

Lost in Translation:

Using Poetry to Find Cultural Representation

WORKSHOP REFLECTION

Who, what, where, when and why...

On February 22nd, 2018 I facilitated my workshop *Lost In Translation: Using Poetry to Find Cultural Representation* in Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed's upper-tier Conversations on Race Capstone course. I worked with twenty college upperclassmen for a total of two hours. Participants had already been learning about ethnic studies programs, specifically the controversy surrounding the Mexican-American Studies program in Tucson, Arizona. Within this context, participants had already been introduced to various efforts to incorporate culture into the dominant discourse of academia. My workshop functioned to extend this conversation by using experiential learning and arts education techniques to further reveal and reinforce the significant value of incorporating culture into the classroom.

In brief, my workshop invites participants to construct a poem using foreign-language words and phrases, most of which do not translate to English because their meaning is contextually specific to a cultural temperament belonging to different racial and ethnic groups across the globe. This workshop is a *hybrid poetic exercise* with *code-meshing*: the act of combining local, vernacular, colloquial, world dialects of English, as well as other languages, on formal assignments and in everyday conversation in an attempt to embrace the globalized and diverse world we live in. Hybrid poetry is best understood as an art form rooted in the conventions of creative writing but extends to include the practice of cultural and literary criticism. These conventions are characteristically kept separate, but when brought together to form an artistic and innovative statement, they are inherently *hybrid*. In this respect, the essence of this workshop is to create something that blurs or recombines different modes, genres or registers of writing and language, in order to invent new, apparently organic forms of expression.

To begin, I introduced participants to contemporary examples of code-meshing as a "warm up." I used the song "["Mi Gente" \(My People\) by J. Balvin, Willy William, Feat. Beyonce](#)" and a poem by Gloria Anzaldua, titled "The Borderlands." Anzaldua's poem uses code-meshing of English and Spanish so that Anzaldua's form mirrors her content in order to heighten reader's overall reception to her bordered identity. Additionally, Anzaldua is recognized as a *hybrid poet* due to her experimental style and form. Following the reading, I opened up a group discussion so that participants could voice their thoughts and reactions to Anzaldua's poem. The group discussion is integral to the workshop because it allowed me clarify ambiguities and discuss the value of code-meshing in an inclusive and collective space. I began the discussion with open-ended questions so there was no "right" or "wrong" answer but, instead, an opportunity for participants to share their observations. Likewise, these initial comments allowed me to gauge the latter half of the discussion because participants' responses reflected their grasp of the poem in the larger context of the workshop. Subsequently, this informed me of what aspects I needed to cover more than others to ensure they could move on to the next portion of the workshop.