

Using Contact Zone Concepts to Teach Critical Autoethnography to Multilingual Writers in Foundational Composition

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Introduction

I remember sitting in the orientation for graduate student teachers who would be working in the writing program. The majority of participants were first-time teachers slated for the “mainstream” sections which, at our university in the southeastern US, were largely composed of domestic, white, monolingual English-speaking students. The small handful of us in the MA program in applied linguistics and TESOL already had a year of experience co-teaching the EAL (English as an Additional Language) sections that were “intended and required for international students who are non-native speakers of English” (“Course Descriptions and Outcomes”).

At the meeting, everyone was given the same materials—textbooks, syllabi, training—regardless of which course we were going to teach. I remember receiving the syllabus that included the series of projects for the course, thinking about how clear it was, based on the entire orientation and the resources with which we were provided, that everything was geared towards the mainstream course. Those of us teaching the EAL sections had support from our own faculty, but the writing program did not explicitly provide any unique preparation for our work in this different context.

I tried to rationalize that this made some sense given the fact that this was the first year that the EAL teachers had ever been required to attend this orientation and that there were many, many more mainstream sections than EAL ones. Even so, as I read the materials, I thought about my own research and coursework and felt compelled to engage in praxis, “when theory and practice inform and transform each other” (Berlin 76), and acknowledge the unique socio-linguistic, -cultural, and -political nuances of the classroom I was about to enter. In the writing that follows, I attempt to unpack contact zone theory (Pratt 34) in regard to multilingual writing pedagogy and demonstrate how I updated a foundational writing assignment prompt to reflect contact zone principles.

Through this work, I aim to empower other graduate student teachers to practice autonomy in their curriculum design, advocate for critical curriculum design in EAL writing classes, and encourage the use of culturally-relevant, decolonial pedagogies in all kinds of writing courses.

The Multilingual Writing Classroom: A Contact Zone

As more multilingual speakers enter writing classrooms, linguistic homogeneity becomes even more mythologized (Matsuda 638). Even though various iterations of writing classrooms like “mainstream,” “ESL,” or “cross-cultural” exist, a reality of increased globalization is that students of all kinds of cultural and linguistic backgrounds enter all types of writing classrooms (Matsuda and Silva 253). It is critical, then, that writing teachers, regardless of the type of section they teach, integrate pedagogical strategies that support students and meet them where they are, whether they are in an earlier stage of development with English, learning a new dialect of English, discovering academic English, or all of the above. The US writing classroom is known for its tendency to prioritize US paradigms (Donahue 213) and trying to inculcate white writing practices (Young 68). Despite repeated calls to uphold *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*, we recognize that, nearly 50 years later, we are still struggling to grant students this Right, both within writing classrooms as well as across the curriculum (Ball and Lardner 473). Contact zone concepts (Pratt 34) are well-suited for responding to this need, helping to enact teaching philosophies that centralize affirming multilingual students’ capabilities and transnational identities.

Contact zone concepts are largely attributed to Mary Louise Pratt’s foundational article “Arts of the Contact Zone.” Here, she defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). A contact zone framework allows those involved in textual creation and analysis to see linguistically- and culturally-bound struggles that may otherwise be suppressed by more dominant narratives (Pratt 37; McCook). Contact zones give participants the opportunity to redistribute power, enabling broader understandings of sensitive topics and greater respect for their own cultures and those of others. The prospect for allowing students, particularly those who belong to traditionally marginalized groups, the space to express themselves and be respected and heard can be an attractive pedagogical technique to employ in writing classrooms (Key 102).

Because students generally take foundational composition courses in their first year of study, it can be one of the first places that they begin to interact with new ideas, as students intermingle with others from backgrounds different from their own and write about their opinions and experiences. This can be a sort of awakening for students and therein lies the composition classroom’s opportunity to become a contact zone for students to experience and negotiate their own power and responsibilities (Beauvais 35). Within the contact zone, student writers may investigate their lived experiences and learn from others’ stories, analyzing cultural conflicts and sociopolitical inequalities (Miller 145; Lu 482; Beauvais 22). Patricia Bizzell endorses contact zone-rooted pedagogy, explaining that “this new

paradigm will stimulate scholarship and give vitally needed guidance to [...] undergraduate curricula” (466).

The literature supports writing teachers taking a more proactive approach to incorporating contact zone-informed strategies in their pedagogy. Nora McCook, in her discussion of contact zones and literacy studies, explains that literacy scholarship can come to life through practical application in writing classrooms, making what some perceive to be an abstract concept much more concrete. Scholars agree that writing classrooms are in the unique position of helping students discover the significance of linguistic and rhetorical dynamics and allow them the opportunity to experiment (McCook; Bizzell 464). Katherine K. Gottschalk also encourages this kind of learning, and adds that when working with sensitive subjects of language and culture, “we instructors of writing are often extremely careful to provide our own students with contact zones in our classrooms that are enabling ones, in which all voices are heard” (61). This tenet of approaching with care the discussions within the contact zone becomes critical in its need to be constantly followed, a stricter protocol than Gottschalk’s recommendation of “often,” when working with multilingual writers. Furthermore, following Vershawn Ashanti Young’s discussion of white writing (68), teachers should work to facilitate a safe space where the voices heard are authentic—a concept that can be expanded to many aspects of diversity, such as including students who identify as, for example, disabled or queer, in addition to identifying as racially, culturally, and/or linguistically diverse. The contact zone should promote restorative, liberatory literacies (Pritchard 35; hooks 17) instead of reifying harmful ones.

Concentrating contact zone discussions in multilingual writing classrooms is a step forward in increasing linguistic and cultural diversity and acceptance. Many first-year writing programs utilize the same standards and practices designed for native speakers of English for their multilingual students (Canagarajah 291; Lu 473; Ferreira and Mendelowitz 55). The courses designed for native speakers are sometimes referred to as “mainstream” classes, which creates a dichotomy of those who are in the majority versus those who are marginalized. Although the “multilingual/ESL/international” sections are often praised for having more specialized teachers and smaller course caps, this separation can result in a sidelining of these students with unique needs and can foster a deficit model centered on what English forms multilingual students do not know or struggle with instead of celebrating the unique perspectives that they bring to class (Ferreira and Mendelowitz 70; Canagarajah 99). Pratt writes that “the prototypical manifestation of language is generally taken to be the speech of individual adult native speakers face-to-face [...] in monolingual, even monodialectal situations” (38). These practices deny multilingual writers their sense of agency and right to their own language—problems that underscore the exigency for examining multilingual writers’ experiences and creating a safe space for them.

Negotiating Literate Identities in the Contact Zone

Identity and literacy are clearly connected and co-constitutive" (Descourtis et al. 35, in Viera et al.). In order to create praxis from contact zone theory, we must understand how multilingual students co-construct their identities and literacies. Writing assignments must be curated to support the identity exploration happening through the practice of writing in a contact zone. Ana Ferreira and Belinda Mendelowitz offer a strong summary definition of identity:

By identity, we do not mean a unified, stable and autonomous sense of self but rather we conceive of identity as socially located and shaped by discourse. Identity is therefore about an ongoing process of becoming (Hall, 1996), where one is actively engaged in negotiating the multiple and often contradictory subject positions made available by the discourses, or ways of being, thinking and producing meaning, that operate in particular spaces (Gee, 1996). (58)

The contact zone encourages the exploration of different identities through literacy practices, emphasizing that individuals' social location and discourses impact their access to and membership in certain discourse communities (Gee 6). Thus, identity negotiation becomes a focal point of the class.

Since discussions of identity and interacting with different people's identities may cause students' identities to evolve, students can struggle with self-identification. In addition to internal struggles, outside forces may further influence students' feeling of unknowing of themselves. Min-Zhan Lu includes these as some of the voices that collide in a contact zone: the student's voice, outside resources' voices, native speakers' voices, and the teacher's voice (478-479). Students consequently face many pressures when trying to find their identity in the multilingual composition classroom (Lu 482; Voeste 217). Richard E. Miller refers to the "matrix" of identities colliding in the classroom and explains that the contact zone will only be powerful "so long as it involves resisting the temptation either to silence or to celebrate the voices that seek to oppose, critique, and/or parody the work of constructing knowledge in the classroom" (144). Therefore, an important part of identity development is allowing time for cultural mediation (Pratt 40; McCook) and not overlooking students' dialogical nature (Lu 473). As such, teachers should collaborate with their students to make this matrix a safe space that supports individuals' mediation, though this process may not be easy.

Identity development requires a great deal of negotiation. While the perspectives students bring into the classroom are important and influential in the negotiation process, they are but one voice in a conversation of many. Students therefore must make choices based not only on their own opinions but also those of others that they encounter in the writing classroom. Class activities like peer

workshopping, small group work, and large group discussions promote student exchange. By interacting with others and reading outside texts, the contact zone becomes a market of perspectives where students move through a continuum of different experiences. Here, they can self-reflect from different vantage points found in the contact zone and thus negotiate their identity (Ferreira and Mendelowitz 56). This process is a constant pushing and pulling as students negotiate who they want to be (Beauvais 34), which can be supported as students revise multiple drafts, compose reflections, and design summative projects. The identity that results can be a productive, hybrid, chosen one that allows students greater awareness and advanced intercultural communication competencies (Canagarajah 87; Bizzell 51).

This negotiation process is conducted neither quickly nor easily. While the above-described productive, hybrid, chosen identity of a student capable of handling differences is a desired one, it can also feel like an idealistic one. Lu reminds us that the seemingly simplest details like native language or skin color can affect how identities are perceived and portrayed in a multilingual contact zone (481). Pratt, after describing some of the benefits of the contact zone, divulges its liabilities, such as miscomprehension or heterogeneity (37). In such a transnational, multilingual environment, students who may have previously had a strong sense of identity may feel unstable or unsettled with their changing knowledge. Even in a contact-zone-based classroom that focuses on eradicating power differences, different students will maintain different levels of authority (Pratt 38; Voeste 204; Canagarajah 85-86). Students will likely feel resistance to different ideas, especially if they perceive their own ideas as not being heard or valued (Gottschalk 63).

The response to these challenges, however, is what can make a contact zone-based classroom stronger than one that does not employ the ideology. Educators are encouraged “to recognize and take advantage of clashes between differing cultures, values, and disciplines” (Gottschalk 63), attend “to the writer’s effort to look at one discourse through the eyes of another” (Lu 470), and acknowledge writers’ rights and abilities (Lu 482; Miller 140). These tasks require a great deal of emotional and psychological labor for teachers, though. Supporting students’ development of metacognition and socio-linguistic, -cultural, and -political awareness in the contact zone is an ongoing, challenging process.

Writing teachers who have employed contact zone-based pedagogy remark that it was the most difficult teaching they have ever done, but also the most rewarding. Lu (482) comments on sociopolitical inequities that arose within her classroom, but concludes with the positive statement that contact zone-rooted pedagogy acknowledged the writers’ rights, which helped ameliorate discrimination. Pratt (39) also categorizes her contact zones as challenging for her students and herself as the teacher because when speaking about personal opinions of potentially polarizing topics, no one knew how their stances would be

perceived. This diversity of thought, though, made for engaged, exciting dialogue. Success stories such as these reinforce the value of the contact zone.

Contact Zone-Based Composition Pedagogy

Contact zone scholarship can, at times, make the contact zone feel like more of a theoretical construct than a real space or implementable praxis. However, Pratt instructs educators to “look for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone” (40). In response to this, the literature calls for revolution via new pedagogical approaches instead of trying to force new ideas into old methods (Bizzell 460). The basis of this revolution should be methodologies that focus on providing safe spaces for learners to unpack linguistic and cultural conceptions and entry points for meaningful interactions with new ideas (Canagarajah 85; Beauvais 22; Ferreira and Mendelowitz 55). Ferreira and Mendelowitz use traveling as a metaphor for the process that students undergo (55). As an extension of this metaphor and aligning with Deborah Brandt’s notion of literacy sponsors (19), I suggest perceiving instructors as travel agents or tour guides for their sojourning students. A contact zone tour guide enhances their sponsorship by making the contact zone tangible for students and helping them navigate the different learning experiences they encounter within it. Although any classroom can be a space for cultural learning, a contact zone classroom and tour guiding teacher intentionally recognize and facilitate pedagogical moments instead of letting rich opportunities be lost haphazardly. Tour guiding teachers multitask to create a holistically implemented contact zone classroom: teachers must collaborate with students to foster a safe, productive classroom environment. Moreover, teachers must consider the activities and assignments conducted within the space as well as the thoughts and experiences students may have outside of it.

The Contact Zone Classroom

Students should learn how to socialize within their translingual environment (Canagarajah 99; McCook; Ferreira and Mendelowitz 56). To facilitate this socialization, Ferreira and Mendelowitz advocate for reflexive inquiry (57). Donna Qualley explains that inquiry is a discovery process of systematically assessing oneself and that “reflexive” refers to “the act of turning back to discover, examine and critique one’s claims and assumptions in response to an encounter with another idea, text, person, or culture” (3).

To get to a point where students can perform reflexive inquiry, though, instructors must create an environment that is conducive to discovery through error-making (Pratt 39; Lu 481; McCook; Miller 129; Voeste 217). Growth from error-making is a hallmark of both Second Language Acquisition studies and Writing Studies, making this an integral aspect of the multilingual composition classroom as students progress through the learning process. The goal here is that students can feel comfortable with themselves, their work, others, and others’ work within the classroom, so it is incredibly important that teachers be aware of how they

talk about writing (Miller 134) and learning, particularly within their role as literacy sponsor.

If a teacher does not critically assume their role as tour guide in these moments of rapport-building and constructive learning, the literacy development can become oppressive. Without their instructor's conscious and explicit facilitation of contact zone happenings, students may be unaware of their own or others' identities and negotiations. Worse than being unaware of these processes, students, without proper guidance, could view the contact zone with apathy or even hostility. It is therefore of the utmost importance that teachers exemplify equitable, decolonizing practices so that their students may model those constructive behaviors (Gottschalk 61). Teachers as tour guides helping students journey through the contact zone equip students with skills for noticing and reconciling differences in a process that, without a tour-guiding teacher, would likely feel confusing and isolating. Creating an amicable relationship-based environment will aid in students feeling more comfortable with their assignments and identity negotiation.

I recognize I run the risk of exotifying the cultures explored within the contact zone by using a "tour guide" metaphor. A teacher's presence is important for facilitating the contact zone, but teachers should be wary of promoting ethnocentric beliefs and hegemonic norms. Consequently, I think the metaphor's risk demonstrates the need for careful pedagogical practice and teachers' reflexive inquiry when developing a contact zone and co-constructing it in an agency-building process with students. Teachers should continually examine their positionality and do the same type of reflective work that they are asking of their students; they can create opportunities for student-led learning to highlight students' voices instead of prioritizing their own perspective. Student/teacher collaboration enables co-constitutive identity and literacy development for *all* participants where co-construction of knowledge equitably distributes power across stakeholders.

Teaching in the Contact Zone

Once the pedagogical environment is established, instructors can focus on the course projects and activities. Paul Beauvais prefaces this discussion by explaining that all writing and reading assignments should be focused on the contact zone (22). Course projects and activities should also try to feature agency building opportunities (Ferreira and Mendelowitz 59). Examples of such activities include:

- oral and written narratives (Ferreira and Mendelowitz 56),
- revision work (Lu 478; Miller 130),
- looking at outside materials, including authentic texts (Lu 481; Canagarajah 99),
- multimodal projects (McCook; Canagarajah 300),

- literacy skills development (Miller 134; Pratt 38; McCook), and
- games or roleplay and storytelling (Pratt 38, 40).

Lessons should also cater to a variety of learning strategies with learner-centered pedagogy (Canagarajah 96; McCook). Furthermore, the presentation of materials and assignment directions should be clear and scaffolded to avoid adding unnecessary pressure to students (Miller 133; Ferreira and Mendelowitz 56). Outside of class, McCook recommends that teachers research their students' educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to better understand them.

Each of these strategies can be performed in hopes of getting the class to a point where everyone can dialogue about rhetorical decisions made during reading and writing (Miller 140; Gottschalk 63). In sum, an auspicious pedagogical response is one where teachers are "closely attending to what our students say and write in an ongoing effort to learn how to read, understand, and respond to the strange, sometimes threatening, multivocal texts they produce while writing in the contact zone" (Miller 145).

Bearing all of these suggestions in mind, it is important to create a streamlined action plan for a contact zone-based composition class. However, the countless genres available for writing instructors to choose from can be overwhelming, particularly when trying to identify ones that will mesh with contact zone principles. Subsequently, I now turn my attention to an assignment I designed, with the hope that this vignette will offer a humble attempt at responding to the question Suresh Canagarajah poses in response to being inundated by theory and wanting to create praxis: "As a teacher of writing for ESL and multilingual students, I am left with the question: what can I do to promote this pedagogical vision in my classroom now?" (299)

The Critical Autoethnography Project

Multilingual composition scholars and writing program administrators should investigate their local contexts (Tardy 635). For me, this meant recognizing that the memoir narrative essay I was given at orientation was a prime candidate for getting a contact zone refresh. The memoir narrative essay assignment (First-Year Writing Program; see Appendix A) was originally developed for the "mainstream" sections of our writing program. We, the teachers of the EAL sections, received this curriculum with no updates or considerations for our students, so as I grappled with Canagarajah's question, I recognized the opportunity and responsibility to redesign the memoir narrative essay assignment as a critical autoethnography project (see Appendix B).

Pratt describes an autoethnographic text as "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (35). David Seitz lauds the ethnography employed in his classroom for its ability to spark in students an understanding of power relations, cultures, and ethics as an agency-building text that teaches students to negotiate identity

(220). Canagarajah advocates for multilingual writers to compose a critical autoethnography because “in reflecting on their multilingual, literate lives, students analyze the tensions between different language norms and literate practices, their strategies in negotiating them, their efforts for voice, and their trajectories of development. The exercise helps students value their experiences and learn from them” (30).

Though an autoethnography is not the greatest departure from a memoir, I think my example displays an instance of where small changes can have substantial impacts. While I understand Bizzell’s call for new pedagogies instead of revamped ones (460) and respect her suggestion, that can require a great deal of labor and/or resources that teachers might not have. As a graduate teaching associate, I had little say in our writing program’s curriculum design or the ability to create my own. Nevertheless, as a teacher-scholar of multilingual writing, I recognized my duty to make some sort of curricular revision to support my students’ developing co-constitutive literacies and identities. Though my situation may not be generalizable, I share my experience and redesign from memoir to critical autoethnography to demonstrate working within one’s own context and resources, exemplifying that developing a contact zone classroom does not always require a complete overhaul of current conditions.

The Assignment Prompt

The first step in adapting the original assignment prompt was conducting a needs assessment (Key 116). It was important to rhetorically analyze the assignment prompt to highlight existing strengths and also note room for improvements, with special consideration of contact zone ideologies. This assignment prompt features both positives and negatives. For example, the language regarding purpose is conducive to agency-building and is accessible to multilingual writers: “This narrative is your chance to expand the world of your audience. Let them see your perspective.” Here, authors can understand why they are asked to write this type of personal text and it makes available the opportunity to share diverse viewpoints in a—hopefully—receptive space.

Some issues with this assignment prompt, however, are the paradoxically vague yet specific statements. In the first paragraph, the assignment calls for students to “write a memoir essay that tells a focused story with some kind of significance.” It would seem that the goal here, particularly when paired with the context of the rest of the paragraph calling for a singular instance in time, is to help students understand the limited scope of the assignment. The issue, however, is that it does not give any direction for how the story should be focused or significant, only that it needs to be both. Another command that appears well-intentioned but may be problematic in implementation is “organize your story effectively.” As this assignment prompt presumes to operate in its parent culture of US academic conventions, this “effective organization” is likely assumed to be a linear organization (see Kaplan). While a classroom of first-

language English speakers may default to this style of organization, in a multicultural and multilingual classroom like the one for which this project was being redesigned, organizational constraints either need to be explicitly described so as to avoid any confusion or, better yet, the instructor needs to explain organization as being effective within a rhetorical situation, considering elements like audience, purpose, and genre. The original assignment prompt can be extolled for aligning with this more closely when describing that style and tone should be “best suited to your particular story and point.” These portions of the assignment prompt may seem minor, but it is important to analyze the messages conveyed in them to understand how students may perceive and perform their assignments.

Following this needs assessment of the original assignment prompt, I wrote a new assignment prompt that aligns with contact zone ideologies. The new project is born from the strengths of the original and attempts to innovatively update its weaknesses. The first modification to this assignment prompt is the addition of a definition section. The original assignment prompt does not define *memoir*. Although memoir is perhaps a more commonly known genre than critical autoethnography, definitions facilitate scope and expectations. Additionally, because *critical autoethnography* is a term that undergraduate multilingual first-year writing students have not likely encountered, a written definition that they can refer to throughout the project is useful.

The second paragraph of the updated assignment prompt has a similar function as the first paragraph of the original assignment prompt. The difference, however, is that it offers more culturally sensitive rhetoric. It balances requirements that are essential to conducting the project successfully with opportunities for creativity and uniqueness. Refer again to the opening statement of the original assignment prompt: “Write a memoir essay that tells a focused story with some kind of significance.” Now, compare that with the updated version: “For this assignment, you will design a critical autoethnography focusing on a story that is in some way meaningful to you and you feel is reflective of your identity.” The first update is the change in the verb from “write” to “design.” This follows Canagarajah’s (300) call for using this term instead and also helps to set up the project as multimodal. Additionally, it addresses the original assignment’s call for significance by enumerating that the story’s significance comes from its relation to identity. This is an important agency-building opportunity and also presents again the function of the critical autoethnography genre. The rest of the paragraph balances instruction and example with open-endedness so that multilingual writers, particularly those unfamiliar with the genre, do not feel blind in this experience and have the ability to personalize their project.

Moving on to the second paragraph of the updated assignment prompt, I created a section that does not exist in the original and is the largest departure from the original assignment prompt. Suggestions from contact zone literature presented earlier (Canagarajah 300; McCook) as well as from the Writing Studies field at-

large encourage multimodality, and this project has easy entry points to designing diverse projects.

The updated assignment prompt uses the terminology “multimodal” to introduce students to the concept, defining it through examples of how multimodality may be employed. This assignment, though, as part of a writing class, does feature an explicit written requirement that is twofold. The first requirement is that students discuss in writing why they chose a particular identity to discuss and story to tell. The second requirement is that they also describe and discuss their design choices. The purpose behind these requirements is that it gives students an opportunity to debrief their project and then engage critical thinking and metacognition through rhetorical analysis and reflection. The final statement in this section is that students can include languages other than English in their assignment. This is to demonstrate a classroom environment that is accepting of diverse linguistic backgrounds and affirms students’ diverse linguistic identities. In order to facilitate universal understanding, though, in addition to any non-English texts the students produce, they must include an English translation, as English serves as the lingua franca of the course and it is a course designed to develop written communication skills in English.

The next section of the updated assignment prompt is included to make students aware of the public nature of the course. Since part of contact-zone-theory-based composition pedagogies is workshopping (Lu 478; Miller 130) and this can be a practice that students are unfamiliar with, it is important to let students know that the stories they share will be known not just by the teacher, but also by other students. This knowledge allows writers the opportunity to select a story and aspect of their identity that they feel comfortable sharing with these outside parties. This section also provides language encouraging students who feel uncomfortable with the assignment to come speak with the teacher. Letting students know that they have a safe space to communicate with their instructor is important for students processing their identities and navigating the course as a whole. This reinforces the idea of a tour guide teacher as it also helps students know that they have an advocate and confidant in their instructor.

Following this section, the assignment prompt features a bulleted list. A bulleted list also exists in the original assignment prompt. A strong aspect of a bulleted list is that it can succinctly summarize the assignment prompt for students. Within a multilingual context, this can be particularly helpful for students who may feel overwhelmed with the extensive prose offered earlier in the assignment prompt. It can further serve as a scaffolded checklist for students to refer to as they design their critical autoethnography. The updated assignment prompt’s list is condensed from the original one for brevity, clarity, and cultural sensitivity.

The “Audience and Purpose” section is included in both assignment prompts. This is an example of a section that did not require much change. The addressed audience—teacher and classmates—are the same. The updated assignment

prompt, however, includes a theoretical and/or known audience. The decision to add this language is in an effort to help students see how their schoolwork can be used for purposes outside of the course in which they design it. In this vein, it shows students that the identity discussed in a critical autoethnography is not bound to this assignment alone, but that their identity is transcendent of the classroom. Again, this is an opportunity for students to build agency and transfer their knowledge.

The “Format” section also appears in both assignment prompts, but the updated version features some additions. The main addition is information regarding the multimodality of the project. To foster creativity, there is no limit to this format except that it be “in a multimodal, creative format that supports your rhetorical purpose.” The original formatting requirements are fairly prescriptive. Due to the constraints of the course being academic in nature, these prescriptive requirements are carried over into the updated assignment prompt, but restricted to only being necessary for the written component to develop academic formatting skills. The goal here, like the majority of the assignment, is to demonstrate to students that there will likely always be formal academic assignments and regulations, but whenever possible, they should take opportunities to assume agency in their work.

There are a couple other rhetorically significant decisions in the updated assignment prompt. For example, the updated assignment prompt is written in first person. This decision is one that will hopefully help reduce the barriers between the instructor and students. In creating an assignment that can be stressful due to its personal nature, students need to feel like their instructor is not only available, but also approachable. While writing in first person only barely opens that door, it is hopefully a step in the right direction. Readers of the original assignment prompt will also likely notice that the reflection component has been removed in the updated assignment. Since a goal of a contact zone classroom is fostering reflection that is ongoing, there would likely already be reflective opportunities in place such as journaling and discussion, so requiring it here may seem redundant, especially when paired with the metacognitive tasks students are asked to complete earlier in the prompt. This aspect, though, like the entire assignment prompt, is one that can be modified according to the instructor’s preferences and course design.

Conclusion

While writing an assignment prompt is critical in designing a project, it is equally important to consider the actual implementation of the unit in class, focusing on questions like “How will I teach this project? What activities do I want to include? What do I want to explain to my students or let them discover on their own? What kind of environment do I want to create?” When operating within a framework like contact zone ideology, particularly if it is a new method for the instructor, these questions are of the utmost importance to consider. This requires a great deal of work, especially in a diverse multilingual classroom, but the goal is to make the

contact zone visible, tangible, collaborative, and customized to local contexts. The main goal of the writing classroom is that students learn how to write; the goal of a contact zone writing classroom is expanded to include participants learning how to engage meaningfully with their culture and others' through writing in a way that does not promote xenophobia or prejudice.

Contact zone classrooms and pedagogy are continuously evolving (Miller 145), so teachers are encouraged to engage with various techniques and iterations of assignments and activities to discover what might be successful. Implementing contact zone-based ideologies in the multilingual writing classroom will require trial and error. This is important to remember within an individual section, but also in iterations of it with different student groups, where a new contact zone will have to be created each time. The extent to which students will engage with or grow from this pedagogy is "displayed to varying degrees by multilinguals from different walks of life in the extant literature" (Canagarajah 99), so teachers should not be disheartened by difficulties they may encounter.

The contact zone can be unpredictable. Firsthand accounts of teaching within it describe it as being "dynamic, heterogeneous, and volatile. Bewilderment and suffering as well as revelation and exhilaration are experienced by everyone, teacher and students, at different moments" (Lu 481). Deciding to create and engage a contact zone in one's classroom is therefore not a decision made lightly. It requires a great deal of effort by all parties involved and can cause some uncomfortable situations. However, a contact zone also enables participants to learn more about themselves and others, and the composition contact zone allows participants to deal with and express those thoughts and emotions in writing. The contact zone does not and cannot promise that all involved will emerge culturally and linguistically enlightened. It cannot promise the impossible: that people will leave without any prejudices or with a full understanding of all cultures, including one's own or others. The contact zone is promising, however, in its ability to at least initiate thought-provoking conversations that can enact productive change. The multilingual writing contact zone can be a safe place for people of diverse backgrounds to have their own space to develop their multiliterate, multicultural, and multilingual identities.

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Appendix A: Original Assignment Prompt – Narrative Memoir Essay

Worth 20% of total class grade

Approximately 1000 words

Assignment:

Write a memoir essay that tells a focused story with some kind of significance. The memoir should focus on a specific, limited time period so that you are only telling one story and not your whole autobiography.

At the end of your essay, include a separate one-paragraph reflection that does the following: explains how this paper changed from the initial brainstorming stages to the final draft, mentions what kind of activities or feedback were most helpful in composing this assignment, and discusses the biggest challenge and biggest success you had in this assignment.

Your narrative should do the following:

- Organize your story effectively
- Convey the significance of the story
- Included vivid detail and scenes
- Use the style and tone best suited to your particular story and point
- Include a one-paragraph reflection in a separate section at the end of the paper

Audience and Purpose:

Your teacher and classmates will be the audience for this essay.

This narrative is your chance to expand the world of your audience. Let them see your perspective.

Format:

Follow MLA format – paper should be typed, double-spaced, 12-pt Times New Roman font or other similar font, standard 1" or 1.25" margins.

Appendix B: New Assignment Prompt – Critical Autoethnography

A **critical autoethnography** is a text that you can use to describe yourself and your experiences.

For this assignment, you will design a critical autoethnography focusing on a story that is in some way meaningful to you and you feel is reflective of your identity. The autoethnography should focus primarily on a single story, but you may include details like background information or information regarding what happened after the main story to help explain the story and/or its significance. You may choose any aspect of your identity to express, such as student, son/daughter/child, spouse, foodie, thrill-seeker, mountain climber, server, etc.

This project should be creative and multimodal. This includes using various methods of presentation, like video, speech, or artwork, and selecting a genre that will best support your story. After you create your autoethnography, you will create a written discussion of why you chose the identity and story you selected as well as a description of the design choices you made and discussion of their relevance to your identity and storytelling. Your project may feature other languages but must also have an English translation as English is our class' common language.

Critical autoethnographies can be challenging to share, so please speak with me if you are unsure of a story to tell or encounter difficulties in designing your project. We will be workshoping and presenting our autoethnographies in class. Keep this in mind as you select a story.

Your critical autoethnography should do the following:

- Share a story that impacted your identity
- Include vivid detail and scenes
- Use the style and tone best suited to your particular story and point
- Have an accompanying written discussion of your choices for topic and design

Audience and Purpose:

Your classmates and I are your main audience, but hopefully, you will create an assignment that can also be meaningful outside of this course. Your critical autoethnography is an opportunity to expand the world of your audience. Let them see your perspective.

Format:

Your story should be shared in a multimodal, creative format that supports your rhetorical purpose.

Your written description should follow MLA or APA format – paper should be typed, double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font, and standard 1” margins.