

Reflections on a Poetry Workshop with First-Year Latin@ Students at Oregon State University

by

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Abstract:

This paper explores the benefits of a poetry workshop with first-year Latin@ students at Oregon State University. Over the course of nine weeks, participants met once a week for fifty minutes to analyze and discuss culturally relevant poetry as well as compose and revise their own work. Drawing from critical pedagogy and critical literacy theories, the workshop sought to expose participants to culturally relevant poetry with which they could identify, and assist them in the process of producing their own works in order to create a space where they could explore themes that they found relevant. Surveys, interviews, observations, and the poems provided data for the study. After conducting a thematic analysis, results show participants were able to relate to the texts. Furthermore, they were engaged and inspired, became more confident (both writing and presenting), grew together as a group, and enjoyed the therapeutic benefits of writing and discussing poetry together. Drawing on the results of the workshop as described by the participants, I hope other educators and/or community members see the potential benefits of opening a supportive space for first-year students to explore culturally relevant poems and create their own.

“Social change is not built solely on passionate good intentions. The very act of creating a work of social justice art can—especially when considering conscientization as a fundamental component of social change—be a profound act of counter-hegemonic action.”

- Marit Dewherst (2011, p. 376)

“A person is literate to the extent that he or she is able to use language for social and political reconstruction”

-Freire y Macedo - “Reading the Word and the World”, 1987, p.159 in Wallowitz).

“I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue- my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.”

- Gloria Anzaldúa – (1987, p. 81)

Introduction:

It is well documented that Latin@ students are not achieving “academic success” at the same rate as their white, anglo counterparts (Davis, 2008; Gándara y Contreras, 2010; Lopez 2009, Sepúlveda III, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Sepúlveda III (2011) observed how part of the problem was student disengagement and teacher's lack of knowledge about their students (p. 555). Similarly, Helmer (2013) describes how student resistance and/or nonperformance can occur when educators do not understand the realities or experiences of the students and the classroom becomes a place of *symbolic violence*, where “the performance of hegemonic power... is not physically overt, but mutually constructed as status quo” (p. 271). Thus, while Latin@ youth in general may not be achieving the same amount of academic success as students of other ethnicities, there are external forces that play an important role in dismissing the identities and cultural heritage of these students. It can make the classroom an unwelcoming or unsafe space.

In addition to teachers' misconceptions and lack of student engagement, many Latin@ students feel their culture and/or they themselves are viewed negatively (Valenzuela, 1999). That is to say, beyond academic achievement, Latin@ students' emotional wellbeing can be harmed as their

experiences, histories, cultural identities and funds of knowledge¹ are not valued or appreciated in school. In a study on microaggressions conducted by Rivera et al. (2010), the authors discovered that eight out of eleven Latino participants found “their culture or values related to their culture were viewed as a deficit” (p. 69). Oftentimes, it is within academic institutions themselves where these types of negative ideologies and attitudes are promoted. As the authors state, many of the participants' experiences with microaggressions “were contextualized in educational settings” and that they “have both immediate and long-lasting negative effects” (p. 77). Latin@ students, then, are encouraged to assimilate into the dominant, “superior” culture, and rid themselves of their cultural heritage.

In a society where many youth are marginalized and silenced, their histories absent from school curricula, I believe creative writing and poetry can be used as pedagogical tools that allow and promote student development of voice and identity. As Jocson (2006) states, “For youth whose voices and experiences have been largely ignored in the schooling process, poetry acts as a site for critical transitions” (p.129). Hall (2007), conducted a study as a participant-observer that explored how various forms of written expression that African-American and Latino youth used at an after-school program revealed “coping strategies and resources that these resilient adolescent males of color used to transcend adversity in their environment” (p. 217). In his recommendations for future research, Hall mentions that, “Research on educational activities that center on writing and critical literacy as vehicles of voice and agency may prove favorable in understanding resiliency within socially and culturally specific locations and actions” (p. 238). I believe that, by dedicating a space and a time for the analysis and discussion of culturally relevant texts and the creation of new poems, we can take a step towards what Perea (1995) proposes:

We have long spoken. It is past time for people to listen. We have long lived. It is past time for recognition. We have long belonged to America. Longer, perhaps, than even you. As we

¹ Funds of knowledge, as defined by Luis Moll et al., (1992) refer to “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133).

struggle toward our rightful place in American society, and as America, in turn, listens to us and recognizes us, there will be fewer deaths by English. (p. 15)

This *death by English*, as Perea poetically puts it, is “a death of the spirit, the slow death that occurs when one's own identity is replaced, reconfigured, overwhelmed, or rejected by a more powerful, dominant identity not one's own” (p. 2).

Can poetry be a means to expressing and finding pride in one's identity? Can a poetry workshop serve as a forum to speak up and counter this process of death by English, that not only affects language use but other manifestations of expression of identity and self? In contrast to many traditional English or Literature classes, where the focus is on acquiring competency in standard English, there are many authors and poets that use their craft to assert their agency² and express themselves in more than one language. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) is one example, as are the works of Tato Laviera, José Antonio Burciaga, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and many others.

This community-based research project first and foremost sought to create a safe space where first-year Latin@ students could explore culturally relevant texts (see next section) and develop their own poems. Similar to Wiseman's (2011) study, in which she sought to describe how students participated in a classroom poetry workshop, the purpose of this paper aims to identify and explore the ways in which the workshop participants found it to be beneficial.

² Anthropologist Laura Ahearn (2001) defines agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112).

What Constitutes a Culturally Relevant Text?

According to Ann E. Ebe (2010), who looked at the benefits of using culturally relevant texts with third grade English Language Learners (ELLs), such texts are those that “draw on the schema that ELLs bring to reading” (p. 196). A culturally relevant text, therefore, is one that students can relate to and connect to their previous experiences or funds of knowledge. Ebe builds on Yetta Goodman's work, and identifies eight areas to consider when selecting a culturally relevant text: 1) the ethnicity of the characters, 2) the setting, 3) the year the story takes place, 4) age of the characters, 5) gender of the characters, 6) the language or dialect used in the story, 7) the genre and exposure to this type of text, 8) the reader's background experiences (p. 197). While selecting poetry for the workshop, I kept Ebe's suggestions in mind, focusing more on areas 1, 2, 6, and 8 for all poems. Furthermore, I attempted to include a balance between male and female poets, both well known and obscure.

In her study of a Chicano Literature class, Jessica M. Vásquez (2005) observed how student ethnicity and background affects textual interpretation of Chicano texts and how reading such material affects ethnic consciousness. She states that “All readings were authored by Chicanos, and dealt with topics such as immigration, acculturation, assimilation, migrant labour, poverty, urban oppositional environments, Catholicism, patriarchy/machismo, and Chicana feminism” (p. 906). Latino students in the class she observed could relate to the authors' voices and the themes of the works. Most literature courses, from high school through college, fail to focus on authors of marginalized or subaltern groups. As a result, the histories, stories, and realities of non-dominant groups are too often silenced or invisible (Diaz-Greenberg, 2003), and students in literature courses must constantly be exposed to histories and experiences expressed by members of the dominant group about topics that often fail to resonate with them. Perea (1995) said, “When I write of Latino invisibility, I mean a relative lack of positive public identity and legitimacy” (p. 1). Might the invisibility of Latin@ authors' works in mainstream curricula or the common canon contribute to this symbolic deportation? (Perea, 1995).

In the workshop, we analyzed and discussed poems by Cherríe Moraga, Tato Laviera, José Antonio Burciaga, Martín Espada, Julia Álvarez, Juan Felipe Herrera, Mayda del Valle, Pat Mora, a song by Hip-Hop artist Cambio, and more. Many times, as participants shared their thoughts and reactions to the poems, they would say “I can relate to...” or “I can really connect with...” I feel it is that relatability, in one way or another, that made the texts culturally relevant. Of course, not all texts will be relatable to everyone. Most texts will not be relevant in all areas, nor will they be relevant for all readers. Some poems we looked at were from Mexican-American authors, others were by Puerto Rican and/or Nuyorican poets. The experience of being Mexican-American in the northwest is not the same as being Puerto Rican in New York, or being Puerto Rican in the northwest for that matter. Nonetheless, there was common ground that participants could relate to regarding themes presented in the poems. For example, one participant mentioned in an interview how he really enjoyed Martín Espada's poem *Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits* because Espada describes how janitors are seen as invisible. The participant related to that sentiment, describing how Mexican immigrants' humanity is often ignored.

Aren't all poems or texts relevant to the human condition? Can't students in school all relate to poems on love, or friendship, or family? Yes. However, when considering the negative experiences, microaggressions, and/or deficit views many Latin@ youth confront in school, and the *denied identity* or *symbolic deportation* described by Perea, culturally relevant texts can do more than just engage students. They can engage students with the material (Feger, 2006), expose students to new role models that may come from a similar situation as the students, boost self-esteem, and help build and strengthen a positive identity.

Previous Studies

Many studies have looked at how various forms of creative written expression can aid “marginalized” students and youth with healing and emotional release (Hall, 2007; hooks, 1994; Jocson, 2006; Sepúlveda III, 2011), knowledge of cultural heritage (Hall, 2007; Sepúlveda III, 2011; Vásquez, 2005), a sense of individual and collective political agency (Hall, 2007; Keddie, 2012; Wiseman, 2011), critical awareness (Hall, 2007; Keddie, 2012; Vásquez, 2005), and creating stronger identities (Hall, 2007; Keddie, 2012; Vásquez, 2005). Amanda Keddie (2012) analyzed a poetry book written by disadvantaged girls (many who identified as Indigenous Australian) and looked at the possibilities that poetry and prose offer as “pedagogical tools that can both accommodate and address difficult and painful knowledges” (p. 317). She discusses the importance of voice and agency, “centring [sic] marginalised voices” and moving beyond the reductionism and “holidays and heroes” approach of multiculturalism to actually allowing the silenced group to speak for themselves. Hall (2007) agrees, stating, “Positioning their words and feelings at the center of this sociological inquiry enables us to see them more completely and adjust our perceptions of how we see them” (p. 218). Sepúlveda III (2011), from a perspective of critical literacy and liberation theology, exclaims “in the process of liberation, the voices of those on the margins must be recentered” (p. 559).

In a context far from Keddie's study in Australia, Enrique Sepúlveda III (2011) worked with a group of Latino students in the United States and developed what he calls a “pedagogy of acompañamiento” where one accompanies individuals on their journey, and focus is on healthy relationships and community. In a system where students are disengaged, separated “spatially, socially, and academically” (p. 555) from mainstream students and culture, and their histories, cultures, and achievements are not represented in the curricula, Sepúlveda III worked with 24 transmigrant boys to “discuss and examine, through poetry, storytelling, and dialogue, the multiple realities, identities, and meanings of being border-crossers and outsiders to this land and school” (p. 561). Horace R. Hall

(2007) worked with male African-American and Latino students in an after-school program. Participants shared their own stories through free writing and group dialogue activities. In a college level Chicano Literature class, Jessica M. Vásquez (2005) observed how student ethnicity and background affect textual interpretation of Chicano texts and how reading such material affects ethnic consciousness. She looked at results for both Latino and non-Latino students.

The studies by Cahnmann (2006), Hall (2007), Keddie (2012), Sepúlveda III (2011), Vásquez (2005), and Wiseman (2011) all show the benefits of representing and valuing what students bring to the classroom. Their histories, languages, experiences, pains, struggles, and achievements should be voiced and valued. Through connecting with culturally relevant literature, Vásquez found ethnic validation for nearly all Latino participants. When students write their own pieces and share them in a safe, supportive environment, they can share their struggles and pain and realize that they are not alone (Hall, 2007; Ingalls, 2012; Sepúlveda III, 2011; Vásquez 2005).

Data Collection

Over the course of nine weeks, seven Freshman members of the Oregon State University College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and I met once a week for fifty minutes. The program, according to the U.S. Department of Education, “assists students who are migratory or seasonal farmworkers (or children of such workers) enrolled in their first year of undergraduate studies at an IHE³.” The mission is “To provide educational and support services including outreach efforts...during their first year of college” (Oregon State University CAMP website). Enrollment fluctuates from year to year, but at the time of the study there were just over thirty students in the program.

The participants in this study self-identified as Hispanic, Latin@, Mexican-American, Chican@, and/or Mexican@. They were between eighteen and nineteen years old and all but one majored in a STEM⁴ field. Six participants were born in the United States, and one in México.

Reasons for participating included:

- a desire to expand one's horizons beyond STEM courses
- to have a place to go to relieve stress and emotions
- to learn how to express oneself in writing/put emotions and ideas into writing
- to give poetry a second chance
- to improve poetry writing and analysis skills
- to learn about different authors

I had dual roles as both facilitator and student researcher. Though I am fluent in Spanish and English, I am a cultural outsider. I am of Anglo/European descent and grew up speaking English. While I can not directly relate to some of the experiences shared by the participants of the group, I have experienced the transformational potential of creative writing and poetry. Despite cultural, historical, and linguistic differences between the group and the facilitator, participants could write for themselves,

³ Institution of Higher Learning

⁴ STEM is an acronym that refers to the academic fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

each other, and others. In this way, since they were not writing for me, I hoped these differences would not hinder self-expression.

Data for this qualitative study were obtained via three methods. Keeping triangulation in mind (Berg & Lune, 2012), I combined the information gathered from field notes I took as a participant-observer during and immediately following our meetings, pre-workshop surveys and post-workshop interviews with participants, and the poems produced by the members themselves.

First, to check if there was interest in a poetry workshop for students at the university, I met with both the director and academic counselor of CAMP to propose the idea. The leaders of the program had previously organized a film group that was popular among those who participated, and the idea for a poetry group was met with enthusiasm. With the generous support of the staff, I organized a sample workshop and facilitated activities for the entire group. Afterwards, two sheets were distributed in order to gather the contact information of interested students. Working with the academic counselor, we were able to identify available times to offer the workshop, and seven students (five women and two men) chose to participate.

Before the first workshop meeting, participants filled out a survey (attached) in order to provide general background information as well as describe their interests and previous experiences with poetry. In this way, I hoped to learn a little about the participants and their interests to help shape the trajectory of the workshop. Similarly, throughout the nine weeks, participants provided feedback about the poetry and activities in the workshop to make adjustments and ensure that the participants' interests and goals were the focus.

In addition to the initial survey, I took field notes during and immediately following our weekly meetings. I took note of any comments participants had in response/reaction to poems, and difficulties or successes with writing during the week, as well as other interactions or discussions that reflected participants' attitudes or experiences in the workshop.

Furthermore, face-to-face semi-structured interviews (attached) were conducted after the conclusion of the workshop to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences with poetry. Interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, and all relevant information was later transcribed.

Lastly, the poems themselves were collected and organized. All data were analyzed thematically and patterns emerged connecting observations in the field-notes with participant statements via interviews and poems.

Structure of the Workshop

“After reading poems that address real social issues, students often feel empowered to write their own poems using words that are authentic rather than borrowed, raw rather than polished. By allowing students to write 'their own reality' through a form that is powerfully accessible, we have a chance—as [Adrienne] Rich would say—of avoiding the old lies.”

- Alice Pettway – (2012)

The workshop took place once a week for fifty minutes in a comfortable classroom with ample natural light. There were eight meetings total, culminating in a final potluck/presentation where all poets presented a poem they wrote during the previous weeks and brought a treat for the group. The format was inspired by personal experience, informative guides, and published articles. Reflecting on my past experiences both taking and teaching high-school and college creative writing classes/workshops, I attempted to include what worked well and adapt what I identified as areas for improvement. For example, while I greatly enjoyed the classes I took in high-school, we as students did not have much say regarding what we did in class or what texts we read. Some of my college experiences were similar. However, one benefit of having a small group of poets is the opportunity for each participant to provide input. After reflecting on my experience in two poetry classes in Ecuador,

each with under ten members, I wanted to encourage students to give feedback during the process, adapt or change what they didn't enjoy, and allow them to have as much ownership of the process as they desired.

Drawing on student voice research (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009), I did my best to give the participants a say in the format and process of the workshop. Rodríguez and Brown advocate for “pedagogical and methodological processes that not only gather and present the viewpoints of marginalized youth but further their understandings of how they can make their voices matter—that is, a shift from simply having a voice to being actual agents of change” (p. 22).

In response to the student-centered approach and attempt to center the participants' voices in the workshop, members felt they had a say in what we did. One participant-poet⁵ said afterwards, “[the workshop] was about all of us, and what we wanted to do. And you don't get that in a classroom setting.” Another participant confirmed, saying:

You would ask us, like 'What do you guys think?' It was like open forum, you know? Yea, I think you gave us a choice. I don't feel like you were controlling everything... No, I feel like it was, if at any point we felt like we were doing something that was wasteful, we would have said something.

At the end of one meeting, for example, they were asked if they wanted to focus on their own poems or read and discuss others' work the following week. Several participants responded by saying, “Why can't we do both?” I asked if the others agreed, and when they assured me they did, we used the following week to read and discuss a new poem before digging into our own work.

I drew on texts like Carol Jago's *Sandra Cisneros in the Classroom* (2002), Linda Christensen's *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (2000), Tannenbaum and Chow Bush's *Jump Write In* (2005), and Collom and Noethe's *Poetry Everywhere* (2005) for ideas on how to structure the workshop and

⁵ To differentiate between the published poets that we read and discussed and the participant-poets of the workshop, I refer to the members of the workshop as either participant-poets or student-poets throughout the paper.

possible activities to include. An example from Christensen's work that was incorporated into the workshop was her version of *the read around*. "During our read-arounds," she says "we socialize together and create community, but we also teach and learn from each other. If I had to choose one strategy as the centerpiece of my teaching, it would be the read-around" (p. 14). The read-around experience in this workshop, as you will read later, helped foster a supportive environment where participants' were able to build confidence and community.

Poetry collections like *Red Hot Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Being Young and Latino in the United States* (Carlson ed., 2005) were also helpful in selecting texts and/or poets to analyze as a group. In that collection, I found José Antonio Burciaga's *Bilingual Love Poem*. In my own copy of *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets* (Algarín & Holman, eds., 1994) I'd read Tato Laviera's poem *My Graduation Speech*. Both poems were read and discussed in our first meeting. Finally, *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing* (Adler, Busman & García eds., 2009) provided inspiration as to the power, purpose, and possibility of poetry for social action.

The workshop included both analysis and discussion of culturally relevant texts as well as the composition and revision of personal pieces. After a brief check-in to see how everyone was doing each week, meetings began with a short writing activity. We looked at a question, prompt, or slam poem and then had approximately five minutes to freewrite, brainstorm, or make a web. A freewrite is generally a short activity where time is dedicated to writing what is on one's mind without editing oneself. The goal is to keep the pen or pencil moving for the duration of the activity and, as a result, have material to work with afterwards. Furthermore, by refusing to edit oneself during the activity, it often allows the writer to produce raw material and write on topics that she or he otherwise would have left untouched. As Ruggieri (2000) discovered in her classroom, "Allowing [the students] to freewrite provided a forum for them to express feelings they may have otherwise left unexamined" (p. 51.) Additionally, there were meetings where participants brainstormed and created lists for the opening

activity. For example, to generate material for *I Am* poems, *Where I'm From* poems (Christensen, 2000, p. 18), or *I Remember* poems (Collom & Noethe, 2005, p. 105) the writers list objects, phrases, smells, etc. that remind them of their childhood. Later, they adapt the lists and incorporate them into their pieces. On the other hand, creating a web can be useful to show connections between ideas or concepts or to find structure in a topic. It is a type of visual map, with the main concept or idea in the middle, and related ideas branching off. Then, other ideas can branch off of the outer concepts, so the relationships between ideas become clear.

As a result of the opening writing activities, the participants wrote in each meeting and had material to work with as they created their own poems during the week. Furthermore, we would discuss the uses of these short exercises, and how we could transfer such skills to other classes or settings. For example, when we created webs to connect ideas about a subject we wanted to write about, we used it specifically for the purpose of creating a poem. However, we discussed and gave examples about how it could be applied to make a web for a class reading, an essay, etc. Thus, participants were not only strengthening their writing skills, but were also acquiring strategies that could be applied in other contexts.

After the initial check-in and brief writing activity, we would dive into the poems. During the first few weeks, before the participants had produced several of their own pieces, we focused more heavily on analyzing and discussing other poets' work. As the workshop progressed, the focus shifted more heavily to peer editing and presenting participant poems.

To support dialogue and interaction, and provide structure for our discussions, participants could use the peer-editing guide and a handout on poetry terms and explicating poetry (both attached). Participant-poets were also encouraged to ask questions of the group. That is to say, the responsibility wasn't completely on the audience to provide feedback to the poet, but the poet was encouraged to ask questions of the audience as well. For example, after presenting her or his poem, the author could ask

“Was *X* clear in my poem?” “What did you think of the ending?” “Do you have any ideas for improving *X*?” In this way, the poets could become aware of their own role in soliciting feedback and guiding the discussion to answer questions they themselves had of their own work.

Finally, to complement the focus on writing, we discussed strategies for reading and presenting poems. Once we really began to focus on our own work, the participants were encouraged to stand up in front of the group and practice reading their pieces with energy, emotion, and good enunciation. While uncomfortable at first, many eventually enjoyed the experience.

Findings

To present the findings, I will first discuss group-wide patterns and shared experiences observed during the workshop or taken from interviews. Later, I will present several participant poems with a brief discussion of each. Multiple changes occurred throughout the course of the nine weeks as participant-poets interacted with published texts, each other, and their own written work. Many gained more confidence in their ability to write and share their own pieces. They became engaged with the texts and the experience changed their opinions of poetry. They were able to grow as a group and get to know each other in ways they wouldn't have otherwise, and for a few, they found the experience of writing poetry to be therapeutic or cathartic. In the following subsections, I will discuss each of these findings in greater detail while including as many participant voices as possible.

Participants' reactions to texts

“It changed my perspective of the way the two languages can be used.”

- Workshop participant

All of the students that participated in the workshop said they were able to relate to the texts. Some mentioned the bilingual poems and described how the authors' use of both English and Spanish reflected their experience. Others discussed in their interviews how they could connect with the themes of the poems. As a result, several participants changed their perspective of what poetry could look like. Although one member of the group did not like code-switching before the workshop, he changed his mind after seeing how the authors used the two languages to communicate a message impossible to transmit in just English or Spanish. Finally, by being exposed to culturally relevant texts, the participant-poets had new ideas of what to attempt in their own work and were inspired to try new things.

Bilingual Poems

None of the students had previously read a bilingual poem. I wanted to make sure the participants understood that all languages were welcome in the workshop, and that they were free to use whichever language they preferred. In our first meeting I asked if everyone was comfortable speaking and reading both Spanish and English, and when everyone assured me they were, we read and analyzed Tato Laviera's poem *My Graduation Speech* and José Antonio Burciaga's *Bilingual Love Poem*. Reactions were positive. Students connected with Laviera's opening lines “i think in spanish/ i write in english.” In the discussion following the readings of the poem, they identified and related to the confusion that the author expresses, as well as the humor in his tone. In this poem, they were able to see both intrasentential and intersentential code-switching where Laviera switches between

languages within the same sentence, and between sentences, respectively.

In Burciaga's piece, code-switching occurs multiple times within each line, and the author's wordplay with similar sounding words in each language engaged participants immediately. It was challenging at first and took multiple readings to become familiar with the Spanish and English sections. Participants mentioned the complexity of the poem and were aware of the richness of language and the unique possibilities that bilingualism provides.

From reading and discussing these compositions, the writers in the workshop were motivated to include multiple languages in their own poems. One student, describing her reaction to the readings, said, "The ones that were in Spanish and English. I liked those a lot... I don't think I had ever seen some like that... From seeing those it made me want to write in Spanish and English..." Similarly, another participant described this change and related it back to her previous experiences: "It inspired me to put in some Spanish and English into my poems because when I would write them in seventh or eighth grade, they were all in English, all one language. I think it helps to add something different to your poem. Add more meaning."

However, the exposure to bilingual texts didn't just affect their writing. One student described how reading bilingual poetry made her feel good because, despite negative societal views of Spanish speakers, the authors embraced their heritage and wrote in both languages. As she said:

I really liked it. I felt kinda happy because there's people who come and say 'Oh, he's Mexican, he doesn't speak English, he'll never be successful.' It makes me happy to know that this is out, that he wrote this in English and Spanish, and he rose above all the negativity.

She is aware of the racist and xenophobic views some people have towards Mexicans, and sees writing a bilingual poem as a way to resist or overcome adversity.

For one participant, the experience of reading bilingual poems changed his opinion of mixing languages. Reflecting on this change, he said:

That's what I thought...you either write a poem in Spanish or in English. But once I heard the [love poem] in both languages, I thought that was really cool because he knows how to use the words, and what words to use to kind of confuse you, but at the same time make sense...Since it was my first time, it...gave me another perspective of how it could be done.

Furthermore, this participant understood the complexity of the language use and the cognitive demand of reading such a text:

The thing is that, the only way you get that poem is when you know both languages. If you don't know both languages, you have no idea what he's talking about. So, for someone like us, that know both Spanish and English, reading a poem like that and then just realizing like, oh, sea is mar, and sí is yes, it just blows your mind.

In addition to recognizing the challenge of reading bilingual texts, this participant mentions how he is part of the target audience. Instead of being excluded for the curriculum, his language skills and experiences are precisely what is needed to make sense of such a poem. As the previous paragraphs demonstrate how students reacted to bilingual poems for the first time, the following section will look at reactions and connections to the themes of the poems.

Reading and discussing poems with relevant themes

“I think reading definitely changed me or my outlook because it's not just what they say but what you get from it. You read it once, and it's like, okay, I see what they're trying to say. I get it. And then you read it again, and discuss it with someone else, and it's like “oh, this is what *I* get from it. The meaning behind the poem I guess. It reminds me of other things. I never saw poetry like this”

-Workshop participant

In addition to relating to the language(s) used in the poems, participants often connected with the themes. *Legal Alien* by Pat Mora was one notable example. We read this poem in our sixth meeting.

Pat Mora – *Legal Alien*

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
able to slip from "How's life?"
to "*Me'stan volviendo loca,*"
able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
viewed by Mexicans as alien,
(their eyes say, "You may speak
Spanish but you're not like me")
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by masking the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally.

From Chants by Pat Mora, Arte Publico Press (1985)

Below are several observations and direct quotes made during the discussion that followed.

- “I had to learn Spanish well to speak with my family, and we're pushed to do well in school and get good grades, so we have to learn English well.”
- Several participants described how they don't fit in here in the United States or in México, because in México they get judged when family or friends see they speak English really well, and here they are thought of as illegal when they say they were born in México.
 - “When I say I was born in Mexico, people think that means I'm here illegally”

- “Legality has nothing to do with how people think of you.”
- Discussing her multiple identities, one student said, “You know me, but what side did you get to know?” Later, she integrated this thought into a poem (discussed later).
- Several students commented on how they've been considered whitewashed.
- “We are not like the old generation of Mexican-Americans, or the American generation.”
- “You have to try twice as hard to fit in.”
- The group noticed the alliteration of “definitely different,” and how Mora increased the impact of that phrase by preceding it with the repetition of “perhaps exotic, perhaps inferior.” One participant mentioned the repetition of sound in “**by** smiling/**by** masking the discomfort/ of being pre-judged/**bi**-laterally.”

The student-poets shared their own stories and experiences that relate to the themes presented in Mora's poem. They understand what the author is expressing, and have their own stories of similar struggles. The group did discuss and enjoy the poetic devices present in the poem like alliteration “definitely different,” and the repetition and word-play seen in “by smiling,” “by masking,” “bi-laterally,” for example. However, it was the connections they made with the theme that truly stuck. Three weeks later, during the post-workshop interview, a participant recalled her reaction to the poem, stating “I felt like I related to it a lot because a lot of people are surprised when I tell them 'Oh, I wasn't born here,' you know? I was born in México. And they're like 'Oh. You have papers?' You know? They look at you kind of differently. So I could relate to that one.” Another member of the group similarly recalled the poem during the interview, and remembered what she said in the discussion that day: “I really liked it because you have to work twice as hard to be both Mexican and American, and I really relate to that. And like, I think that's the one where I said 'what side did you get to know'.”

She continued, reflecting on what it felt like to see her culture represented in the poems:

These poems, I liked them because...they showed my culture, they were talking about racism

and Spanish and how people work in the fields, they're viewed as aliens, and I'm like, 'Oh nice!' I've never had any classes or taken anything that embraced my culture until I came here to Oregon State, so I feel like my culture is really valued here, because I grew up in a small racist little town, so I never see this around.

She mentions never having taken a class that embraced her culture before arriving at OSU, and it is clear that the representation and appreciation of her culture has had a positive effect on her. A benefit of the CAMP program is the amazing work they do with incoming Latino and Latina students to help with the transition to the new environment. A poetry workshop could complement such a program, or be useful in schools or areas where programs like CAMP are not present in order to represent students' cultures and identities and could result in increased engagement and inspiration.

Engagement and Inspiration

The experience in the workshop engaged participants both with the texts they explored and the pieces they produced. While some students had enjoyed previous experiences with poetry in English classes, others found it boring or unenjoyable. These members participated in the workshop to “give it another shot” and mentioned how they were hesitant to join at first. In contrast to some of the experiences they had in the past, these participants described this experience as enjoyable, refreshing, and inspirational. This is demonstrated, in part, by participants' reactions to the poems and language use as previously discussed. They were inspired to include other languages in their work and take on themes of social justice, identity, and family.

Further evidence of inspiration and engagement with the material can be seen in their poems. Ideas that were shared in our discussions of poems would then appear in their own work. Later, in the interviews, participants would mention a poem that we read, how they related to it, and how it ended up in their poem. Since I was able to obtain data via several methods, I could see the connections and influence the poems had. One example is the student-poet who really connected to Pat Mora's poem

(discussed in the previous section) and was struck by the focus on multiple identities. She mentioned in the group discussion how she could relate and how people only get to know one side of her. “What side of me did you get to know,” she said. Later, she ends one of her poems:

Will I survive? Will I live?
With this shame?
Blame me for my embarrassment
I am sorry
It's all on me
You say you know me
But what side did you get to know?

Participants also quoted each other's poems in the final interviews. They were engaged enough during our time together to remember, weeks later, feedback that was given to *other* members of the group. They didn't learn only from the poems of the published poets; they learned greatly from each others' poems and the group discussions.

When asked if they had any favorite poets after the workshop, several students mentioned fellow poets from the group. They would refer to specific poems that another student wrote, even repeating similes and vivid images written by their group mates: “She said his room tasted like vanilla coke/And he said hers smelled like peppermint” or “The colors of its death are extraordinary/Filled with a variety of colors like brand new berries.” Receiving positive feedback from each other, and being recognized for their poetry by their group mates was not only an inspiration, but a confidence builder.

Increased Confidence

Sharing one's own poetry is often a personal experience. Not only can it expose private information and sentiments, but the poem itself can be judged and critiqued. In other words, it makes the poet vulnerable. As skilled as writers may be at their craft, they may not be comfortable sharing their work with others. However, as the participants in this workshop observed, many of the poems contained important critiques of society that need to be addressed. Thus, sharing one's work can play a fundamental role in creating change. Moreover, if one writes to communicate a message, presenting a poem is a prime occasion for communication. As poets, who do we reach if our poems stay scribbled in our notebooks?

In the beginning, the participants were uncomfortable reading another's poem aloud and discussing it afterward. During the first few weeks, I would either read a poem or ask for a volunteer, then wait twenty or thirty seconds for a student to raise his or her hand. After reading, I would often have to guide the discussion with questions (What do you think of the poem? Are there any images that really stand out? What do you think the poet is trying say?) and the participants would respond directly to me. However, for our last several meetings, I was able to sit quietly in the circle as participants volunteered to read the poems or present their own work. Then, others would immediately jump in to discuss and analyze the piece or provide feedback. They mentioned what they liked, what they thought the main message was, striking metaphors or similes, vivid imagery, and more. They shared their opinions with the group instead of me, and they built off of each other's comments, digging beneath the surface.

Of course, the longer a group stays together, the more comfortable the members become with each other and thus are more willing to open up. However, I believe an important reason the participants became more confident was due to the feedback they received from other members of the group, seeing that others could relate to their poems, experiences, and feelings. Instead of feeling like

they were the only ones experiencing something, they felt the support of others who could relate. A poetry workshop can be a perfect venue for such a discovery. As one member said, “All of them told me that they were able to relate to a lot of it. So that kind of helped me be more confident about my poems knowing that, you know, I’m not the only one who felt like that and that my poems are kind of true in a way. Not just in my case but with other people.” Another added:

It felt good... just being able to make somebody relate to something you wrote. And, it's not even like a full story, you know, it's just like a few lines of what you really felt, you know? And then just being able to have somebody relate to its, like, cool, you know? You're not the only one that has gone through something like that.

Furthermore, several poets described how getting out of their comfort zone was beneficial for them. “The most helpful part that I think I got from the whole thing,” one student said, “was just, getting out of my comfort zone... because when I saw that other people were writing it, and they weren't nervous about sharing it... I was more confident and like, I can just write one too, you know? And just share it...it helps to think about the way you write, and again, when you were saying the way people get it, you know?” Another student shared what the experience was like for him. “I like how it took me out of my comfort zone and then through that, you know, it got me talking about things that I wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable talking about before. You know? Now I feel more comfortable in bringing up those topics or talking about issues.” Issues of identity, family, history, and language can be difficult to address. Discussing these topics with other students who can relate, and hearing their stories, allows participants to move beyond the initial discomfort and take advantage of the supportive environment.

Finally, there were some participants who doubted their ability to write poetry before the workshop. Perhaps due to prior experience in poetry classes where their work didn't meet what was described in the rubric, they were not confident in the ability to write. One student described a

discovery she made during our meetings. “I found out that it's okay to have short poems. You know, so I guess I kinda found myself as a writer. Like, I like short poems. You know? I guess I just make it straight to the point so you get it in the short poems. Finding myself as a writer.” While still comparing herself to other poets, she no longer saw her work in a negative light. She was comfortable with her writing style while still valuing and appreciating the styles of her group mates. These respectful and supportive attitudes fostered a collaborative environment where poets were able to grow together.

Building Camaraderie

One result of the workshop that many participants alluded to in their interviews, and that they enjoyed, was growing together as a group. By spending time together each week, sitting in a circle, sharing poems, and giving feedback, participants were able to build camaraderie. Going through uncomfortable situations together, like sharing their poetry in front of each other, gave them a shared experience. While they were all part of the CAMP program that met once a week, not all students in the workshop interacted regularly in the larger (CAMP) group before participating in the workshop. As a result, some of the female participants noted how they got to know the males in the group better. “I really liked the group. And I got to get to know the guys, because I didn't really talk to the guys that much that were in there. So being in [the workshop] made me get to know them more. I feel like I got more than what I expected out of it.” The combination of meeting in a small group and interacting frequently to share poems and provide feedback gave participants the opportunity to get to know each other in ways they wouldn't have otherwise.

In fact, they became so familiar with each others' writing styles that they were able to tell each other apart by their poems. As one participant explained, “you could tell whose poems were whose, like after a while you were able to tell everybody's personality, like if I was just reading somebody's poem I could probably guess whose it was. So I really enjoyed seeing how everybody was really

different in how they write.” Not only were they able to gain a sense of each others' poetic voices, but this allowed them to really see each other as poets. As one member exclaimed, “these are like my classmates, you know? And that's cool, they're talented in many ways...I was just like, damn! They're just straight up poets.” For the other poets in the workshop, having such support from a group mate, and being seen as a talented poet, helps to build self-esteem and confidence.

Another poet, reflecting on the differences and similarities among group members, said:

It's kinda interesting because we come from different parts of Oregon and our parents come from different parts of México, and we're all different but we all relate back to the same thing...So we're from different places but we all connect together, but at the same time we're all unique, and different, so it's interesting to see how they developed themselves as (writers), like each one has their own style of writing.

The group members valued the connections they formed and the collaborative nature of giving feedback and working on poems together. Later, this same participant described how her favorite part of the workshop was tied to the other participants in the group.

My favorite part was hearing everyone else's poems and kinda working together to help us improve our poems, I kinda like that. It's a small group, I feel we got to know each other better through our writing. I really enjoyed that. I like how you made us sit in a little circle so we could see everyone. I never really read my poems out loud to nobody, it was kinda hard at first, but since it's a small group, I kinda got it down. I felt like a stand up poet, so it's kinda cool. That's what I really enjoyed.

In contrast to many traditional classes, where there is a competitive atmosphere and students work individually, this experience was highly collaborative and supportive. For most poets, their favorite parts of the workshop were hearing each others' poems, receiving and providing feedback, working together, growing together, and/or discussing and analyzing the poems in the circle. Not one

of those options could have been achieved without a comfortable, collaborative environment.

Therapeutic/Cathartic Benefits

“It kinda made me a little happy actually, because I have all this weight on my shoulders, on me all the day. How do I get this out? And writing poems kinda helped get the stress out.”

- Workshop participant-poet

Several poets in the group described their experience in the workshop as therapeutic. In part, writing poetry itself can be a form of therapy. From a pedagogical standpoint, poet and professor Mary Rose O'Reilly says in her book *The Peaceable Classroom* (1993), “good teaching is, in the classical sense, therapy: good teaching involves reweaving the spirit” (p. 47).

However, I also believe that being in a relaxed environment and discussing poetry and how it relates to your own life and experiences can help relieve stress. Furthermore, as some of the participants mentioned in the *Participants' Reactions to the Texts* section of this paper, it felt good to read poetry in both languages and see that a) the poets overcame the adversity and negative societal views to create and publish poetry in both languages and b) participants were able to relate to many of the experiences and messages related in the poems. One participant in the workshop described what she got out of the experience:

I got a lot out of [the workshop]...Better feelings if that makes sense? It made me feel better actually. I find it like counseling kind of. Going in there. Because I was able to read my stuff, I felt better being able to share my work, more confident about it. At first I was like “No, I don't want to get up and read it in front of everyone.” But after a while, like, I want to be the first one to go up. So it made me be a lot more confident about my writing. It makes me want to show it to my roommates, like “Oh, what do you think about this line?” and like “Oh, you know, you could write this,” or it made me want to talk more about it with my friend. So you know, I got a

lot out of it. Also it makes me want to keep on writing. Because just seeing these three poems (the three of hers she had in front of her) makes me want to have a whole desk full of them. So it makes me want to go write more.

In her response, she mentions feeling better after sharing her work. She also felt more confident afterwards, and this inspired her to go beyond the workshop and share with roommates or friends. In this way, the effects of the workshop can be shared and can include others who are not directly participating. Finally, her response describes a desire to continue writing. The experience in a poetry workshop or class can open a temporary world where students share their work and have deadlines to create poetry. The goal, I imagine, for many instructors and facilitators is that the practicing poets get a feel for writing poetry and take control and ownership of the process to continue outside and after the group meetings end.

While the previous poet focused on the positive feelings that come from sharing her work with others, another described how the writing process made her feel better:

I feel like what this workshop also helped me with was just, like, writing kind of makes you feel better, I don't know. For me, if I was feeling stressed or if I was having a problem that I was always thinking about, and it was taking up time, and exercise wasn't helping to alleviate it, you know? I would just write and write and write, and then I'd be like 'Ahhh. I'm good.'

This poet would also regularly comment on the relaxed environment of the workshop and how she enjoyed the flexibility of being able to either create a new poem or continue working on a previous poem. Having options, and not being forced to create a new piece each week, reduced the stress of the participants and they responded by creating work that they felt inspired to at the time. Instead of feeling pressured to write a poem, she was able to discover the therapeutic or cathartic benefits of writing her own poems.

One more poet described the freedom of the experience. He too enjoyed the flexibility of the

workshop and the fact that there were no rubrics involved. In the interview he described frustration with previous lessons in poetry where he would have to write according to a rubric and make sure to include certain criteria. As he says:

The way I see it, it's just, freedom. You know, like, writing as you please, you know?... that's the way I saw doing the poetry. Just write, you know, like...just write. And like I was saying, that's the way I did it. Just wrote it as a short story first, and then try to make it like a poem. So I really enjoyed doing that. I never really did it before, so it was really fun just writing stuff down and deleting stuff...and it actually makes you think about other words too, you know?

As you can see, these participants enjoyed different parts of the workshop. For some, it was the flexibility and openness of being able to write what you want, for others it was the experience of presenting and sharing their work with others, and seeing that they're not alone. It can serve as a form of stress-relief and/or be a liberating practice. Most traditional classrooms can not allow as much flexibility as this workshop due to the amount of material teachers must cover or the sole focus on academic skills. However, perhaps giving participants that space to be creative allows them to develop their love of poetry and see it as a means of self-expression and resistance rather than a required assignment.

What Participants Enjoyed About the Format:

Several elements that members enjoyed can be identified in their quotes included in the findings section. However, there were other areas that the students mentioned explicitly during the interviews:

- *The variety of poem formats: text and video, bilingual and unilingual*
- *Sitting in a circle*
- *Relaxed, comfortable environment*
- *Freedom to be creative (flexibility of workshop)*

- *Focus on goals*
- *Focus on dialogue rather than lecture*

In regard to the *focus on goals*, one participant said “The workshop, as a whole I think was good. I think we accomplished all those goals that we had, you know? To be able to write poetry, and to be able to use imagery, I think. I believe everybody writes good poetry so obviously our goal was reached. As a whole I enjoyed it a lot.”

One student particularly liked the group discussions of poems and how it made her think. Related to the previous point of *focus on dialogue rather than lecture*, she said, “I expected it to be more like how it was in Middle School. Where we read a poem, then you kinda tell us what it was about.” She mentioned how she didn't want to go through that again, and in discussing this workshop, added, “I didn't expect it to be like 'Oh, what do you think?' or 'What do you get out of this poem?' or 'Read it again' and hear everybody else's opinions.”

Sample Participant Poetry

The poems written by participants focused on a variety of themes. While we discussed and analyzed poems of various themes and in a variety of formats, participants were not forced to write on any one subject. The poems we discussed together could serve as models, but no one was required to follow any set structure or theme. As a result, participants were able to express whatever they felt necessary during the week. Some looked at identity and heritage, language, love, family, and reflections on advice they had received from family members. Others are experiments in which the poets challenge themselves to tell a story, play with words in a certain way, or write in a manner that builds suspense or keeps the reader guessing. The following poems are representative of the group's writing.

Untitled

It's sad to see how some throw their lives away,
the ones that can have it all.
Then there are those that want to have it all.
The ones that want to have it all, trabajan duro.
Y para qué?
Para que no les den trabajo porque no tienen seguro?
Aprovecha, nos dicen, mírame a mí.
Study para que no estés aquí.
No quiero que sufras lo que yo sufrí.
Get your career, and stay on board.
You have a dream?
Síguelo hija, porque no hay de otra.

In this piece, the poet is drawing from advice she's received from her parents. Responsibility, hard work, and studies are themes that all students could relate to. The mix of languages could reflect the dialogue in the home between child and parents. She also expresses her parents' desire for their child(ren) to study hard and avoid going through what they experienced. In an interview, the poet described how, during the workshop, she became aware of the many connections one can form and how poets often combine material from a variety of experiences and sources.

The One Que Quiero

The first thing *que noté fueron sus ojos*, full of chocolate
And the funny thing is, *encanta el chocolate*
Su cabello trae una textura tan hermosa y fina
That is to say, her features exceed the word "fine"
Unas veces creo que no me mira, que soy invisible
Only time will tell if I can escape from being invisible
Trae un alma de niña y es tan social
However, whenever I see her, I cannot be social
Hay tiempos cuando creo que lo que quiero es posible
But when I see her, it no longer seems possible
Lo que tengo no trae remedio
But being with her is my only remedy

This poet often experimented with rhyme and structure in his poems. Here, he plays with cognates, alternating the ending of each line between English and Spanish. He received very positive feedback and other members of the group especially enjoyed the sound of the poem as he read it. This

piece was likely influenced by José Antonio Burciaga's "Bilingual Love Poem." Furthermore, alternating between languages line by line in this way while maintaining meaning demonstrates complex language use.

Here I include another poem by the same participant so you can see some of the range of what the participants created.

Live

Looking back at life, we seem to understand
Intuitive processes that seem to be simple
Vicious corruption upon this "foreign" land
Everything around us, strange like a small dimple

You need to see that you must work hard
Or even make a small change that harvests our future
Under the oppression, we are put on the card
Relying on family is strong in our culture

Little does one know as to why this is so difficult
In life we are promised nothing but death
Follow your hearts! Avoid life's cult
Even though times are tough, never lose your faith

In this piece, the poet decided to compose an acrostic. As you read down the left side, you see the first letters of each line spell out "live your life." This student thoroughly enjoyed the creativity and flexibility within the workshop and decided on his own to organize his poems according to certain structures. In addition, he mentioned how he enjoyed the challenge of rhyming in his poems. Furthermore, similar to the first untitled poem in this section, there are themes of family, of responsibility, and the importance of the choices we make in life. There is a sense of hope and optimism in his poems, despite adversity.

Te Amo?

Te amo...
I hate you!
Me dices que de mí enamorado estás,
yet your words hurt me.
Pero siempre estás conmigo cuando te necesito.
You constantly tear me down, but
Te necesito para vivir.
Well, that's what it feels like.
Me pides perdón cada vez,
but your blows get harder every time.
Eres mi droga.
I need you, even if it's slowly killing me.

Alternating between English and Spanish, this poet draws from the Laviera poem that we read and the poem “Laredo” by Raquel Valle-Sentías that I shared with the entire CAMP group during the sample workshop. There, we did an activity listing things that we hate and things that we love, then alternating between them stanza by stanza. In “Te Amo?,” the participant alternates between languages and feelings. English and Spanish. Love and hate. The heart and the brain. Even though she was nervous when she first shared it with the group, several group mates mentioned how they could relate to it. Those conflicting feelings and the tough decisions involved resonated with other members of the group. After hearing others' reactions and feedback to her work she felt more confident with her writing.

Flags

I have two flags tattooed on my heart.
Red, White and Blue from the country where I reside.
Red as in blood spilled from the Natives,
White as in hope from the pilgrims,
And blue as the sign of a new beginning
Of expansion, oppression and “civilization.”

Don't get me wrong partner,
Because I do love these colors.
I'm just against the discrimination
I am all about emancipation

I have two flags tattooed on my heart.
Green, White and Red from the place that I grew up
Green as in hope from all of my indigenous pueblos
White as in unity of all my people

Red as in blood spilled from my heroes
Don't generalize mi gente
Not all of us come from aztec descendancy
Just like drinking Tequila and speaking Spanish
Doesn't mean you know about netza
I have two flags tattooed on my heart.
Both of these flags have history
Blood and hope included in their biography
Still lacking the unity
I need more representation on this beautiful country
More acceptance of my people
Less hypocrisy
I need more respect for my home country
More recognition for mi gente.
This is not desperation
I just want unification!

In the final piece included here, the poet talks of history and multiple identities. He describes both the United States and México and some of the social justice issues facing Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the U.S. He describes how he is marked by both countries with tattoos on his heart, reflecting both his identity and feelings. However, he demands more. He loves the United States, but is against discrimination and some of what the country stands for. Through poetry, he grapples with these thoughts and raises important questions regarding issues of identity, respect, representation, and discrimination.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research:

Since I was both the facilitator and the researcher, note-taking was often difficult during my meetings with the group. However, I would leave our meetings and go directly to my office to flesh out and record any notes taken during our time together. Another possible limitation of data collection due to my dual roles in the process is the possibility that I received biased information in the interviews. Participants could have felt that criticizing the workshop would offend me. For this

reason, the triangulation of methods was beneficial in providing data via other sources to check the validity of the information gathered in the post-workshop interviews.

Despite the focus on Latin@ culturally relevant texts, I am a cultural outsider. Though I am fluent in Spanish, I can't relate firsthand to many of the experiences we discussed. Furthermore, the texts were described as culturally relevant by me, and though participants said they were able to relate, they were designated as “culturally relevant” by an outsider. Ideally, I would have liked to have included the group in the selection of the poems, and it would provide a wonderful opportunity for them to gain more experience researching and looking for sources in the library.

Changes Recommended by Participants:

-More time: All members of the poetry workshop stated that they would have liked to have had more time together. One participant recommended longer sessions, perhaps two hours long. Others recommended meeting twice a week. Regardless, meeting once a week for fifty minutes made it difficult for those involved to both read and discuss others' poems and develop and edit their own.

-Time to work on poems during our meetings: Related to the recommendation for more time, one poet suggested allocating some time to specifically work on writing poems.

- Provide background information on poets: One participant recommended seeing more information on the poets themselves to see where they are from and where they live. Sometimes I would mention where a poet was from as we discussed the piece, or students would ask, and other times it came through in the poem (references to Puerto Rico in Laviera's piece, description of identity in del Valle's poem) but I could have included that information, or a short biography, along with the handouts of the poems.

- More variety of poems: One participant said “I kinda wish we looked at more, more variety of poems rather than just Mexican-American ones. These were fun, but like, more like maybe about other things, like you know how there's poems about objects...”

- *More collaborative writing*: Three of the six participants interviewed, when asked if there were any types of activities they wished we'd done, suggested more collaborative pieces. In our last meeting, while waiting for a Skype interview with a hip-hop and spoken-word artist, we did two collaborative writing activities. In the end, while we weren't able to speak with the artist, we composed several collaborative poems. Due to time constraints, we didn't do writing activities together during the workshop. However, they enjoyed the experience enough during that last meeting to suggest similar activities for future workshops.

- *Slightly larger group*: Two participants suggested a slightly larger group. Neither wanted a large group because they enjoyed sitting in a circle and hearing everyone's pieces. However, rather than having seven members in the group, they each recommended between ten to twelve participants. They suggested including a few more participants to be able to hear more poetry and receive more feedback, as well as hear different styles.

- *Begin reading/presenting poems earlier*: One final recommendation from a participant was to begin to read or present poetry earlier. She noted how everyone became more confident presenting poems as the workshop progressed, and suggested that by starting earlier, "Maybe that would have made it easier towards the end... I felt like we were getting more comfortable, but towards the end...Maybe if we could have started sooner, maybe not reading our *own* poetry, but maybe signing up and reading one of the poems you handed us, like taking turns, I think that would help."

- *Provide participants with a folder* (my personal recommendation): While no members of the workshop mentioned difficulty keeping their papers together, I believe it would have been a good idea to give everyone a folder on the first day. In my experience, the most productive creative writing classes that I took required us to present a final portfolio. I still have them years later and can look back on my work, my different drafts, and the poems that inspired me.

Conclusion

Similar to previous studies on the effects of culturally sensitive or culturally relevant poetry workshops, the participants in this nine-week workshop described a variety of positive outcomes. Since the experience was unique for each participant-poet, they all took something different away from their time together. The workshop provided a forum for participants to explore poetry, improve their writing, and increase their confidence while simultaneously building camaraderie.

Henry Giroux (1991) states, in the introduction to *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice* by Catherine Walsh:

There are no unified subjects here, only students whose voices and experiences intermingle with the weight of particular histories that will not fit into the master narrative of a monolithic culture. Such borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as a potential source of experimentation, creativity, and possibility. This is not a call to romanticize such voices. It is instead to suggest that educators construct pedagogical practices in which ideologies that inform student experiences be both heard and interrogated.

While all students may not benefit from, nor be interested in, a poetry workshop, it has the potential to provide many benefits to those who participate. Members of the group discussed in this paper enjoyed the welcoming opportunity to experiment and be creative with language. Some wrote in multiple languages. Others created structured poems with end rhymes, acrostics, haikus, or page long poems. For Latino and Latina students, as well as students of other marginalized groups whose histories may not “fit into the master narrative,” a poetry workshop can provide the time and space to build community, increase one's confidence, and aid in the transition to a new environment by serving as a type of therapy or catharsis. I mention this in addition to the academic benefits of engaging with texts, improving thematic and literary (stylistic) analysis skills, and developing one's own writing. While the academic abilities are important, we must acknowledge the emotional and social benefits of such an experience.

As the facilitator of the workshop, our time together was always the highlight of my week. The participants' enthusiasm, creativity, and willingness to share and work together inspired me both as an educator and a poet. I was reminded of the benefits of collaboratively analyzing and discussing poetry as the participant-poets unpacked published works and came to conclusions I hadn't previously considered. As an educator, the experience reinforced my belief that students should have a say in their own education. Seeing how the members of the group engaged with the material and connected it to their own lives demonstrated how beneficial the interaction with culturally relevant material can be. I was able to identify further areas for improvement (some mentioned by participants and others recognized by myself,) and I am motivated to continue writing poetry and creating spaces for others to do the same.

After this experience, several participants stated that poetry workshops should be offered for first-year students. I hope this study provides evidence that such a space can be a positive and powerful place for students to express themselves, explore identity, and be heard. We should work to include more culturally relevant texts in the curriculum and center students' voices in the classroom. However, even in cases where it's not incorporated in the classroom, the experience can be organized and facilitated collaboratively outside the curriculum and benefit all of those involved.

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Attachments

Test Instrument 1 Pre-Workshop Survey

Pre-Workshop Survey

Background Information

Name: _____

Place of birth: City/state: _____ Country _____ Age _____

Major at OSU: _____

Family's place of origin:

Ethnic/Racial identity: (How do you identify yourself? For example: Caucasian, Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, African-American, among many other options. If you identify in multiple ways, please include all terms).

Survey Questions

- 1) Before we start the workshop, it will be helpful if I know a little about your experience with poetry. Have you read or written poetry before? If so, where "school, home, etc."? Please describe the experience (if applicable).
- 2) Please describe your experience reading and writing in school (elementary-college). Have you been able to relate to the texts and/or authors? Have you had opportunities to express yourself in written assignments?
- 3) How do you like to express yourself? Through art? Sports? Dress? Etc.
- 4) Why did you decide to participate in the workshop?
- 5) What are your goals with the workshop? More specifically, what do you hope to get out of the time we spend reading, discussing, and writing poetry?
- 6) Do you have any favorite poets or poems you would like to mention? If not, please leave blank.

Test Instrument 2
Post-Workshop Interview

Post-Workshop Interview

Interview Questions

- 1) Were you able to relate to the poems we read and listened to?
- Any examples?
- 2) Were there any poems you really enjoyed? Which ones? Why?
- 3) How did you feel reading the poems we read in the workshop?
- 4) Do you have any favorite poets or poems you would like to mention?
- 5) How did it feel to write your own poems?
- Did you enjoy it?
- Was it difficult?
- Why?
- 6) Do you feel you were able to express yourself or your experiences in your poems? Any examples?
- 7) What was your favorite part of the workshop? Please describe.
- 8) Looking back, what were your expectations when joining the workshop?
-In your opinion, did the workshop meet your expectations? Please describe.
- 9) Are there any types of poems you wish we looked at?
Are there any activities you would have liked to have done?
Would you change anything about the workshop?
- 10) Did discussing (1) or writing poems (2) change you or your outlook? If so, in what ways?
- 11) Had you read any bilingual poetry before the workshop? What did you think when we looked at it?
- 12) (If not mentioned earlier) Do you think you got anything out of the experience? Were there any benefits?

Peer Editing Guide

Poet: _____

Peer Evaluator: _____

Editing and revision are extremely important parts of the writing process. A good peer evaluator gives helpful and tactful suggestions to help someone improve his or her writing. This give us an opportunity to hear each other's work, learn from one another, and provide useful and constructive feedback so that we can revise and improve our work. Following are a few points to look at.

1) After reading/hearing the poem, what stands out? What do you think the poet was trying to communicate?

2) Is there a part of the poem that confuses you or where you feel the poet has not clearly communicated his or her meaning? Where is it and why does it strike you as odd?

3) What do you feel are the most effective parts of the poem? Why?

4) What do you feel the poet still needs to work on? Is there anything s/he could do to make it more effective/impactful.

5) Take a look at the handout on poetry terms and explicating poetry. Does the poet use any of these “poetic devices, like alliteration, rhyme, metaphor, etc.” Make any suggestions for **word choice**, grammar, or punctuation on the poem itself.

6) Does the poet’s title enhance the poem? Why or why not.

7) Any other comments or suggestions?

List of Texts/Videos Included in the Workshop

(In alphabetical order)

Julia Álvarez – Bilingual Sestina

José Antonio Burciaga – Bilingual Love Poem

Cambio – Work Song

Martín Espada – Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits

Guante – An Open Letter to Michelle Bachmann (included after student asked if a letter can be a poem)

Juan Felipe Herrera - Mexican Differences Mexican Similarities

Tato Laviera – My Graduation Speech

Pat Mora – Legal Alien

Cherríe Moraga – They Was Girls Together

Mayda del Valle – Descendancy

Raquel Valle-Sentíes – Laredo