the tools available to you through our library database. You will explore these library tools as you engage in library-based research on your topic.
 - Remember: this may be the first time you are using tools like databases to do research, describe the highs and the lows of the search!

There are three ways students generally plan the research process:

- You might pick a source you've already read for other assignments in this class (or other classes) and branch off your search from that starting point, or
- You might approach it more methodically, targeting specific journals or areas to locate specific articles on specific topics which might unlock further research questions for study, or
- You might just pull three totally random articles and use the narrative body of the essay to connect them, or talk about disconnects between them!

Then:

- Explain how you found your sources, be specific!
- Summarize each source and discuss how that source relates to your original research question
- Don't forget to discuss the reading / annotating / summarizing process alongside the information from those sources. This is a story about research as much as it is an informative essay!

The Conclusion (What I Learned)

This conclusion might be different than other essays and papers you've written because, as you'll come to learn, not every research question has a good answer. Not every research project is a success. In the I-Search, that's totally okay! The real goal, as the conclusion demonstrates to readers, is to offer a narrative accounting of the research process. We might not answer a specific research question, but we'll know some new things about how to conduct research in the future (or, at least, in the next project 😊).

Even if you are left with more questions than answers, even if you get no answers, you still told a great story, and that's worth writing about!

I recently taught a basic writing course that included a variation of the I-Search project that more specifically appeals to multilingual students (who predominantly made up that particular courses' enrollments). The theme of this basic writing course

was centered around language encounters both at school and at home and code-switching/meshing; as I described in my syllabus for the course: “while learning about the kinds of writing tools needed for academic writing and similar genres, we’ll also reflect on the different voices (codes) we adapt and toggle between (switch) in our daily lives.” Assignments and readings centered around concepts of language awareness, audience awareness, and code-meshing. The culminating assignment was a literacy narrative essay anchored by readings from Min-Zhan Lu’s ideas about languages, codes, and education, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s ideas about language and dialectical difference. While during the course of the semester I did not yet know this practice by the name *hakawati*, the convergence of storytelling and “academic essay writing” proved to be generative and fruitful for my multilingual students. This variation, which I called a “Critical Narrative Essay,” gets at the core goals of the I-Search with an explicit valuation of personal storytelling (as opposed to narrativizing the research process). Here is the assignment text:

Research starts with a researcher. In this instance, that’s you! Once you get further into your area of study at university, you will be expected to create new knowledge within your field. If that sounds like a daunting task, don’t worry - we’re here to practice.

Like writing, research is a process, not a thing that is ever “finished.” The goal for this project is for you to consider (via reflection, and by having an explicit awareness of how you do research) your ethos - or your own story - within a research area.

As we read in Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How To Tame a Wild Tongue,” her interest and expertise in the subject area is clear. We discussed how Anzaldúa’s ethos contributes to her discussion of literacy and learning and teaching. For this paper, we want to model Anzaldúa’s writing to establish our own sense of ethos, and more importantly, make our first statement in our new areas of study and/or interest.

What in your life has led you to this classroom? Why are you studying what you’ve decided to study? What old thing that has already happened is part of the voice you’ll use to state something that hasn’t been said before?

If we can be critical and reflective about our own narrative experience, like Anzaldúa, we can write about new things from positions supported by our experiences. Before we write a formal research-based argumentative essay

(that's Project Three), let's take stock of who we are, what we're writing, and how we're writing it.

Expectations:

1. Have clear thesis statements that answer the following questions (these might be different paragraphs or sections of your paper):
 - a. What is your area of interest?
 - b. What contributes to/supports/makes your ethos in this area?
 - c. Why is this your area of interest?
2. Write a first-person narrative that describes/explains your relationship to your interest that supports any or all of the above claims.
 - a. For example: Anzaldua is bilingual and lives in a bilingual area - she has a close relationship to writing about language usage.
3. Use your critical narrative to make a clear statement about/responding to/reflecting on your claims.
4. Have a clear research question that might end up being the subject of Project Three.
 - a. This does not have to be answered in this writing situation but must be proposed.

This assignment, like the I-Search, offers an explicit platform for storytelling and audience awareness, making it a prime example of how the *hakawati* tradition is already lurking within our pedagogy. In this “Critical Narrative Essay,” students talked about academic writing in a storytelling context, directly engaging with their audiences and wanting to present compelling narratives about their history with education, free of the constraints of English language requirements via code-meshing. During the writing process, peer review conversations and reflections on the continued drafting of these essays—particularly the first-person narrative aspects—were proving grounds for students to engage with their own languages (be that literal or figurative). Not only did students convey a complex understanding of the genres and conventions of academic writing, they also engaged in deeper, more thoughtful conversations about academic writing and the opportunities to use other codes to interrogate or subvert readers’ expectations in meaningful ways.

In these literacy narratives, students almost all talked about this as a key moment in their learning, not just of “standard academic English,” but all their time as students where they were thoughtful in explicit ways about their audience and eager

to please, if not entertain, their audience. They became, in the oral performance of their projects, hakawatis.

Conclusion, or Rather, The Start of the Next Story

The hakawati tradition from Arab history is a necessary rhetorical tradition in first-year writing as one step towards liberating writing studies from its “Eurocentric foundations” (Ruiz & Baca, 2017, p. 227). The tradition enriches the experience of multilingual students in FYW achieve communicative and rhetorical knowledge goals by allowing students to focus on developing rhetorical listening skills, critical awareness, and empathy towards audiences. We firmly believe that every student walks into the classroom with their own writing toolbox, and as instructors our job is to help them develop their prior and new writing skills together. Storytelling via the hakawati tradition allows students to reflect on both how to connect with their audiences, as well as how they may connect with their own writing skills to become more empowered writers. What we presented here is not only the background of a communicatory and literacy tradition that has thus far been sidelined in favor of other communicative traditions, but how scholars and instructors might work towards providing students a method to uncover their own linguistic backgrounds. Our goal is to continue this story and find more meaningful connections with the research our colleagues are doing in changing the way first-year writing is understood by working beyond the euro-centric models of writing programs.

As we say, every story starts somewhere; all it needs are the writers excited for the unfolding narrative.

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