
Writer's Statement for "Chinks in My Armor: Reclaiming One's Voice"

JULIE WAN

One of the first threshold concepts my ENC 1101 class examined was how writing is shaped by prior literacy experiences. We looked at literacy beyond reading and writing comprehension and discussed how we might be operating on a spectrum of *multiliteracies*. I took the term multiliteracies to suggest that there is more than one way to interpret something and derive meaning from it, and that we're capable of many modes of communication. Professor Molko encouraged us to recall our earliest or most salient literacy sponsors, consider how our literacies were shaped by pivotal experiences, and weave a literacy narrative based on such remarkable instances and our analyses. "Chinks In My Armor" was my response.

It was my first time writing in several years (I'd taken an extended holiday from school), so I wasn't too hot or confident that I'd submit something complete. My argument was nebulous, my chosen examples floating. Professor Molko facilitated our progress by assigning Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts" during the interim before our rough draft due date. Reassured that all initial drafts are unavoidably shitty, I drove a finger down my throat and began spilling my guts out. We had an unexpected 2-week extension owed to Hurricane Irma. The temporary lack of electricity and food served as conducive kairotic constraints that allowed the piece to come together.

According to my writing log (yes, we were made to keep records on our writing process which turned out incredibly helpful towards composing this Writer's Statement some six months later) I was borderline obsessive compulsive: "I'd print out a copy and, thinking I was finally done, quickly skim, come to a halt, grab a pen and start my ruthless attack, then go back on Google Docs." It was an interminable and grindingly slow cycle of re-reading and re-working. I was *too* meticulous, too preoccupied with the surficial and as a result the composition perhaps rubs off as contrived. I maintained a thesaurus approach, an unadaptable method as described by Nancy Sommers in "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," where because students were cautioned against word repetition throughout high school, their editing persisted at the micro-level, only producing the lexical substitutions of individual words. I wasn't yet familiar with revision and didn't know to try "re-viewing" my work from an audience perspective. I'd get so caught up in my head for hours and not realize just how far I'd deviated and missed my mark. I enlisted the additional readership of my stepdad and boyfriend in order to gain external insight. Professor Molko helped me systematically, going through and

identifying a purpose within each paragraph, and we re-structured the paper such that the ending tied up neatly with the armor metaphor. Then I gnawed on how to authentically convey the cultural dissimilitude between Chinese and English to an uninitiated reader and poured myself into “fattening up the bones of the paper, explicating, elucidating, filling in disconnects.”

Our second reading, “‘Nah, We Straight’: An Argument Against Code Switching” by Vershawn Young, served as the backbone of my essay. To express the tender difficulty in my own language learning process while addressing the mythicism surrounding a standardized, perfectible English and the consequent marginalization of linguistic varieties, I pulled from Young’s dialogue. His deconstruction of dominant language ideology and argument that code-switching is forced segregation of one’s psyche, inculcating and perpetuating double consciousness within its speaker, served as substantiating wisdom between my weepy anecdotes. Most significantly, he disrupted the illusion that English is naturally without variation and asserted our potential to become an enriched, multi-dialectical, and more capable society.

I’ve revisited that article at least four or five times. During each re-reading, I experience a dunk tank sort of revelation, a sudden slap of water and then the submerging of my whole being. The part of me that spent two decades acculturating contends with Young’s proposed code-meshing alternative, but the rest of me all too readily embraces the idea, feeling validated, a weight lifting, an unknown voice rising from within.

I strove to make the piece relatable and engaging in order to transmit something worthwhile and enduring. Our writing may be a composite and reflection of our immutable histories, and it’s more than likely that most of us dread writing and see it as restrictive and unforgiving due to terrible past experiences. However, every one of us houses an irreproducible and precious way of communicating and knowledge-making as our literacies are all uniquely formed. And there is no “correct” or “better” way to speak than to use your own words and modes of expression. So, I hope that you and all future readers take to heart that each of you has a voice, a miraculous voice marked with beauty, substance and possibility, and that you might also begin to recognize something similarly powerful in those around you.