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### **Multilingual Epicenters: First-Year Writing and the Writing Center as Critical Sites of Multilingual Sustainability for Language-Minoritized Students in Higher Education**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines pedagogical and administrative practices to undo the harm that colonial institutions have caused to racialized and language-minoritized students. We focus our discussion on two sites of learning and potential transformation, the First-Year writing classrooms and the Writing Center in the U.S. multilingual epicenters of Houston, Texas, and Queens, New York. As we share discussions of our own pedagogical practices and reflections, we purposefully contend with the questions of multilingualism *for whom and how?* In *what context, and site of learning?* And *“towards what justice?”* (Lee & Alvarez, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2018). In grappling with the question of “how to provide access and empower” those categorized as multilingual students, we concretely ask what labor is necessary to sustain multilingualism in ways that centralize the ways of knowing, languaging, and envisioning of racialized and language-minoritized students. We argue that higher education practitioners’ attunement to the language and literacy practices of racialized communities must be both conscientious of how writing practices, histories, and positionalities can be (and have been) flattened in sites of education, and how colonial English-only monolingual ideology and other institutional policies pathologize them.

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### Introduction: First-Year Writing and Writing Centers as “Remediation” Systems in Writing Education

The conceptualization of writing education as a site of skill acquisition and remediation has long been established in the intersecting fields of Rhetoric and Composition (Kynard, 2013; Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). As we have discussed elsewhere (Lee & Alvarez, 2020), the idea of writing as a fixed “skill” to obtain, refine, and monitor has resulted from the history of teaching writing, formulated for specific bodies imagined as “in need” of this form of “fixing,”—first, white men attending Harvard University, the population for whom universities were designed for (Brereton, 1995; Wilder, 2013). These formulations of teaching writing have long been tied to nationalistic and racial-stratifying projects, by way of determining who must acquire writing as “a” fixed language. Such racialized metrics of writing have obscured language-minoritized communities’ critical and culturally sustaining contributions to (re)*doings* of literacies, with detrimental effects on how we continue to define, research, and practice writing education, as Carmen Kynard (2013, 2018) has forcefully demonstrated (also see Lathan, 2015; Mao, 2006).

And while collectives of BIPOC students and scholars have led institutions of higher education to recognize our right to a richer and more equitable writing education (Kynard, 2013), racialized ideologies about the teaching of writing continue to permeate curricula and practice. As Do and Rowan (2022) highlight, the rise of translanguaging—a language theory and disposition meant to cultivate linguistic pluralism in the writing classroom—has ironically decentered different ways that students are racialized and experience multilingual practice. To this extent, even BIPOC-led demands for linguistic justice, such as the 1974 Students’ Right to Their Own Language (STROL), have been dismissed or “adapted” in ways that do not fully capture or welcome writers’ varied ways of language practice (Smitherman, 1995). More so, as Kinloch (2005) has critically posed, policies such as STROL have often ignored the *doings* of classroom practice. As Kinloch explains, “professional documents that seek to affirm student differences in dialects and language patterns must consider the work that occurs inside and outside of the classrooms as well as the work of literacy education in general” (p. 87). That is, writing education cannot ignore how the teaching of writing—in practice—shapes orientation to and policies of writing.

Therefore, while perhaps the terms of *what writing gets assigned* and *to whom and how* have changed, the dominant culture of writing as that of a system of surveillance remains. Specifically, this system is extended by way of several monolingual-oriented

metrics and assessments systems, generally introduced in the first-year writing course and reinforced through other sites for writing “support,” such as the writing center, center for academic support, and, in some cases, still, “developmental and remediation” and other required writing courses. Writing Centers, for instance, “function within a tapestry of social structures, reproducing and generating systems of privilege” (García, 2017, p. 32). The dominant white-centric, monolingual-oriented discourse of “academic” writing helps to shape and foment “the construction of master narratives, narratives that define students’ values, goals, and epistemologies, and that perpetuate power relationships and subject positions” (Bawarshi & Pelkoski, 1999, p. 46). In this manner, writing education systemically participates in the ways in which institutions can (and do) reproduce a deficit and exoticizing view of students for whom multilingual practice is an everyday way of knowing and *doing* in our world.

So how might we sustain students’ multilingual practices in a system designed to fail them? How might we move toward linguistic justice in ways that do not get co-opted in the service of populations who have already had historical access to these support systems? How might we reaffirm that certain principles of linguistic justice are about rights, not only desired and needed changes? In “Justice is a Lackey,” Leigh Patel (2018) warns that the pursuit of justice can be “intertwined [with injustice]” (p. 105) when following the colonial metaphor and temporality of the “narrative of linearity, a knowledge project for maintenance of a stratified settler society” (p. 106). To this extent, Patel calls for a shift away from such colonial onto-epistemologies. First-year writing classrooms and writing centers are the very places where justice and injustice get intertwined for language-minoritized students—sites often conceived within the educational boundaries of “remediation” and “multilingualism” as deficit or exoticism. Yet, their institutionalized status and space has the power to allow us to transform the culture and discourse of writing as well as multilingualism. Sustaining language-minoritized students’ rich and critical multilingual practices then necessitates a move beyond valuing their often-overlooked creative labor and must wreak havoc with coloniality and its continued harm in our monolingual-oriented writing sites.

Conscientious of institutional harm on language-minoritized students, we purposefully look to answer the questions of multilingualism *for whom and how?* In *what context, and site of learning?* And “*towards what justice?*” (Lee & Alvarez, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2018). We concretely ask, what labor is necessary to sustain and centralize language-minoritized and racialized students’ multilingual ways of knowing, languaging, and envisioning without following the colonial onto-epistemologies? We argue that higher education practitioners’ attention to racialized communities’ language and literacy practices must be both conscientious of how writing practices, histories, and

positionalities can be (and have been) flattened in sites of education, and how monolingual ideology—rampant throughout the teaching of writing—and other institutional policies pathologize them. We pose that in centralizing the variedly rich and complex language and literacy practices of language-minoritized and racialized students, we sustain our commitment to our communities, who extraordinarily forward multilingual practice as a livelihood (Alim & Paris, 2017; Baker-Bell, 2020; Love, 2019)—the labor necessary to reimagine educational spaces.

### **Monolingual Construction of Multilingual Students**

The monolingual and colonial constructions of multilingual students, especially language-minoritized students, remain a problem in our multilingual epicenters of Queens and Houston. At Queens College (QC) and University of Houston (UH), both designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI), student populations reflect the city's racioethnic and linguistic heterogeneity at large. With 133 countries of origin and 96 named languages at QC (QC-OIE), and 145 countries at UH and 145 languages in the Houston metropolitan area (UH Institutional Research; US Census Bureau) represented, our students bring rich histories, experiences, and knowledges of meaning-making that constitute the dynamic sociolinguistic landscapes of our locales.

Students at our institutions are indeed branded and “celebrated” as “diverse,” but their language and writing practices continuously face the English-only colonial lens. Our students express that their writing is often evaluated as “unclear” or “confusing,” rather than critical, rich, or insightful. Equally common in our classrooms are stories of the societal, educational, and familial pressure on “mastering” English, and ensuing sense of ambivalence, disconnection, or even loss towards named heritage language practices (Tseng, 2021). We too, as experienced bilinguals, still sometimes find ourselves questioning the complexity of our rich language practices, and recall accepting labels that detracted from our experienced bilingualism: “Not fully bilingual; not super fluent; I learned English in school; I thrive in Spanglish” are all too common phrases in our livelihoods.

Our students' experience of multilingualism has yet to be fully recognized in their own terms as the scholarly discussion of the “linguistic” parameters of what constitutes multilingualism has been dominated by colonial ideology. Colonial approaches view language as a separate, homogenous, discrete entity and decontextualized skills, with monolingualism as a communicative norm (García & Solorza, 2020). The Eurocentric monolingual ideal approaches multilingualism

“additively,” simply the sum of multiple individual languages, rather than dynamically (Sánchez & García, 2022). This orientation and its language standards then view multilingual students’ language practices as monolithically and monolingually conceived, rendering multilingualism and multilingual students as “new” phenomenon and populations always “in need of” (academic) language, or even *languageless* (Dovchin & Lee, 2019; García & Solorza, 2020; Rosa, 2016). Yet, the working of colonial ideology is not “new” as shown by American Indian education’s elimination of Native languages, allegiance to the system of schooling, and the destruction of Native practices among Indigenous students (See Spring, 2001). While the discourse of students in multilingual epicenters is markedly different from the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ boarding schools, the framework of forced assimilation is eerily similar. This way, *who is* multilingual is imagined and constructed through a colonial, monolingual lens, and multilingual practitioners get assessed, exoticized, and/or excluded through this very lens.

More recently, BIPOC scholars have cautioned on the erasure and homogenization of language-minoritized students’ variedly complex ways of being, knowing, and *doing* language, whose language practices get harmfully evaluated in connection to perceived racial categories, and vice versa (Flores & Rosa, 2015). As Alvarez (2018) has critically contended, the term *multilingual students* (and *multilingual writers*, by extension), itself “has become a rather large umbrella term for a body of students contributing a diverse range of writing perspectives, practices, and expectations to the writing classrooms” (p. 343). In fact, the attention to the specific histories, practices, and experiences of each language-minoritized community is at the center of April Baker-Bell’s (2020) call for Black linguistic justice. Baker-Bell (2020) emphasizes the need to “interrogate and examine the specific linguistic oppressions experienced by linguistically marginalized communities of color and account for the critical distinctions between their linguistic histories, heritages, experiences, circumstances, and relationships to white supremacy” (p. 18).

Indeed, raciolinguistic assumptions about and evaluations of language practices, as part of its colonial ideology, are not equally imposed on all students *viewed* as multilingual. For example, Black and African American communities are often detracted from the *multilingual imaginary*, dissociated from the multilingual paradigm, and Black students in our anti-Black society continuously face the double-edged sword of experienced multilingual practice (Baker-Bell, 2020; Kynard, 2013; Love, 2019). As Walcott (2018) critiques, the colonial logics and structures as shown by institutional color-blind terms and thoughts such as “diversity” erase unique Black bodies and struggles, and therefore, reinforce anti-Blackness. The higher education institutions’

rhetoric of inclusion, Walcott poses, “does not fundamentally question the foundational arrangements that have produced the institutional and structural conditions of contemporary life,” and thus, remains merely as performative gestures towards social justice (p. 92). Patel (2018) too critically warns against ubiquitous yet facile language of justice that does not challenge and disrupt the settler colonial logics, as we have noted earlier. Patel argues that “to intervene on facile uses of justice, it is necessary to begin with a grounding in the foundational logics and structures that stratify, erase, and spectacularize different populations in distinct ways for a common purpose of domination: coloniality” (p. 102).

As this special issue asks “how to provide access and empower” those categorized as multilingual students, we join our fellow critical language and literacy scholar-educators in “reclaiming and reimagining a radically different vision of education” (Paris, 2021, p. 372), and redirect the question: How can we upend the colonial logics that construct and stratify “multilingual” students and their bodies through a monolingual lens, and the institutional structure that perpetuates and maintains such logics (de los Ríos, Martínez, Musser, Canady, Camangian, & Quijada, 2019)? And how can we sustain the variedly rich language and literacy practices of language-minoritized students and communities to work towards equity and justice (Alim & Paris, 2017; Baker-Bell, 2020)? As Paris (2021) critically echoes Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2020) discussion of racial capitalism, “[T]here is no ultimate vision of racial justice or liberation (education or otherwise) within capitalism or ongoing settler colonialism: As such, increased access to the system as it is cannot continue to be the primary goal of the strength-based pedagogical work” (p. 372). Working to sustain linguistic and rhetorical richness and dynamicity of our students’ multilingualism then calls for laboring against the dominant white-gazed, colonial, and monolingual-oriented language that is always present in what we do as literacy educators.

In envisioning equity and justice for language-minoritized students and communities, we propel ourselves into the work where students’ language and literacy practices are centered and sustained to generate change beyond the colonial structure and logics, while conscientious of students’ own lived experiences and histories as language users. This work must identify how the dominant English-only, monolingual ideology works across the networks of writing ecologies, including how it erases the complexity within our language-minoritized students’ lived experiences and literacies. This anti-colonial praxis also means contending with the colonial matrix and cultivating alternative paradigms and spaces of doing language and writing for language-minoritized students, mindful of what potential injustices this work is intertwined with (Patel, 2018). Below, we discuss our own labor in FYC classrooms



and a Writing Center to cultivate and sustain a space that centers our language-minoritized students' multilingualism.

### **Sustaining Multilingualism in FYC Classrooms**

Our labor to sustain language-minoritized students' multilingual practices started from redefining, reorienting, and reimagining language and writing in FYC classrooms and beyond, away from the white-gazed, monolingual perspectives (Wan, Lee, & Alvarez, 2023). Conceptualizations of language and writing are often communicated through policies and structures of writing programs. Language policy statements such as “a Statement on Linguistic Pluralism” (Mihut, 2019) or student learning outcomes often set the writing program's tone and stance towards language and literacies and can guide instructors' pedagogy (Watson & Shapiro, 2018), as they also extend a language and culture about writing and its instruction.

At the same time, having a statement in the official document in and of itself does not guarantee a culture that centers and values students' multilingual practice, as Kinloch (2005) rightly critiques. After all, it is the everyday *doing* of language that shapes and structures our relations, histories, and experiences with language, and vice versa (Kynard, 2013; Sánchez & García, 2022). In our classrooms, we have continuously reformulated the “statement on linguistic pluralism” to begin the conversation with students about their varied experiences and practices of different named languages and literacies. This process then continues into a semester-long reflection, inquiry, and engagement with issues of inequities and inequalities in multilingual lives. Throughout the semester, we (Eunjeong and Sara) revisit the statement multiple times as an anchor point to further reflect on our lived experiences of language and literacies.

Such reflections have been fundamental in our and our students' anti-racist reading and writing praxis. In Eunjeong's class, students collaboratively build on a document called, “Our commitment to anti-racist reading and writing practices” where they formulate what anti-racist reading and writing means to them and how they practice this literacy. Students read, watch, research, and reflect on inequities surrounding their own and their communities' multilingual lived experiences, including the intersection of language, identity, and racialization (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Simultaneously, Eunjeong and her students discuss how we can language beyond harm, and towards justice. These examples range from “love our language and ourselves and each other as we are,” to not assuming the person's language proficiency based on the perceived phenotype or last name that the colonial ideology assumes, to reading for the meaning, not for the “correctness” based on their individual

understanding of the standardized or white mainstream English, to not representing their own and their communities' knowledge from a deficit lens. Each of the commitments that the students offer is grounded in their own lived experiences of language and literacies—as a racialized bilingual, a language broker for their families, or the only person of color in the classroom, neighborhood, or at work. But importantly, such reflection also amplified opportunities for students to reckon with how their own language practices and anti-racist endeavors also vary, intersected with their positionalities and experiences. Eunjeong and her students revisit and revise both a “Statement on Linguistic Pluralism” and this document, before or after engaging with the course materials for the day, peer reviews, and writing workshops, making it an interactive and ongoing endeavor. This cyclical praxis has helped Eunjeong and her students to not only understand varied experiences of language and literacies, but also theorize what being anti-racist languageers entails *for whom* and *how*, while reinforcing the conceptualization of language and literacies, including writing, as *doing*.

This reflexivity is possible in part because of the centrality of our language-minoritized students' lived experiences in our class. To sustain students' multilingual practices, we must labor the *centering of* our students' meaning-making, and ways of doing and being in the world. And, of course, this understanding extends to how we place our language-minoritized students and communities' doing of language at the core of our curriculum and assessment practices.

Recently, Sara has focused on centralizing the extraordinary labor of sustaining multilingual language and literacy practices, while also forwarding the full extent of her multimodal and multilingual practices in all capacities. Students in Sara's classes—regardless of the course designated theme—engage texts in multimodal forms, in their majority guided and led by BIPOC researchers, educators, journalists, and media content producers who often examine how *doing* and *acting* as self-identified multilingual and immigrant-generation individuals requires extraordinary labor in a monolingual and anti-Black society. For instance, students will read about how a well-paid job in New York City is that of a certified translator, yet very few BIPOC communities, *for whom* this is an everyday occurrence, become eligible for these positions. This has become a more dire and complicated need amidst COVID-19 (Chung, 2021).

Students often then discuss matters of language access. For example, students share an instance (or many) in their lives in which they, from a young age, translated for a family or community member in a place of crucial concern, say a medical office, hospital, social security office, or immigration attorney for free, at no cost to the city that taxes them and our communities, because of the insufficient number of translators



and translation services—when, by way of rights, the city should provide this service. These critical and mind-boggling conversations highlight how injustice is intertwined with justice in the students’ multilingual lives. Students often have (as they should) learned to take pride in having the capacity to support their families and communities with translation, but have also realized the toll it takes on them and their family relationships (Alvarez, 2017; Orellana, 2016), let alone that this labor is often supposed to be remunerated for access and best support possible. Because this navigation often weighs heavy on the minds of students in Sara’s classes, and Sara’s mind, she also implements a systemic approach that seeks to dismantle monolingualism from the inside while pushing forward the joys and rights granted by way of their bilingual practice.

Bilingual practice also consists of the pieces, parts, and emotions tied to language, and cultural practice, as well as modalities that multilingual practitioners select in their everyday communication. For this reason, Sara works along with students to capture the full extent of her bilingual educator practice by drawing on many emojis, gifs, and embodied multimodalities that animate and best communicate her ideas. Sara constructs syllabi, emails, course memos, and students’ messages in ways that capture this multilingual practice. And this openness and critical labor (and the research the class reads about it), is one that students respond to with ease. For example, it is not uncommon for students in Sara’s classes to now send Sara emails that have emojis and language expressions they feel comfortable with, and that fully capture the extent of their multilingual practice, including savvy jokes about the strikethrough function in the editing of alphabetic-based writing. What is important to highlight here is that students are joyfully amplifying their multimodal and multilingual practices, as they construct their college-student identities and communicative practice. Students are not *playing* to win or defy the rules of the game, as some colonial logics might seek to explain. Rather, students are fully designing their own multilingual imaginaries and selves as college students.

The capacity to reimagine and reconceptualize language and writing beyond what the institution sets as legitimate” requires creative, critical, and conscientious thinking and understanding of what language is and does, *for whom and how* in our everyday and pedagogical spaces. But “creative” does not mean “anything goes,” or this endeavor should not overlook the very labor that is involved in the lived experience of knowledge. Arguments rationalizing logics of now they “want for everything to go” are part of the colonial logic that flattens the very labor and different differences in multilingual practice and multidimensionality. Particularly considering Patel’s (2018) point of how a conceptualization of “justice” itself can be problematic

when understood as “linear progression,” creative and expansive labor for sustaining multilingualism necessitates keen awareness and praxis that understand the harm that institutions continue to bring upon, yet remain indifferent to (Dumas, 2018). In other words, pursuing and expanding the alternatives must attune to who is doing language, how, under what conditions towards what goal, and how this languaging sustains language-minoritized students and communities’ multilingualism, away from the colonial logics and structures.

### **Writing Centers and Conditions of Labor Against the Colonial Logic**

In addition to other writing “support” sites, writing centers operate as yet another “particularized mode of control” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5) within the colonial structure of institutions. Often formulated as the “fixers” of students and their writing, writing centers reinforce monolingual writing practices and push students, often those with complex linguistic histories, to make a choice of whether or not to adopt so-called standard or academic English. Indeed, the idea that student writing improvement is so easily and linearly attainable with writing center support fits right into the colonial metaphors of “development” and “improvement.” Anything is individually attainable, you only need “the effort,” so students only need to carve time out of their schedules, at the expense of everything else in their lives—a deeply troubling misconception thoroughly challenged by Villanueva (1993), Gilyard (1991), and Young (2004) among others. This way, writing centers, and institutions in general, continue to communicate to students that seeking help and/or exposing themselves to a tutor will result in better writing. In Spanish, this can be described as something being “al alcance,” or, within reach or outside of one’s reach. Yet, the responsibility to do “better” often relies on the student, rather than the people and entities who supposedly have a commitment and power to cultivate an equitable educational experience. More so, for many students, is writing that is “acceptable” to the white gaze ever really attainable—especially when “acceptable” often changes from professor to professor?

In writing centers, it often becomes clear that intellectual pursuit is disconnected from the educational project of humanization (Paris, 2021). Marco has often found it shocking how acknowledging students, by welcoming them into the Center, asking them how they are doing, offering them water or a piece of candy (or Oreos, which can be consumed by most people on campus), has been seen as an act so out of the ordinary. Students’ expectations are often such that they are greeted and asked what they want to *work* on, the common responses to which include: “I just want to make it better;” “I want to fix my grammar;” “My teacher says I need a lot of help,”

or the common bodily response, to sit back in apparent defeat while a tutor engages with you and your work—the result of a lifetime of not meeting “writerly” expectations. These expectations, which we argue are colonial in nature, necessitate a holistic anticolonial response, to move away from “good writing” at all costs to writing that is *en todas nuestras manos*. So how do we, in our positions of privilege, facilitate access (and to a certain extent, excellence) for students? How can we position the work, support, help, and love that Writing Centers can provide within reach of our students?

### **Writing Centers as Multilingual Sites of Rhetorical Sustainability**

Centering students’ embodied multilingualism in the Writing Center means disrupting the colonial practices of higher education and writing studies by refusing to maintain monoglossic ideology. Lape (2020) writes about holistic tutoring practices, or “a specific kind of ‘informed flexibility,’ [that] can help writers negotiate the writing process, global writing concerns, and sentence level issues” (p. 37). In this regard, while Writing Centers at HSIs can and must implement multilingual-oriented approaches to writing, such as co-writing practices, anti-racist writing, and/or agency informed writing, much of these approaches are possible when the institution, in addition to the Writing Center, values students’ multilingual practices and lived experiences. As Reynolds (2004) describes, identities “take root from particular sociogeographical intersections, reflecting where a person comes from and, to some extent, directing where she is allowed to go” (p. 11). As a writing center director who is Latino, grew up speaking Spanish, and has a history in the college as an undergraduate student, Marco draws on these biographical intersections for the benefit of students seeking tutoring at the college and to make sense of their journeys as writers. His face then becomes crucial to space-making at the center (see Denny, 2010, p. 55).

Entering the directorship position, Marco wreaked havoc with exclusionary practices. Marco stopped the Center’s surveillance of students through a strict protocol about what is not allowed in the space. “No eating and No loitering” was the only large display of “policy” in the space. Informally, conversations that were not related to tutoring were not allowed. It was also not uncommon to hear staff formerly trained by the previous Writing Center leadership asking students to “speak or write in English.” Students were expected to display a college persona who was fully dissociated from the social and economic demands of a fast cosmopolitan living, where time and opportunities to connect with people are limited, and multilingualism is in high demand. Here, we want to note that our understanding of the limitations

this writing site and culture poses on students comes from but is not limited to our own experiences as students and scholars. Marco and Sara are QC undergraduate alumni, but the three of us as researchers and educators understand the demands on our students: in most cases, they attend school full-time, have part-time and full-time jobs, and family and community responsibilities. A writing site that communicates to students what they cannot do, including grabbing a snack or a meal while they learn, simply ignores the sociomaterial conditions of students and centers the settler colonial logics.

Marco also removed the students' attendance policy. In the past, the QC Writing Center kept a list of students who had missed appointments by the front desk computer. Updated quotidianly, a student's name in bold meant that the student was no longer able to make tutoring appointments and would be automatically denied an appointment. Once a student's name was up on the list, it meant they had less opportunity to request an appointment before being barred from the Center's services. Accessibility was denied purposefully by "foundational logics and structures that stratify" (Patel, 2018, p. 102). Additionally, per the previous directorship, students were expected to offer a "legitimate" rationale for their missed or late appointment. For decades, the Writing Center functioned on this culture of fear, English-Only, and severe penalty for missed appointments.

In addition to trying to codify student-centered practices, Marco designed a mission statement and cultivated a more collective environment in which all Writing Center practitioners could discuss important research findings about writing support, and problem-solve issues they identified in the Center's everyday happenings. For example, during bi-weekly meetings, Marco discussed with staff how error-correction was not the focus of the Center, and that students should be encouraged to speak and write in the languages they felt most comfortable and supported. Accordingly, Marco prioritized hiring staff that can communicate in languages other than English. Marco offered a re-envisioning of the Center's purpose: that staff meets students where they are, that tutoring sessions functioned as collaborative writing opportunities, and that we ask students if they want to read their work to us, but we do not demand they read to us. Marco also established a policy in which the Center had a responsibility to work with students on *reading* as well as writing, that these two literacy practices were synergic, and that reading in writing centers had the tremendous opportunity to support students in their learning practices (see Carillo, 2017). This simple change seemed a revolutionary task since reading had, for decades, been separated from writing center work at QC and had eventually been outsourced to a single ESL tutor with no formal training in language acquisition or reading tutoring.

Marco's approach to open the space to many different student populations depended on his capacity and practice to be present—to welcome students with open arms, to remember names, and to codify cultural and religious practices in students' everyday lives. For example, thanking religious Muslim students with a nod and a hand over his heart to convey mutual respect, one of the many practices Marco had learned growing up in Queens, has made all the difference. He understood that cultivating openness was not about simply supporting the document, text, or idea the student brought to the Center, but instead about those moments of writing. As García (2017) reminds us, writing centers can be sites “of place, meaning, and knowledge-making, the writing center is about interactions and encounters, co-existing histories and trajectories, and is always in the process of being made” (p. 48). Today, this is what the Writing Center is working towards—a multilingual academic, generative, and critical support and anti-racist space.

Similarly, Marco and writing tutors protect, treat, and cultivate their own and students' multilingualism as an everyday practice and lived experience, in culturally grounded and interpersonal ways, not some exploitative phenomenon in the service of literacy. The tutoring session includes communication outside and related to the assignment. In the languages they share beyond Englishes, students speak with tutors, show their writing, or at times, pictures of their pets, to tutors, and take breaks with tutors. Tutors prioritize the students' personal lives, at times waiting for them to take pressing phone calls—all the while both try to make sense of an assignment that an instructor designs and grades. This vibrancy is what makes writing centers in multilingual epicenters so dynamic, so necessary. In this sense, writing centers can serve as a focal point for dynamic languaging on college campuses; critical awareness, learning, being and living can happen in spaces that help to recognize and center students' rights to their own languages.

The tutoring dynamic is often framed as a lower-stakes encounter, as opposed to more high-stakes encounters such as speaking in class or visiting a professor during office hours. But a student visiting a writing center can still experience the interaction as a high-stakes encounter, especially if there are communication challenges between student and tutor (often, a tutor who is themselves a student). Whereas an English as a Second Language framework frames the discourse as students needing to learn a second language that is also the dominant language of the academic discourse, a multilingual framework frames the discourse as students, having full possession of their languages, have, know, and understand how to communicate their own sense-making of assignments. But Writing Center Directors, tutors, and teachers are the ones who have the position, time, and space to lead this way of *doing* and practicing

languages and literacy learning. This is why we need to reframe writing centers as multilingual sites of rhetorical sustainability. Sites that are outside, but also so deeply embedded within, traditional educational discourses. Sites that offer us the potential to disrupt monolingual rhetorics.

Working through rhetorical sustainability necessitates deliberate refusal (Grande, 2018) to participate in monolingual-oriented metrics and assessment systems: to stop, pause, and sabotage racist and exclusionary writing dynamics. At QC, this would seem to almost be a moral right, as faculty and staff members are union members with varied job stabilities, positionalities, and privileges. Perhaps this is not a random characteristic of this site of teaching, but rather a sign that there are multiple agents actively striving for rhetorical sustainability. Rodriguez (2019) argues that deliberate refusal can work to “unmask seemingly benevolent relations and the function of affect in creating institutional buy-in...[creating] space for resistance to incorporation while simultaneously opening space for us to turn toward possibility” (p. 6). More and more, Marco finds himself refusing to engage with extra work that removes him from direct contact with students. What might it mean to respond to a racist educator who did not know their students? To tell them that they were the ones who needed decolonial *remediation*—slow, step-by-step help undoing decades of structural and historical racism? What would it mean to support students in getting to say no to those assignments, to challenge assignments and rubrics that sustain misguided notions and practices about language and literacy learning? To weaponize protocol and use it against the colonial legacy of higher education and writing studies? Maybe rhetorical sustainability in the writing center that truly helps students and faculty, an overwhelming majority of whom are part-time, contingent faculty, works towards bringing in the conversations that are taking place between students and making professors aware of what is linguistically occurring across campus, across disciplines.

### **Implications**

As we reflect on our work of sustaining language-minoritized students’ multilingual meaning-making practices, we pause to remember the critical point that Dumas (2018) offers us, scholar-educators and people who can (and do) shape and shift the narrative, namely how the very terms, imaginations, and doing of racial justice work in education yet falls short in challenging the conditions of Black suffering—that is, the world that is built upon anti-Blackness, against Black freedom where Black suffering continues to be met with indifference. Dumas (2018) keenly explains, “There is no social justice



research or remedy to end [Black suffering],” and therefore, urges scholar-educators to “refuse and exceed what can be done, what has always been done, through education reform” (p. 42-43). In this sense, we must reckon with how the labor of sustaining language-minoritized students’ multilingual practices may work in ways that erase and contribute to Black suffering. That is, this work must also refuse and reject the colonial logics and metaphors of linear and monolithic trajectories of progress and success that flatten different bodies and their struggles and assume homogeneity (Grande, 2018; Patel, 2018). Concurrently, we should reimagine different possibilities of sustaining multilingualism that adamantly cultivate, amplify, and reimagine the possibilities for our Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities. Above all, it should centralize the well-being of students at the margins, and yet on the frontlines of racialization and suffering. Our work must not just advance the “outcomes” and “benefits” of multilingualism, but be also answerable to people who contribute extraordinary labor through their multilingual practice and their livelihoods.

And the terms of racial justice work must account for the materialities of this labor. For instance, writing centers should reimagine their hiring practices, rethinking who ideal peer tutors are and the kind of labor and training that they are expected to engage in for sustaining students’ multilingual practices. To this extent, our practice in the classroom must also work more collectively with students, with our educator colleagues, with librarians, and with administrators who have direct input on policy, so that multilingualism gets cultivated in the service of students, and not measurability-oriented goals. To sustain our multilingual epicenters, we need to build solidarity across different contexts of colonial logics while conscientious of multilingual practice entangled with different struggles and bodies.

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