One Room, Many Worlds

By Alex Naeve

This project is an attempt to synthesize my experience teaching preparatory English in San Quentin State Prison, while enrolled in English 701: Theoretical Backgrounds in Community College Reading at San Francisco State University.

Under the presumption that literacy can lead to empowerment, the information included here discusses my integration of what I've learned in English 701 into the preparatory English class, which I refer to here as "English 99B", that I teach at San Quentin. In doing so, I propose that student learning improves when students are given the tools with which to relate the texts from class to their lived experiences.

What's it like, teaching in prison?

One of the first things I noticed when I began teaching at San Quentin in September 2018 was the remarkable similarity to, well, any other classroom. Other than the razor wire visible from the window, and the padlocks on the metal cabinets that lined the back wall of the room, there wasn't much about the space that made me immediately think, "prison." There are, however, a few key differences, which I detail below. For information about the incarcerated population in the United States and in California specifically, please see the Guys in Blue.

I've taught both communication studies and pre-college English twice with the Prison University Project (PUP) at San Quentin State Prison. All of the classes offered by PUP meet twice per week and are team-taught by two or more instructors. Instructors of credit-level courses must hold an advanced degree (master's or higher) in a closely related field, and instructors of pre-college courses must have a bachelor's degree at minimum, with graduate experience preferred.

Okay, there are a few differences

- Students do not have computers. Students are unable to access the internet, and rely on printed materials from teachers or the prison's library when collecting research. While some students have access to basic word processing programs through their jobs and can hand in typed work, many do not, and have to write their papers by hand.
- Students cannot contact teachers directly. The institution's rules do not allow students to contact teachers outside of class, and teachers cannot hold regular office hours.
- Students sometimes miss class due to extenuating circumstances. Students may be called to a medical appointment or parole board hearing without having a say in the day or time of the appointment.
- Lockdowns, quarantines, and unforeseen circumstances happen. In other words, classes might be canceled with very little notice, and teachers probably won't know why. Or, teachers won't be allowed into the prison if there is limited visibility due to the weather (fog, for instance, is a recurring problem).
- The only technology available in the classroom is a TV/VCR/DVD player combination. No cell phones, no laptops, and no recording devices are allowed. All media shown in class must be approved in advance by the CDCR.
- Students are all (self-identifying) adult men. They also all wear some variation of the same state-issued clothing.

The Guys in Blue

Students in English 99B, Fall 2019

The following examples of student work are offered to provide readers with an idea of San Quentin students' backgrounds, which are vastly diverse. I feel that acknowledging my privilege as a non-incarcerated person is important here, because I'm speaking for students who can't simply type up a blog post and make it public. Therefore, I want to represent a few students' words as they chose to convey their own messages to my co-instructor and myself (with permission from students).

One of our first assignments of the semester invites students to write a letter to us, their teachers. Students are prompted to share their challenges and successes in learning, prior education experiences, and their reading and writing practices in everyday life. These letters are useful for several reasons, one of which is that students are invited to share more about themselves than their obvious status as an incarcerated person. I think that this not only allows teachers to see students as complex humans (rather than inmates) but it allows students to draw attention to their own lived experiences and see these as both valuable and relevant in a classroom context. In these letters, I learned that one of my students is currently writing a novel that takes place in Hong Kong, another was born in Thailand and worked as a sushi chef in Hollywood for several years. One student is married to a middle school teacher and attended Cal Poly where he majored in engineering. Another just completed his GED and wasn't so sure about this whole college thing. The letters allow us to read our students as people, to see beyond the state-issued blue shirts and recognize the vast differences between each person.

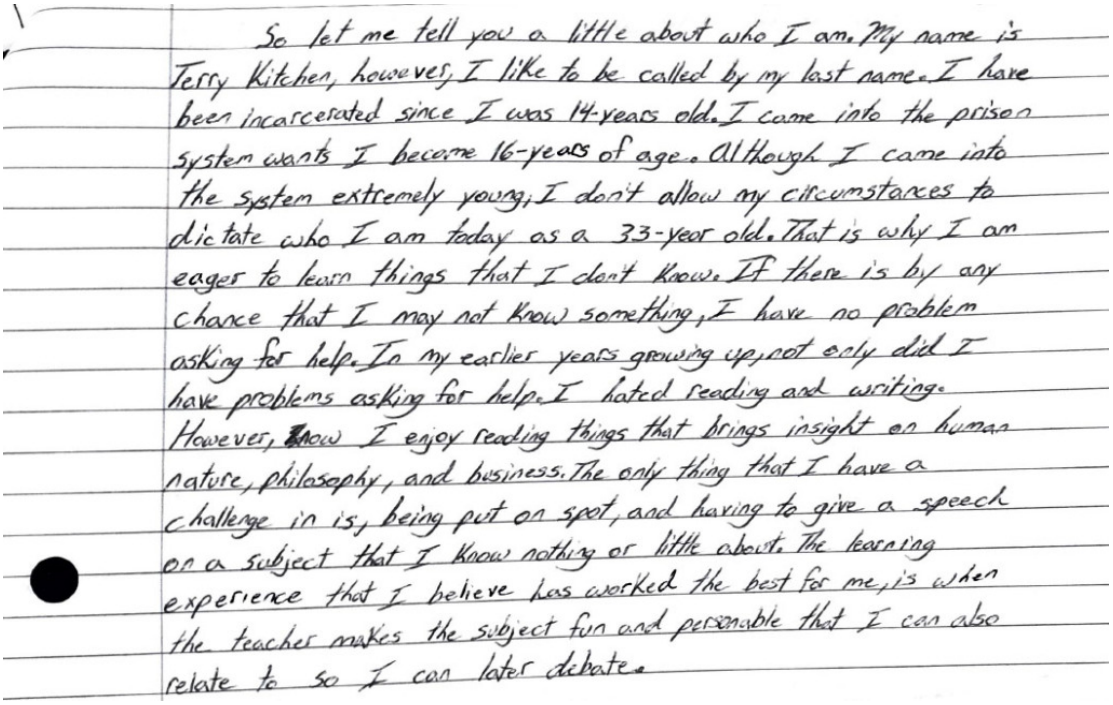
The writing shared is posted with explicit permission from students, who were provided with a description of this assignment and an explanation of the context in which their words would be used. Any student whose name appears here gave explicit permission (and in some cases, requested) to have his full name included with his work.

Jay D.

I'm using English-Thai dictionary to translate the words that I don't understand and get better understanding of its meaning. Eventhough I have to read it over 2-3 times to connet the dots and figure out meaning of whole paragraph, but this practice helps thrived me to learn more vocabularies. Before I came into prison, I like to speak Thai and only use English language at work as my daily life. This situation that I'm in right now force me to use English as my first language. I've been incarcerated for 7 years now and I've never met anyone that can speak Thai but myself. Since I have to relearn English all over again; this times I will not want to learn just good enough to get by, but I really want to be good at it too! This times I want to turn this situation around into a great opportunity for me to better myself.

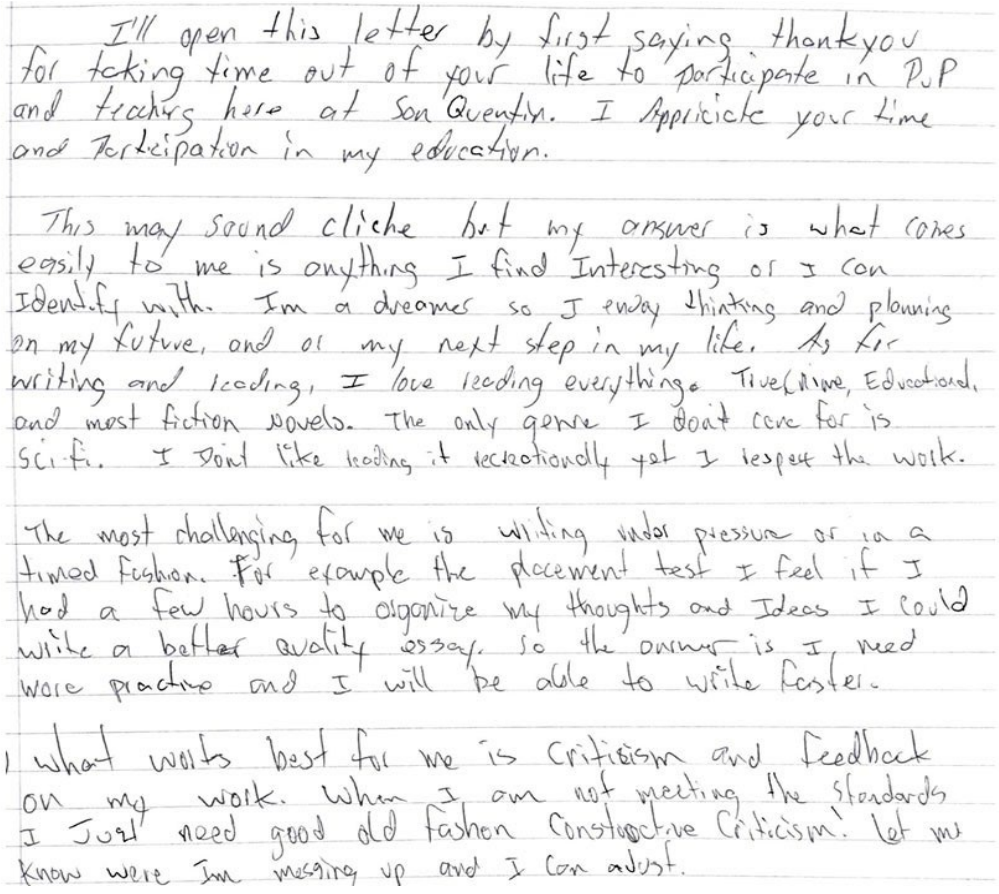
I am very excited, and looking forward to work with you guys this fall semester. I want to thank you for spending your times and effort coming in S.Q to teach us, and thank you for spending your times reading my letter.

Kitchen



So let me tell you a little about who I am. My name is Terry Kitchen, however, I like to be called by my last name. I have been incarcerated since I was 14-years old. I came into the prison system until I became 16-years of age. Although I came into the system extremely young, I don't allow my circumstances to dictate who I am today as a 33-year old. That is why I am eager to learn things that I don't know. If there is by any chance that I may not know something, I have no problem asking for help. In my earlier years growing up, not only did I have problems asking for help. I hated reading and writing. However, Now I enjoy reading things that brings insight on human nature, philosophy, and business. The only thing that I have a challenge in is, being put on spot, and having to give a speech on a subject that I know nothing or little about. The learning experience that I believe has worked the best for me, is when the teacher makes the subject fun and personable that I can also relate to so I can later debate.

Phillip



I'll open this letter by first saying thankyou for taking time out of your life to participate in PuP and teaching here at San Quentin. I Appricicte your time and Participation in my education.

This may sound cliche but my answer is what comes easily to me is anything I find Interesting or I can Identify with. Im a dreamer so I enjoy thinking and planning on my future, and of my next step in my life. As for writing and reading, I love reading everything. Tive(Crime, Educational, and most fiction novels. The only genre I don't care for is sci-fi. I don't like reading it recreationally yet I respect the work.

The most challenging for me is writing under pressure or in a timed fashion. For example the placement test I feel if I had a few hours to organize my thoughts and Ideas I could write a better quality essay. So the answer is I need more practice and I will be able to write faster.

What works best for me is Critisism and feedback on my work. When I am not meeting the standards I just need good old fashon Constructive Criticism! Let me know were Im messing up and I can adjust.

Nolan

I enjoy thinking, reading and writing about business. I naturally love seeking out more ways to be successful in the world of business. Prior to my incarceration - owned a LLC (limited liability company), Now I research and read as many books and articles as I can to enlighten myself on aspects of business. Other than that, I enjoy writing music.

One thing that is truly challenging for me is returning back to school, after being absent from the environment for so long. Readjusting my mind to dive back into schooling and a laboratory is mental tug-o-war, because one side of my mind is saying this will be helpful in training my mind up. While on the other hand, the other side of my mind is saying, what am I going to need this schooling for to run a business? I need mental support to keep me focused and ambitious to want to complete these courses.

What has worked for me during my learning process is actually being hands on and also instructing and seriously interacting with the class I'm enrolled in. Not just being a fly on the wall, but really voicing my opinions in the subject matter. I felt as though I achieved success by stepping out of prison and actually starting a company that was generating me an income, and allowed me to do quite a bit of traveling around the united states.

The population at San Quentin State Prison

- 4,198 men are housed at San Quentin (weekly report , CDCR, 12/4/2019.) ("Men" refers to individuals who are considered by the state to be biologically male because of sex assigned at birth)

The prison population in California

According to the PPIC (Public Policy Institute of California)'s report published in 2019:

- Approximately 115,000 people are housed in California's 35 state prisons
- 28.5% of adult men incarcerated in California are Black, which is 4,236 per 100,000 people (the imprisonment rate for white men is 422 per 100,000)
- 25.9% of incarcerated women are Black (5,849 women are imprisoned in California, total)

The prison population in the United States

According to a report published by the Sentencing Project in 2019:

- **2.2 million** people are incarcerated in the United States
- **60%** of the incarcerated population are people of color
- Approximately **1 out of 12** Black men in their thirties is in prison or jail
- Black men are **6 times** more likely than white men to experience incarceration
- Hispanic men are **2.7 times** more likely to experience incarceration than white men

Sure, theory is great, but what do I do on Monday morning?

A shift in focus

The first time I taught English 99B, over this last summer, I focused primarily on student writing. I was nervous that discussing the readings would only serve to impose my agenda, or my interpretations, on students, and that caused a great deal of concern for me. I didn't want to tell them what meaning to make of the readings, but I didn't know how to address teaching reading without doing just that. So, I focused heavily on writing because I felt that I was ill-equipped to offer varying perspectives on the readings and therefore did not offer students very much in terms of reading assistance. My course uses curriculum that was developed specifically for the PUP preparatory program by someone who has more teaching experience than I do, so I tend to defer to the assignments that have been paired with the readings in the past.

Where to start?

Teaching the English 99B course for the second time during this current semester has been a vastly different experience than the first time. Using facets of the many theoretical approaches detailed in our ENG 701 readings has provided an incredibly useful foundation on which to help students develop reading strategies. One of my main goals in the 99B course, I realized, is to facilitate student learning in terms of transferable knowledge and prepare students not only for English 101A, but for future courses. When I read Tara Lockhart and Mary Soliday's article, The Critical Place of Reading in Writing Transfer (2016), I decided that I needed to be a more active facilitator of developing student reading practices in order to help students develop valuable skills that will be useful as they move forward in their college careers, as well as improve confidence in their writing skills. I'm also always worried about resorting to the same methods that Adler-Kassner and Estrem warn against in Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom: seeing students as passive learners, conveying the meaning of texts rather than helping students develop ways in which to engage with texts.

Not to mention, students might even find their readings more interesting if they were shown multiple ways in which to engage with the texts.

As a relatively new teacher, I find that I often lack the experience needed to effectively scaffold my ambitious ideas, so I knew I'd need to begin with smaller exercises rather than high-stakes projects. I began with one of the sample assignments that Dr. Sugie Goen-Salter had graciously shared with our class, a guided annotation exercise, and completed it as I read the next week's assigned reading, Sonny's Blues by James Baldwin. In our next class, I handed out both the blank template and my own completed annotations as an example. In the past, I've been hesitant to offer my own work as examples of assignments, worried that

I was assuming a voice of authority, but I've learned that sometimes, I need to prioritize guidance over worrying excessively about whether or not my interpretation is the best possible example. So, off I went.

I was encouraged when several of the students asked me for more copies of the guided annotation assignment to use in the next weeks' readings. Because stars had somehow aligned and the now-infamous short story, Bloodchild by Octavia Butler, was assigned for the next week, I decided there was no better time to introduce the difficulty paper, another sample assignment shared by Sugie.

I should pause for a moment and mention that several students in my previous English 99B class over the summer had a hard time with this particular text. The students were offended by the reversal of gender roles and generally unhappy that a "feminist" author had been assigned in an English class, and I was unprepared in terms of framing and scaffolding. It was a blip in an otherwise smooth semester, and I was determined to do better the second time around.

Reading 'Bloodchild'
So, this semester I decided that instead of having the students read Bloodchild outside of class, we would read the story aloud in-class. Before distributing the difficulty paper and beginning to read the story, I provided students with my adaptation of my high school English teacher's introduction to the feminist literary perspective. The purpose of this introduction was an effort to reassure students that I wasn't trying to make them dive head-first into the feminist perspective.

Then, we read Bloodchild in its creepy, disturbing entirety out loud; each student (including one of my students from my communication studies course, who decided to sit in on the class that day when he heard we were talking about feminism), our TA, and I read a page of the story. Once we had completed the story, the students spent 10 minutes writing about the difficulties they had experienced with the text: everything from confusion in understanding the relationships between the characters to implications around gender and power dynamics.

Rather than attempting to somehow convince students that their perspectives were incorrect, or that they were correct, or that my reading was somehow more valid because I was the teacher, the difficulty paper assignment allowed us to identify and discuss, as a class, components of the text that were problematic. We used the "believing game" to consider how gender roles could have played a part in the story (meaning, taking a hypothetical stance on an issue rather than necessarily arguing one's true viewpoint). This provided students a platform on which to engage with the text and consider a perspective

that they may not have otherwise been able to recognize. It also, hopefully, provided a tool that will help them in future English courses and across the disciplines.

Willingness to engage, even if the student doesn't necessarily agree with or even understand the author's message, is a crucial part of participation in a community. Willingness to push through, to continue despite tension, can determine the difference between whether or not a student completes a class. Helping students explore ways in which to persist through these challenges is crucial to student success, both in the classroom and beyond.

It's complicated

Teaching inside of a prison has a number of challenges, and most are completely unrelated to the subject matter. Among the most apparent is the element of privilege: because I am not incarcerated, I can go home. At the end of class, I can walk across the yard, out the gate, get in my car and drive away. I can choose where I live, eat, work, and attend school. I can choose to travel locally, nationally, and internationally. I can communicate with my family, friends, and colleagues on my own terms. I can, in most hypothetical cases, advocate for my own well-being and my rights without fear of retaliation or harm. This privilege, which is deeply embedded in my everyday life, is a created by my intersecting identities, which result social positionality as a white, cisgender, straight woman who was born in the United States to college-educated parents.

To even conceive of teaching inclusive courses in prison would be incredibly difficult without the willingness to acknowledge and discuss race, racism, whiteness, and white supremacy. It is standard practice for incarcerated individuals to self-segregate according to race, for numerous political reasons that expand beyond the scope of this project. And of course, the number of incarcerated persons who are non-white (mostly Black or Hispanic) far exceeds the number of white people who are in prison. This is reflected in my current class population: of the 37 total students enrolled in my two classes this semester, 21 are Black and seven are white (the remaining men are either either Asian or Hispanic). As a result of navigating the teaching experience as a white women whose students who are predominately men of color, I find the assertions put forth by Asao Inoue to be absolutely imperative when considering how to best understand student perspectives on literacy. In the introduction to Labor Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Writing Classroom, Asao Inoue discusses the importance of acknowledging the presumed authority and power that inherently accompany teaching as white supremacist practice. In anticipation of protest by teachers (especially from those of us who are white), Inoue explains that teachers must stay the course and reflect on our positionality to recognize that the systems by which we operate are not neutral (p. 6). Further, Inoue urges teachers who feel that they are being unfairly accused of perpetuating white supremacist narratives to consider, then, the affects of such practices on their students who belong to marginalized populations, daring teachers to "suffer with us" (p. 6).

It has become apparent to me that teaching, especially teaching reading and writing, serves to reproduce practices and conventions that effectively marginalize entire demographic populations. Anecdotally, many of my students feel that they have been left out of the system of education due to their backgrounds: as men of color, or who grew up in a low-income household, had one or both parents incarcerated, whose lived experiences do not mirror those understood to be normal of members of our society. Statistically, this is

represented by the findings such as, only 52% of black males graduate from high school in four years, compared to 78% of white male students; (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, as cited in Dancy, 2014). The exclusion of marginalized people from literacy is a result of the deeply ingrained ideological values and resulting practices that McCormick and Waller discuss in their article, Text, Reader, Ideology. By employing critical approaches to reading and writing, students are able to develop the tools with which to develop their own student identities, rather than parroting the ideas of the dominant culture.

When we as teachers participate (unknowingly or otherwise) in a societal structure that has been constructed to serve some students and exclude others, we risk training students to remain complicit in an oppressive colonialist society, which perpetuates the unjust conditions that create circumstances for continued marginalization. (hooks, Teaching Critical Thinking). Whether or not we like to acknowledge it, teaching is a political act itself (Freire, p. 5).

So, my messy and incomplete conclusion is, we, as educators, have to be open to change. Because students have been indoctrinated into this system of power as if it's the normal way of operating, just as the rest of us have, teachers need to be mindful that students will likely resist deviation from traditional academic structure, because the traditional structure signifies legitimacy. I have to be willing to have the hard conversations around power and race and oppression, even if doing so feels like I'm implicating myself. I have to be willing to consider the worlds of my students, and to help facilitate their understanding of academic conventions without presenting them as superior. I have to be an advocate for students who are usually not represented in the greater academic community, which generally means that I have to contextualize the academic conventions typical of a college English classroom (for example, literary analysis, persuasion, style, voice, and rhetorical choices) in ways that value student experience.

And, most of all, I have to care. Sometimes that means showing up to teach on Sundays evenings for a couple hours, sometimes it means reading the essays I think are brilliant, and telling the students how great they are. Other times, I have to care in ways that might seem inconvenient, like sitting down with a student who has a hard time reading from print, and reading aloud to him for an hour and a half after class. Admitting, while reading aloud with said student, that I don't know how to pronounce "usurpations" in the Declaration of Independence. Letting students know that it's okay to say when I don't know something. Growing up, I learned that it was definitely not okay to not know what I'm talking about, especially if it's school-related, and I have to remind myself that it's important for my students to see that learning is a process and we're never done. Because I care more about them than I do my ego, I put my own baggage aside and own up when I

don’t have the answers. Guess what? Life goes on. We still don’t have a definitive answer about the pronunciation of “usurpations” but over the course of our meeting, that student and I shared some laughs, drew some connections between readings, talked about historical context, and created his outline for his final essay. That’s all much more important than having the “right” answer, and my student, I believe, felt the same. Grades and degrees come and go, but knowing someone has your back–that’s priceless. I can only hope that my students believe me when I tell them I wouldn’t be there if I didn’t care about them.

About Me: Failed Student, Teaching

My hope, in undertaking this project, is to amplify the voices of incarcerated students, in part because these students are not allowed to participate in every day discourses. However, in order provide context, I'd like to share an overview of my own history and educational experience as a student. If you'd like to skip this section and move to the next, click here to return to the navigation menu.

First, and most importantly, I want to emphasize that the challenges I've experienced in school pale in comparison to those of many, many students. This is largely due to the following:

- I grew up in a household with two white, college-educated parents, who were able to afford preschool and childcare.
- My parents were married and owned the house we lived in; my sister and I didn't have to worry about switching schools due to evictions or rent increases.
- I attended the same school from kindergarten through eighth grade, and while I might have some valid complaints about my early education, I admit that it was consistent.
- One (or both) of my parents read to my sister and me every night, and we regularly took trips to local bookstores where our parents bought books for us.
- Growing up, my sister and I knew that we each had "college money" in some ambiguous bank account somewhere, a sort of motivational safety net.

If you don't get it, you aren't trying hard enough.

However, I discovered in second grade that I had what appeared to be a debilitating and detrimental math problem. Try as I might, adding the complexity of borrowing and carrying to math problems simply made no sense to me. In third grade, I discovered that multiplication tables where going to present a real problem in my life. My third grade teacher, Ms. McCahon, and her teaching aid, Ms. Hassett, both employed a "tough love" approach to struggling students–which is when I learned that if I did not understand something, it was because I wasn't trying hard enough.

"Alexandra. You need to pay more attention. Why don't you understand this? The rest of the class does."

In addition to not learning math, I also learned that beginning to cry out of frustration is very, very bad. (Crying is also an involuntarily, visceral reaction I still have to this day when I don't understand something and feel ashamed or helpless because of it. Yes, I cried in a

graduate seminar because I couldn't understand the math behind calculating reliability. At the age of 33. Fully understanding that my future beyond that specific class wouldn't require me to ever know this.) Third grade taught me that one-on-one tutoring sessions can only lead to one place: confirmation that I was a failure as a human being.

"Alexandra. Stop crying. I know you're just trying to convince me to let you go to recess."

Repeat this scenario at least 50 more times before my eighth grade graduation.

(As an aside, I've since learned that accusing a child under the age of 10 of intentional emotional manipulation can really do a number on that child's self-esteem, self-awareness, and ability to identify and appropriately cope with emotions. Creating a stressful learning environment for a student who is already struggling doesn't actually help that child learn. But, that's for another paper.)

Oh, wait. Maybe you're not just lazy.

In any case, I floundered through school until a therapist I was seeing at the age of 15 suggested that my parents have me tested for learning differences. While coping with the never-ending struggles of academics, I also developed what I now recognize as chronic anxiety and depression (these were also generally disregarded as exaggeration or attention-seeking or a lack of resilience for most of my formative years, so I assumed I was probably just defective). But, eventually these issues were acknowledged and my parents were able to cover the costs of mental care with low-deductible, employer-provided health insurance. Still, I came dangerously close to failing out of high school during my junior year. This was partially due to several weeks of mononucleosis, partially due to my lack of motivation and failure to prioritize school over what had become frequent (over)indulgence in illicit substances. In response, my mom, the school special resource teacher, and the principal sat down with me and decided that I would be better off enrolling in a dual-enrollment program, Cañada Middle College, at the local community college rather than transferring to a continuation school.

Continuation school or college?

A stable home environment, parents who knew not only how to advocate for me but how to navigate the system has provided me with opportunities like enrolling in Cañada Middle College. Middle College allowed me to start college classes as I completed my required high school credits instead of transferring to a heavily-policed continuation school, complete remedial course packets, and maybe end up with a diploma at the end. By enrolling in Middle College, I was allowed to take courses that I found interesting, and was provided

support without the shame that I had come to associate with school. To fulfill the remaining requirements needed for a high school diploma, Middle College students took high school English and US History, Government, and Economics on the college campus with teachers employed with the high school district. The teachers, who we called by their first names, Jen and Mitch, offered academically rigorous classes, challenging us without micromanaging. I made the college Dean's List my first semester in Middle College after earning A's in my college courses–a far cry from the sub-2.0 GPA I'd carried the semester prior.

So, is this actually a real degree?

After graduating high school, I eventually completed my general education requirements at Cañada Community College, and transferred to a bachelor's degree completion program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco. The BA program at CIIS was nothing like I'd ever experienced before–the classes were pass/fail, the professors did not give tests, and the courses had names like, "Self and Society." In other words, my explanations about the work I was doing in my BA program often prompted my parents to ask, "…so this is school actually accredited, right?"

Luckily, it was. CIIS gave me the words to describe the tensions and anxieties I had experienced throughout my childhood education. Our first assigned readings were Ira Shor's Education is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy and chapter 1 from bell hooks' book, Teaching to Transgress. I finally began to understand that it was okay if my brain didn't "memorize and regurgitate" as well as my classmates' brains did–because there was, apparently, more to school than parroting the teacher's words. For the next three semesters, I reveled in complex texts that I rarely understood without the perspectives of my older, more worldly classmates. We talked about social constructs, hegemony, colonialism, paradigmatic research methods, and attitudes around stigma. Our cohort's lead professor, Fernando Castrillon, was just completing his dissertation for his PsyD, and had written his thesis on the imposition of technology on culture, using critical scholars like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and DeLeuze & Guattari for framework. At least 20 of us showed up to hear him defend his thesis.

What now?

After graduating from CIIS in at the end of 2007, I spent a long time trying to just be a normal, functioning adult. I had a hard time finding a full time job with my new BA in interdisciplinary studies (although, in hindsight, 2008 was probably not a great year for very many new graduates). After being laid off from a job I absolutely detested in August 2012, I started working at the ranch where I have ridden horses since childhood, and

eventually began teaching riding lessons. In 2015, I finally had enough self-confidence to imagine myself going back to school. I could maybe teach college one day, in a pinch.

With the help of a book I'd purchased on Amazon to guide me through the process of writing a personal statement and information gathered from the internet, I applied to master's program in communication studies at San Jose State University. I didn't know any of the faculty or students in the program. I contacted my professors (including Fernando) from nearly a decade earlier to request letters of recommendation. I transcribed a hard copy of a 12-page literature review I'd written in 2007 as a writing sample. The whole process felt very…shaky. I just about fainted when I received an email of acceptance.

Turns out, school was easier at 32.

Weirdly, going back to school was not too difficult. The time management part was (is), but the material was fascinating and I loved my professors. Understanding my own capabilities, knowing that whether or not I earned a master's degree was my own choice, and especially (finally) believing that my value as a human was not rooted in grades allowed me to see graduate school as a purely intellectual, almost self-indulgent pursuit. Because of my life experience, I knew that grades didn't define me and weren't totally representative of my academic abilities (although, I did cry for a couple of minutes when I learned that I would have to re-take one of my comprehensive exams during my third semester. Old thought patterns die hard, I suppose). In any case, I graduated with a master's degree in communication studies in May 2018, with a cumulative GPA of 3.92. I learned that, unfortunately or not, everything I'd internalized over the course of my life about value and self-worth equating to a letter grade or GPA did not weigh as heavily on hiring decisions as I'd once thought. That was okay; I'd thoroughly enjoyed spending two years digging into critical theory, pedagogy, constructivism, and studies of rhetoric. (Luckily, I had saved my readings and textbooks from CIIS.)

Back for more.

And now, here I am. Back for a second master's degree. Learning to be a better teacher. Learning to hone the skills that will, hopefully, help students develop their own voices; especially students who may not have had the benefits of parent or teacher advocacy when they were struggling, the privileges that come with attending a small public school in an affluent community, the everyday practice of reading or of being read to as a child. The students whose voices, norms, and cultural values fall outside the margins of dominant discourses. If I, a white person from an affluent community, the daughter of two educated parents, who grew up in a safe neighborhood without exposure to gangs, guns, or drugs, could experience such trouble in school…what happens to the many students whose

circumstances don’t include these elements of support? How much potential, how many brilliant minds are locked up behind walls and razor wire? I don’t claim to know, but I’m going to make sure I do everything I can to help make their voices heard.

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