Equity Reflection

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1. **What have you done to improve your understanding of anti-racism, equity, equity-mindedness, and/or equity as it relates to your field and the LRCCD? This might include but is not limited to the following:**
    - **curriculum review related to anti-racism, decolonization, and equity**
    - **participation in anti-racism and equity-related workshops/institutes,**
    - **review of professional materials and best practices for equity in your field and/or**
    - **review of your student success data**

By 2017, the language of "equity" to refer to the goals of achieving social justice for students within our academic institutions had become apparent to – if not fully understood by – many faculty in Los Rios, including part-timers. In spring of that year, I was instrumental in organizing and putting on a 4-hour professional development opportunity for part-time faculty throughout Los Rios called "Equity NOW! Teaching with Love and Solidarity" that took place at Sac City College.

Some of the descriptions of our event:

> The conference is *FREE* and promises to be an engaging, inspiring, and useful afternoon as we reflect on **what we currently do**, **what we might do in the future**, and **what more we need** as part-time/adjunct faculty in Los Rios **as we serve the interests of student equity and success.**
>
> How can you best support your students while also supporting yourself and your colleagues? Join us for an afternoon of panels, workshops, and a working group. Students, diversity specialists, and teachers will discuss the challenges we face as a community college district, along with possible solutions. Together we will work to address diversity and inclusion in the classroom, part-time faculty challenges, and the relationships between the two!

The conference – the second district-wide conference for part-time faculty hosted by the LRCFT, even better attended than the first, which was itself quite successful – was very fruitful, bringing together groups of people who should gather more frequently to honesty reflect on what we do as individuals, as a District, and as part of a larger system that asks people who aren't experiencing equitable treatment in their working lives to contribute to equity for students.

The "theme" for the conference was born of my experience at an Umoja training specifically for community college part-time faculty in December, 2016 in San Diego that I had helped promote among Los Rios part-time faculty at the request of Teresa Aldredge. While I appreciated most of what I experienced and learned at this event (and appreciated the State Chancellor's Office providing the funding to reimburse part-time faculty from throughout the state for their travel and overnight lodging expenses to attend it), I was struck by the absence of any acknowledgment by its organizers and presenters of the ways in which part-time faculty are positioned as part of a solution to systemic racism and disparate academic outcomes for minoritized students but are ourselves so

often institutionally marginalized. I brought the matter up during the final plenary session's Q&A/group reflection discussion, to some applause by attendees, as I recall.

To add injury to insult, even those California community college part-time faculty who are paid more or less pro rata with full-time faculty for the hours we spend teaching or working with students as librarians, nurses, coaches, and coordinators – as we are in Los Rios – are frequently paid significantly less than our full-time faculty colleagues for our office hours and any "college service" we may provide or professional development activities we may engage in, including, of course, those related to equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, decolonization, and other essential social justice-related topics. I've had multiple conversations with CRC President Ed Bush about the need for more paid professional development opportunities at CRC, bringing up the topic in every single Zoom office hour he and I co-host for CRC part-time faculty (one per month since May, 2020). He verbally agrees each time, but I haven't seen evidence of any real movement in this direction. It may be that the solution will be district-wide and negotiated: if LRCFT is successful in its efforts to address this issue, new money will become available to compensate Los Rios part-time faculty for equity-related professional development opportunities. This would be a major achievement.

Despite not usually being compensated to do so, I have attended several professional development opportunities related to equity, both through Los Rios and through outside entities like A2Mend. I have also regularly attended annual conferences of the CFT, LRCFT's statewide union affiliate, and FACCC, the statewide professional organization for California community college faculty, which have made it possible not only to hear but to engage directly with such prominent thinkers and writers in this field as Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Tim Wise. I have also appreciated and learned from the ongoing work within LRCFT leadership to reflect on the results of a recent equity audit of the organization's key documents and standard procedures regarding governance and negotiations.

Further, I have benefited for many years from working with students through my university tutoring job on undergraduate and graduate writing projects in general education courses as well as the specialized fields of organizational leadership, nursing, and education, so many of which include attention to matters of social justice, equity, and inclusion. I have learned more about K-12 equity-driven educational practices from working with students seeking teaching credentials and Master's degrees in education than I ever would otherwise and have consistently reflected on similarities and differences between the world of compulsory education and higher education. I began applying the concepts of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) and differentiated instruction, so prevalent in K-12 teacher discourse, to my own teaching work even before I started attending specifically "equity-minded"/-focused professional development events, like those mentioned above and the Equity 101 course I participated in through the 3CSN in 2019.

2. How have you used and/or how will you use these understandings to improve your practice and/or help close opportunity gaps?

Over the past several years, I have reflected deeply on my syllabi and improved their friendliness and inclusiveness, introducing myself as an individual at their outset and making multiple references to how much I believe students can succeed and *want* them to succeed in the course and in their higher education. I have also made it a blanket policy in all my courses that students can resubmit all work for higher grades and more thorough learning, making use of the "reassign" button and offering friendly comments in Canvas to encourage students to resubmit work and even to submit work they haven't yet. I also regularly encourage them to come to my 3.5 hours per week

of office hours, which I have rebranded as "student hours," and several weeks per semester, I set up large blocks of optional 15-minute one-on-one appointment slots for students to self-schedule, typically making myself available for about 10 additional hours during those weeks. I have added substantial extra credit opportunities that allow students to practice our core skills even more than the regular assigned work requires, which seems to help students feel a greater sense of participation and achievement.

In addition, I have integrated into my syllabi and other documents, including Canvas communications, multiple direct statements of my understanding of the many pressures and stressors students experience, using the language of the "limits of our control and predictive powers" and my consequent acceptance that sometimes "life gets in the way" of completing work by assignment due dates. I have also started referring to due dates as "suggested to-be-turned-in-by" submission dates. So far, I have had nothing but positive feedback that this flexibility and empathy is helping students; those who seem constitutionally dedicated to submitting all assignments "on time" tend to do so, but even some of these students have benefited from my policy and expressed deep appreciation for the flexibility. Those students who struggle the most to juggle all the elements of their lives and to prioritize their academic work as much as they would like to have indicated that my approach is a) surprising/unusual in their experience, and b) deeply meaningful to them. Since I instituted this policy, I have had a number of students write me private Canvas comments and emails with some version of "You don't know how much this means to me that you're working with me and not giving up on me." One even made a special Zoom appointment with me recently simply to express her thanks. I view these actions as evidence that I am reasonably successful in my efforts to make students feel welcome, valued, respected, supported, and encouraged.

To help students with financial barriers to full participation in college classes, I have adopted a zero-textbook-cost approach for English 300 and English 301. For many years, I took a money-themed approach to English 300 content to allow students to openly explore the complex ways in which money shapes our lives. I used to use a full-length non-fiction book called *In Cheap We Trust: The Story of a Misunderstood American Virtue*, which had its benefits, but then I shifted to a small, affordable anthology of well-chosen materials – mostly non-fiction but also some fiction and images – called *Money Changes Everything*. Since Summer 2020, however, I have ceased asking students in English 300 to buy any course materials and instead provide selections of recently published articles on topics of interest, including Black Lives Matter and racial justice, police violence, diagnosing and ending white supremacism, creativity in social justice movements, and ecological movements and issues.

I have also dramatically increased the number of writers of color I include in both required and suggested readings and viewings for students, and I have revised all examples in my guide to APA and MLA style to include texts about racial and economic justice, including research on the effects of police violence on African Americans college students. Another positive change I made in my English 300 sections was to create an original example of annotating and summarizing a text, for which I chose Pirette McKamey's "What Anti-Racist Teachers Do Differently," published in *The Atlantic* in June, 2020. (Indeed, I first started using this article in my Summer 2020 courses.) In my annotations, students can see me actively reflecting on key terms and concepts, including personal connections and questions about the text's content, all of which I think signals to students my commitment to being an anti-racist teacher. Because active reading and annotation are so important, students encounter this example early in the semester, which I hope helps the most reticent and skeptical among them to see me as someone willing to make herself vulnerable, reflect on her blind

spots and past limitations, and present evidence of her commitment to doing better in order to earn students' confidence in her as their professor.

In my current English 301, I have included virtually no Anglo writers, as I think all students with educational experience in the United States or Europe have been asked to read literary texts emerging from this population. I engage students in 301 in reflecting on concepts of "the canon," helping them learn more about the social and political forces that have shaped the publishing industry, and encourage them to think about how disparate access to that industry has largely determined what we have inherited as printed literary traditions in the US. I also ask them to reflect on oral traditions in communities with little or no access to the means of mechanical production and reproduction of text; this inevitably involves discussion of the power of literacy and the individual, social, cultural, economic, and political interests that legally prevented African Americans from gaining that power. I ask students to investigate the concept of "literature" through their own research and to think and write about how *they* would like that venerated term to be applied to uses of language.

I'm excited that my confidence in my ability to do better than simply doing no harm in the teaching of poetry has dramatically increased since the last time I taught English 301, and I've loved seeing students discover that they can both understand and love poetry, if given compelling texts that resonate with their sensibilities and concerns. Language is a human birthright, and ruminating on the many ways people creatively use language to reflect, explore, and change their reality seems generally to inspire students. I don't think anyone in my current section of English 301 hasn't fallen in love with Rita Dove and the poems she reads in her 2012 conversation with Bill Moyers about the anthology of 20th Century American poetry she edited, and several students – including self-identified men – have written that watching and hearing an elderly, vulnerable, and wistful Stanley Kunitz read one of his poems in this video brought them to tears. Students have discovered the feminist power of Lucille Clifton through Rita Dove, and James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni have become new favorite writers of several students in the course. Several of the poems I selected have brought readers into the worlds of Hmong- and Chinese-American experiences, and I have included writing by Native American, Chicano/a/LatinX, and anglophone African writers as well, embedding in Canvas videos of as many of our writers performing and discussing their work as possible. Some students have availed themselves of the option to write a poem, an open letter, or a small part of a novel or screenplay inspired by one of our course texts in place of a more academic analysis and interpretation, and while I don't imagine ever teaching a "creative writing" class per se, I have loved seeing the energy and enthusiasm those students brought to their writing, including those who had never thought themselves capable of writing "creatively."

In many courses I've taught at CRC over nearly 20 years – even in our old English 57 – I have used June Jordan's painful and beautiful "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You, and the Future Life of Willie Jordan" to engage students in thinking about language and power. Though Jordan wrote this mixed-genre piece in the mid-1980s, students recognize that the issues it so powerfully addresses are as relevant now as they were then: marginalization and even brutalization of African Americans through various social institutions, including education and policing. Reading Jordan's narration of her work with university students to discover the conventions of Black English in relation to Standard White English and the values embodied by those conventions is a "way in" to reflecting on students' own "home" languages – whether a version of English or another language altogether -- in relation to academic English, and to consider their strengths. This is an opportunity to talk openly about the hegemonic (though I doubt I've ever used that word in class!) structures that have elevated some uses of English and denigrated others, and about why academic writing conventions

can feel so "foreign" and even alienating. Rather than teach total assimilation and acculturation to academic writing conventions, I promote the values of multi-lingualism, code-switching, and the option of deciding when – as June Jordan's student Willie does at the end of his essay, which she reproduces in full at the end of hers – to bring non-academically sanctioned forms of expression into academic writing as an act of personal, cultural, and political resistance. I intend to continue using this text in multiple courses based on what it opens up for so many students. I love that Jordan gives her student Willie the "last word" of her essay, and I ask students why they think Jordan did that and what it means to them that she did.

3. What additional trainings and resources, whether offered by LRCCD or others, would be helpful in continuing your development of anti-racist practices?

Learning how to create opportunities for students to showcase their talents and achievements beyond the confines of a single course is something I'm interested in. I also want to see more professional development opportunities in which students talk about what they want from their professors and classmates, along with what kinds of learning environments they thrive in.

But I must admit that at this point, I'm dreaming less about specific opportunities I'd like for myself than I am the ongoing opportunity for all part-time faculty throughout Los Rios to be paid fairly to embrace learning – and teaching -- about anti-racist pedagogical practices and ways to support traditionally underserved students.