
For the Love of Writing: Writing as a Form of (Self-) Love

Gabrielle Isabel Kelenyi

Gabrielle Isabel Kelenyi is a PhD student in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Composition & Rhetoric Program where she has taught composition and at the Writing Center. She currently serves as the TA Coordinator of Multicultural and Social Justice Initiatives at the Writing Center. She is interested in community literacies, community-engaged methodologies, writing development across the lifespan, antiracist and social-justice-oriented writing program administration, and researching best practices for teaching writing effectively across grade levels. Gabbi previously taught 9th Grade Composition in her hometown of Chicago, where she concurrently earned her MA in Teaching.

I became a high school composition teacher after graduating from college because I sincerely wanted to share my love of writing with others, to show students the incredible power they could wield with the confidence and ability to write. As an eager first-year teacher excited to work with students who looked like me in my hometown, this was a driving force in my lessons: sharing the magic that can come from connecting with others through writing—both as writers and as readers. However, a large component of my job as a teacher at a new charter school was preparing students for college entrance exams, like the ACT. Swept up in the audit culture of my charter school and the frenzy around test-score growth and college preparation, I too easily fell into a focus on preparing my predominantly low-income Black and Brown students to gain entrance into and survive college so that then they could survive the “real” world, which I regularly told my students would require clear communication in the form of professional emails and standard academic English. As a young teacher whose job depended on growth in standardized test scores and passing random classroom audits, I didn't question what and why I was surviving. I simply entered survival mode, and I desperately wanted to help my students survive with me. And both by example and in my lessons, I showed my students writing is for survival, it is for academic and professional contexts, it is a product that will incur cold judgement, and it has little to no personal value—writing is functional and not relational. There is no warmth, no connection, no love in writing.

I deeply regret many of the lessons I imparted to my students about code switching, standard academic English, professional communication, and college writing. When I decided to leave the classroom and enter graduate school, it was because I was utterly exhausted, disenchanted, and angry at the way I seemed to be required to share writing with my students, embittered at how I was sharing writing with my students. I knew there had to be a better way, and if graduate school couldn't help me find it, it would help me figure out ways to come up with that better way myself. Bound up in what Bettina Love calls the “educational survival complex,” or the fact that because



Abstract

In this autoethnography, I share my lived experience as a writer and look for how I have come to enact (self-) love through my writing by taking an asset-based lens to analyze family-inspired literacy practices. In so doing, I aim to share ways in which writing instruction in school contexts can help students develop individualized writing processes that help them love writing even when it's hard. As such, this piece illustrates my personal experiences with writing and writing instruction and explores how to apply them to writing pedagogy. I assert that, as writers and writing educators, we must rethink the function of writing and reclaim what kind of writing is productive: writing for/as love is functional and relational; it is a radical act.

Keywords

love; self-love; writing; teaching; autoethnography

“schools mimic the world they [students] live in,” they become “a training site for a life of exhaustion” where students learn “to merely survive” (27), I had forgotten what I wanted to accomplish as a teacher in the first place—to help students love writing.

In order to find my way back to my original motivation to teach, and specifically to teach writing, in this autoethnography, I look for how I have come to enact (self-)love through my writing. bell hooks writes about the practice of love as a move toward liberation: “Love was the force that empowered folks to resist domination and create new ways of living and being in the world” (“The Practice of Love” 195). This can be true of writing as and for love. While hooks writes about love as a way to turn away from the domination of white supremacy, I assert love can also transform the practice of writing from one that is viewed as harmful, tedious, and painful by many students into one that is transformative, worthy, positive, and healing. This is because writing is a way to understand and be understood, to feel and be felt, to commune, to connect . . . And love, according to hooks, is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust (“The Practice of Love” 195). Thus, writing can enact love when it is used/taught/framed as a means of connection between writers and readers to demonstrate and/or build any (hopefully all) of those five factors.

In order to keep writing, in order to meet the challenge to find ways to speak to others’ experiences through my own—to make the individual more universal—I’ve needed to flip the stereotypical script about the act of writing from one that is punishing and painful to one that is safe, empowering, and loving. I share this flipped script with readers now with the hope that others can reconceptualize writing as well, both for themselves and in the writing classroom. As writers and writing educators, we must rethink the function of writing and reclaim what kind of writing is productive: writing for/ as *love* is functional and relational; it is a radical act.

WRITING AS LOVE

My earliest memories of writing are steeped in love. I remember my mom and dad sitting at the kitchen table for hours working on my mom’s papers for her master’s classes. There were yellow legal pads and books strewn all over the table: notes and outlines and drafts that marked my mom’s process, her path toward understanding the prompt and crafting her answer. My mom and my dad sat next to one another for hours, talking and arguing, noting and drafting, until they had a truly *rough* (as in words scratched out and arrows and carets galore) handwritten (by my dad) draft. My dad wasn’t in the master’s program; it was my mom who was getting her master’s degree in public health administration. Yet, he worked with her on every one of her papers and consoled and encouraged her when she felt like giving up. As my mom figured out her ideas, my dad wrote and organized, asked questions and wrote some more, and patiently helped her bring her ideas into focus.¹ All those papers my mom wrote throughout her program

were written with a lot of sweat and tears, but they were also born out of the love she and my dad share. At a very young age, and without knowing it, I witnessed writing as an act of love.

When I think about it further, writing as an act of love surrounded me as a small child. I remember love notes seemingly everywhere: notes in our lunchboxes, notes on the fridge, notes on the coffee machines that read “Have a tremendous day!” or “Good luck on your presentation!” or “I miss you already.” Many times they included practical reminders, too, such as “Don’t wake up your dad—he works tonight,” or “Remember to take out the garbage,” or “I’ll be home by six today,” or even “Don’t fight over the remote!”—but they all ended with love:

XXXOOO,
Dad

Love,
Mom


G

Writing was love put into action in my family—it made material reminders that you’re important and what you’re doing right in that moment (eating your lunch, opening the fridge, making your coffee) is important. In a very real way, writing is an integral part of how my family demonstrates our love for each other.² As both an action and a product, writing is a collaborative act(ivity) that connected my mom and my dad in the moment of cowriting papers for my mom’s master’s classes, *and* writing is an artifact that connected my mom, my dad, and us kids in moments apart through love notes. Both enabled us to feel closer, to feel seen, to know we are loved.

My forays into writing beyond family love notes and essays for school began because I saw my older brother Jasson writing on his own. Jasson filled red spiral notebook after red spiral notebook with his writings, from raps and poetry to journal entries and records of ideas. In rare moments, Jasson let me into his room and shared something he’d written with me. I looked up to my brother immensely as a kid, and I still do. And so, when I first began writing poetry on my own, it was to be like my big brother, to impress him, to have something in common with him, to perhaps instigate another fortuitous invitation into his room. Jasson made writing outside school cool.

And so, I wrote inside school and outside school. Rarely did my personal writing and academic writing cross over. In fact, there were quite a few moments my parents made the distinction clear. Peeking through my open bedroom door to find me furiously scribbling away in my notebook, my dad would ask, “What are you writing?” Undeterred and breathless, I’d reply, “A poem.” Ever the responsible parent, my dad would reply, “Have you done your homework?” And when the answer was no, I was reminded school should come first. “School is your job,” I vividly remember my parents telling me many times when they feared I was getting too distracted. *School is your job*. Well, if school was my job and academic writing my work, if you will, writing poems was my pleasure, my balance. I loved both: writing poems and academic essays

was something I felt *good* at; my teachers, friends, and family all encouraged me to keep writing. No one was ever specific about *what* I should keep writing, except for reminders that schoolwork should be the priority.

So, it was clear from early on that writing would become my profession. However, because academic writing and creative writing had remained in such separate realms for most of my life, I felt I needed to choose between the two. That is, I knew I wanted to be a writer, but what kind would I be? I distinctly remember many moments I chose between poetry or academic essays, moments I unquestioningly accepted the notion that writing for pleasure and writing for work could not coexist in my life on equal footings. School was the priority, and as I progressed further in it, school made little to no room for poetry. As I chose writing for school more and more often, I slowly forgot I had ever successfully struck a balance between the two, that writing for pleasure and writing for work (for school) had coexisted, had informed one another and supported one another and made me feel whole and balanced. I realize now that as I chose writing for school over writing for myself time and time again, I was being socialized to survive rather than to thrive (Love). I didn't question the either/or view of writing my parents and my teachers and even my opportunities seemed to encourage. You can be an educator *or* a poet; you can be an academic writer *or* a creative writer. It seemed you just couldn't be both, at least not equally. And as my parents liked to remind me, school was my job, so this responsibility guided the choices I made. If I wanted to write, I'd need to prioritize writing for school.

It's interesting that this binary between writing for myself and writing for school, writing for love and writing for work that I let crystallize over time, has followed me through life. Poetry has remained a side gig, a hobby. Academic writing—both teaching it and producing it—is how I make my living. I was incredibly lucky to have models of writing as interpersonal love during my most formative years, but I let the physical and metaphorical divisions between writing for school/work and writing creatively and personally on my own overshadow that foundation.

Feeling the need to choose between what I wrote and for whom over and over again, being reminded that I had a job to do, a duty to fulfill in school-based writing, that should take precedence over the writing I wanted to do for myself, made it so I didn't allow my love for writing in general to connect my academic and personal writing. They remained separate entities in my mind: writing for school was my work and writing poems and personal notes was just for me; one was to secure my future by creating more (academic) opportunities, and the other was just a hobby, not a way to securely earn a living one day. (Writing for) *School was my job*, after all. Jobs are how you make money and survive. And poetry was not my job.

Such a clear distinction, reinforced by my parents out of a neo-liberal middle-class sense of love and protection, obscured how

both writing for school and writing creatively on my own both let me enact love—love for school, my teachers, my classes and love for friends, crushes, and family members. That is, not only did I love my written products (sometimes) no matter whether they were for school or for personal inclination, but I came to love the act of writing, too. In writing I found a sense of approval and accomplishment I in turn wanted to share with others. As a reader, I marveled at the way writers shaped my understanding of myself, others, and the world around me; as a writer, I strived to achieve similar effects—for my readers to feel understood, to put something they've struggled to articulate right there on the page and let them know someone else also feels that way.ⁱⁱⁱ *That's* why I love writing. I love working to achieve *that* outcome, that connection built between writers and readers that demonstrates *care* for a topic and an audience, that demonstrates a sense of *commitment* to craft, that augments and exchanges *knowledge*, that takes *responsibility*, and that builds *trust*. Just like the connections forged between my family members through love notes, essay help, and intriguing red spiral notebooks.

So, in order to elevate those connections and honor the foundation of writing as interpersonal love that my family modeled, I reject the either/or view of writing my parents and my teachers, my opportunities, and my experience teaching seemed to encourage. As my dad helped my mom with her essays for her master's classes, they demonstrated how important school is; however, what was more salient to me at seven or eight years old was that my dad helped my mom because he loves her, and my mom accepts my dad's help because she loves and trusts him. And what was the product of their love? A draft. An (academic) essay. A piece of writing. And with this in mind, now I choose a both/and perspective on how and what I write in order to find out what happens when love drives writing (no matter what arena), when we look for love in our writing processes and products. In exploring my relationship with work, love, and writing, I realize writing is my work because I love writing *and* I love writing because I believe writing (and teaching writing) is important work.

WHAT & HOW I WRITE

It's about 5:00 p.m., and I'm about to leave my shared graduate student office in the English Department and catch a bus home. As I wrap my scarf around my neck and walk toward the elevator, I pull out my phone from my coat pocket and begin drafting a quick text message to my partner to let him know I'm on my way and approximately when I will be home. I'm smiling at my phone, partially because I'm finally on my way home after a long day and partially because the message of my text is sweet and easygoing: the words flow without pause from my mind through my thumbs and into the message.

"OMW home to you! ETA 5:40pm. Can't wait for pasta bake with you! 🥰"

I don't think twice about any of the words I've used. I don't consciously consider my tone or my diction; my audience and purpose are crystal clear. I'm letting my loved one know that I'm on my way home, that I'm hungry and ready to enjoy dinner with him. Text messages and emails like this to my partner, close friends, and family are many times about practical matters (like leaving work) but always outlined with love: I know these audiences well, and they know (and already love) me.

Now consider a different seemingly simple text message scenario: it's approximately 8:00 a.m. on a Wednesday, and my brows are furrowed as I type and delete, type some more and delete again a text message to a high school student as their academic coach. I want to catch them as they begin school for the day and check in about how their week is going, their progress toward the goals we set for the week last Sunday, and their overall well-being. I begin:

"Hi, Jackie!¹ How are you?"

Nope. I have just one chance at soliciting an answer, so this question isn't direct enough.

"Good morning, Jackie! Have you turned in that missing assignment for History?"

Nope. This is much too direct, and I don't only care about that missing assignment.

"Hey Jackie. What's up? How's school?"

Nope. Now this is too general, and I'd rather avoid getting a too general response.

"Hi Jackie. I hope you're making good progress on that history assignment. Let me know if you need any support with getting it turned in before our next meeting on Sunday. How's preparing for your math test coming along? Remember to take it one topic at a time. You got this!"

I settle. My student might consider it an essay text, but it does everything I want: walk the line between business-oriented and personal, includes specifics from her goals for the week, lets her know I'm here to support her, and expresses confidence in her ability to achieve her goals. All in just six sentences!

As an academic coach at SuccessHelp,² I work with high school students to augment their executive-functioning skills, like time management, initiative, and organization, for school. Text messages and emails like this to my SuccessHelp students, as well as to other more specialized audiences like supervisors or other members of professional organizations, don't flow as easily as emails

or texts to my partner, friends, and family. These messages must walk a line between friendly or helpful and professional or direct; these audiences might know me but in a more serious, distant manner (and they likely do not already love me) because that's what helps me do my jobs—from helping high school students stay organized and develop healthy study habits to negotiating my schedule and delegating, completing, and following up on tasks. Striking the right tone and conveying the clearest message that will achieve the desired effect is important to me in these instances because the stakes seem higher than when I'm composing a message to audiences who already care (about me and/or the topic). How to make my high school students care enough to answer my text message, or entice my supervisors and colleagues to care enough about scheduling and to-dos?

In just these two examples of composing text messages, it's clear how I write seems to change depending on whether I'm writing for professional audiences and/or purposes or personal audiences and/or purposes. Here, what and how I write seems to separate neatly into writing that flows easily from my mind through my fingertips out onto the page and writing that takes more consideration, planning, and revision. However, this binary that seems so natural and apparent doesn't hold up when I ask myself *why* I write what and how I write.

While it may seem like audiences and topics inform why I write (for example, my professors assign essays they will read or my students need guidance to succeed in a class), when I go deeper, it's clear love actually undergirds all I write. Looked at through hooks's five factors of love—care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust—what and how I write are imbued with care, sometimes for myself, sometimes for my audience, and still other times for my topic, but most times for all three. No matter the rhetorical situation, I find myself in that rhetorical situation because love brought me there. That is, I feel responsible for what I write (genre), need to persuade whomever I'm writing to (audience) to trust me and my information, hope to impart and build knowledge around what I'm writing about (topic), and care about why I'm writing (purpose) because the progress of my students, my career advancement, and (most importantly) my connections with others through writing are all implicated.

Coming to this realization that love undergirds all my writing doesn't make writing easier. In fact, it can be a little daunting. I know and believe in the power of words presented in just the right way to achieve a desired effect, and that's why I love writing—because of the possibility to impact someone or something inside and outside yourself that writing always presents. But knowing and deeply believing in writing's power is a *heavy* weight. So when the words don't just flow (which is often), it can be incredibly anxiety producing. It can be hard to get started. It can be hard to keep writing.

1 Jackie is a pseudonym.

2 SuccessHelp is a pseudonym for a local organization for which I work that provides academic coaching, test prep, and tutoring services.

However, I have had to learn how to curb that anxiety so as to remain productive, especially considering the demands of graduate school and all my other responsibilities—all of which require writing.³ I do this by incorporating how I've seen and experienced writing employed as an act of love into my general writing process. In this way, I embrace the idea that everything I write is an act of love: love for the audiences I write to, the classes I write for, the people I write with, the genres I write in, the topics I write about. My writing process protects me from anxiety and helps me stay productive—it loves me. It is kind to me because it enacts the idea that what I must write is important and impactful, that somehow some way it will enact and spread more love through demonstrating care, commitment, responsibility, and trust, and through sharing knowledge.

I have shaped the writing strategies and tools I've picked up from teachers, writers, mentors, family, and colleagues along the way into ones that work for me. In that way, I've found ways to make my writing process less anxious and more motivating. One way I do this is by intentionally drafting *over time*. Building time into my process helps me reduce anxiety over writing, making my process deeply personal and good for me. By allowing my process to be more intuitive and less rigid, I have developed a process I love and that loves me each time I sit down to write because I know I have time to get closer and closer to achieving all I want my writing to achieve: lovingly considering my audience's needs and possible responses, committedly and responsibly meeting the requirements of the writing task at hand, and treating my topic with love and respect. My process includes time to discuss what I'm reading and writing with colleagues, professors, and even my partner and my brother, which further enhances my ideas and productivity.

I know coming to a written product I'm pleased with takes time; I know my process intimately, so I trust my writing process to get me there. And so my writing process is an exercise in unconditional love: by embedding time into my writing, my process reduces the anxiety various writing tasks might incite and makes writing more intuitive and habitual. Because reducing anxiety is an act of self-love, my writing process enacts self-love; it protects me from possible damage induced by writing.⁴ As a result, my process makes writing easier because it makes progress on writing part of the routine: even just a paragraph completed is progress, polishing what I already wrote is progress, adding new information to my outline is progress. The steady progress and patience inherent in my process allows me to trust my process, to feel loved and supported by it, to know deeply that it will bring my writing to where I want it to be.

However, I can't always control the conditions for my process, such as when deadlines loom before I fully understand a topic or policies require responses and/or reports within a timeframe that doesn't allow for enough reflection. So what happens when

my process requires more time than I have? These are moments when I doubt my process and when I doubt my writerly self-efficacy because I must deviate from my writing routine. Thus, in writing this autoethnography, I've had to grapple with the question, How do I persevere in those moments that make me question my ability to write? I'm sure you've already guessed the answer: love. Not only am I incredibly fortunate that I mostly get to write what I love and get paid for it, but my love for my audiences, my topics, my students, my field helps me push forward. I write for them, to express care for them. If I want my writing to spread the love, I need to write. And so even in those moments of crisis and (time) crunch, I do. Mostly, though, I'm grateful the manageability built into my writing process allows me to do what I love even when I feel unprepared, overwhelmed, or lethargic. As such, my writing process is an act of self-love, especially when I must write what I am not ready or inspired to write.

Using love as a lens for my writing lets me see how all the writing I do is because I love writing. I chose to be an educator and to enter the field of writing studies because I love writing and I want to share that love with others, help others come to love writing, too. So when I write papers for classes about topics I misunderstand or when I write emails to my secondary and undergraduate students, and when I find these writing tasks to be tedious or difficult, I persevere out of love: love for my students, love for my field, love for my work. In fact, I think I find some of these tasks hard or tedious because I love what writing can achieve and my purposes for writing them so much. Loving others and loving yourself is hard sometimes because it requires extra care, but that's what makes me feel good at writing, feel confident my writing can achieve its purpose—the fact that I feel capable of putting in that extra care, forethought, and anticipation. The care I take in my writing enacts love for my audiences and myself, for my topics and my purposes.

FOR THE LOVE OF WRITING

My phone vibrates once in the front pocket of my sweatshirt. I'm in the grocery store, but I recognize the single vibration as signaling a work email. I slip my phone out of my pocket to take a quick peek at the notification. My shoulders slump at the sight of Thela's³ name, and I'm worried at the contents of the email. I provide feedback on manuscripts, application materials, essays, and proposals for my students as well as for strangers on a freelance basis, and over the summer I agreed to help Thela with her preliminary exams and dissertation proposal. She reached out to me for help organizing her ideas, saying she has trouble getting the information from her brain onto the page in a smooth way. Thela was looking for long-term help, to build a relationship with someone around her writing and her important research topic. I typically have more time to dedicate to such work during the summer, so I agreed. Plus, the extra spending money I earn from this freelance work doesn't hurt.

³ Thela is a pseudonym.

But now it's the fall, and the semester has begun, and I'm worried about my ability to balance her writing needs with my own writing responsibilities. Additionally, that line between friendly or helpful and professional or direct thickens again in these situations, which makes such freelance tasks more tedious.

Where's the love here? I'm in the bread aisle at the grocery store with my shoulders slumped and worry furrowing my brow as I look down at this notification, bracing myself for a challenging writing week ahead. Why do I agree to this work if Thela's email doesn't give me joy? I click on the notification, and Thela's message appears on the screen. It reads,

Dear Gabbi,

I'm writing to share wonderful news with you. We did it! I just received the notification that I passed my preliminary examinations, and I am now a dissertator! Thank you for all your help. It feels so good. Graduation in 2021 is possible. Thank you so much.

Be well,

Thela

A smile spreads across my face, and my chest swells with pride. I am *immensely* happy for Thela, and I'm so grateful to have been a part of her journey and contribute in my own small way to her success. Here's the love. Here's where writing—helping Thela organize and transcribe her thoughts onto the page just as my dad did for my mom all those years ago—is an act of love. I provide feedback to my undergraduate and secondary students as well as freelance employers because I want to help them come to love not only what they've written but also the act of writing. If my assistance helps make their writing process smoother, easier, or more purposeful, then I've accomplished what I set out to do: share my writing love with or instigate similar writing love in others. In this case, Thela has experienced a tremendous writing accomplishment, and she can associate a feeling of pride and excitement with her process. Her sentence "Graduation in 2021 is possible" indicates a growing sense of confidence in her ability to write her dissertation, to earn her PhD. Such transformations in writers with whom I work lets me know we've made progress in shifting views of writing as a barrier to writing as a bridge. This shift is where I see the most potential for writing instruction.

Writing—both the act and the product—is important because it helps both writer and reader feel seen and understood. In her classes on theories of literacy, my advisor Kate Vieira draws stick figures to represent the reader and the writer and between them a heart with the word "text" written in it; she goes on to explain that the text is where writer and reader—with their various backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences—meet and where they "decipher," "interpret," and "*fee*" ("What's New about Writing"

26).^{vi} What if writing were taught with the creation of positive feelings of love, trust, and security at the center? What if love became the lens through which students and teachers examine and augment their writing practice? How might dominant notions of the act of writing as hard, painful, and generally inaccessible or unsurmountable change? How might notions of giving and receiving writing feedback change?

I didn't come to my writing process all by myself. It is the product of years of practice both inside and outside school and the conscious and unconscious accumulation of practices and strategies into my writing repertoire. It has evolved from what I was taught in school into something much more personal because I was motivated by love: my love for the cathartic and connective act of writing as well as my love for the sense of care and protection my written products could enact. Writing as and for love was modeled for me from a very young age by my family. What if we brought such a conception of writing—writing as a loving act—into our literacy curricula? By looking at the teaching of writing through the lens of hooks's five factors of love—care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust—writing instructors can help students see writing in a new/different light.

For example, presenting writing as an act of care for one's audience or topic might help transform a writing task from tedious into worthy of time and effort, as with connecting with my SuccessHelp students. Understanding writing as a commitment to oneself and one's community, as a way to connect with and understand oneself and others, might help make writing less harmful and more healing, as with my own writing process when I'm tackling topics I find difficult. Looking at writing as a way to build knowledge both personally and with others that can instigate social change could make writing as an act and a product more transformative than rote, as with helping Thela. Treating writing as a responsibility to cultivate and maintain trust between writer and reader might help transform writing from a school-only activity into a meaningful practice that decodes the world and our way in it, as I found early on in poetry.

Such a practice—that is, teaching writing as a practice of love—is important to challenge the "educational survival complex," where students learn "to merely survive" (Love 27) and where I found myself frustrated as a young teacher. The educational survival complex is the result of neoliberal educational reforms that profit off "dark families' dreams of thriving through education" and maintain (and in many cases augment) systems of oppression (Love 33). When I chose academic writing over writing poetry, writing for school over writing for personal fulfillment, because writing for school would breed more opportunities, I hoped to thrive; however, one cannot thrive without balance, without fulfillment, without love. Teaching writing as a practice of love means teaching writing as a way to thrive and heal as opposed to a subject to be survived; it means practicing and fighting for justice in all its forms^{vii} in and outside the literacy classroom; it means affirming students' literacy

practices matter whether they come from academic or nonacademic contexts; teaching writing as a practice of love means embracing critical theories as ways to move forward (hooks, “The Practice of Love”; Love).

What a blow to neoliberal reforms in education teaching writing for/as love could be—because such a practice challenges the functionality of writing that seeps into the rationale we build for students in our literacy classrooms, transforming it from simply a means of survival in a world that requires ever-increasing levels of literacy (Brandt, *The Rise of Writing*) to a means of connecting and relating with others, to a means of learning, to a means of reclaiming what kind of writing is productive.

In order to challenge the way neoliberal education reforms and purely economic views of the rise of writing in our society are co-opting the function of writing, as writing instructors, we must transform the predominant view of writing in literacy classrooms from one that makes students groan or cry to one that inspires students to connect and “learn from, through, and while writing” (Yagelski 24). This can happen when teachers intentionally shift the focus of writing instruction from the writer’s writing (product) to the writer writing (process), as advocated for by English-education scholar Robert Yagelski. When students come to know their unique writing process well and gather a wide variety of tools and strategies to help their process evolve in the face of novel writing tasks, they can leverage writing to love themselves and love others in various circumstances. The value of teaching students writing processes in composition classrooms is helping students regard their writing process as one that enacts intra- and interpersonal love, as a means of enacting positive social change through connection with others.

For example, imagine how K–12 students might react if developing a writing process was presented to them from the very beginning as a way to practice self-love and not as a series of rote steps. Would they be intrigued? Would their curiosity and creativity be piqued? Imagine if writing strategies and practices were presented as options to choose from and try out, to use when necessary and appropriate, instead of rigid requirements. Would students feel inclined to take risks with their writing? Would they feel more confident in their ability to not only complete a writing task but also overcome obstacles along the way?

Writing processes that help students love writing (even when it’s hard) can be (re)created in literacy classes by purposeful teachers who use humanizing pedagogies to help students draw from their own “cultural frameworks, lived experiences, and diverse learning styles . . . to transform power/knowledge relations” (Camangian 428). According to Patrick Roz Camangian, such pedagogies “[confront] oppression, [affirm] the humanity of the learner, and [use] literacy as a *tool* to transform their realities and subvert subjugation” (428; emphasis mine). Humanizing pedagogies celebrate the power of the literacies students already practice, disrupting

literacy normativity (Pritchard) and encouraging self-love. Such pedagogies can facilitate the creation of writing processes that enact love because they prioritize student choice and affirm what students bring with them into the literacy classroom. For example, learning sciences and literacy scholar Kris Gutiérrez advocates for a sociocritical literacy praxis, which “historicize[s] everyday and institutional literacy practices and texts and reframe[s] them as *powerful tools* oriented toward critical social thought” (96; emphasis mine); such a praxis challenges “traditional conceptions of academic literacy and instruction” by privileging forms of literacy from nondominant communities (96). In a way, then, sociocritical literacies make room for self-love, for loving the literacies students bring to writing classrooms, especially for students from nondominant communities. Humanizing pedagogies not only prioritize and celebrate the humanity of individual students but also help students from various backgrounds build loving, affirming ways to connect across communities by framing writing strategies and processes as literacy tools.

Both these examples highlight how literacy practices are *tools* for students to use however they wish and feel confident doing so. Student choice in the practice of writing and developing writing processes unique to individual students can help students find their writing “flow, or the condition of being so resolutely focused on an activity that one loses sense of external time and space” (Feigenbaum 33). Developing a writing process that loves the writer and instigates flow by making writing more intuitive and habitual can help writers keep writing, even when writing gets hard or motivation wanes. That is to say, if you come to love and trust the process because you recognize it as a means for learning, connecting, and transforming, then the product is not only less important (as it should be, according to Yagelski), but also you can leverage your process for those less authentically motivating but still important writing tasks. Additionally, developing writing processes unique to individual students in which students choose the writing strategies that work best for them and the task at hand demonstrates that there’s no one right way to write; in this way, writing teachers can make writing instruction more equitable and humanizing and therefore more unconditionally loving.

A holistic focus on writing as a pedagogical tool to practice love can help both instructors and students disrupt literacy’s perpetuation of power inequities.^{viii} At the beginning of the penultimate chapter of Bettina Love’s *We Want to Do More Than Survive* is a quote by bell hooks about coming to theory because she was in pain: hooks writes,

I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for love. (qtd. in Love 124)

Bettina Love says this quote made her smile

because hooks, like she has done as a writer and critical thinker for the past forty years, conveyed in written form, what my entire being had been trying to express for years but lacked the emotional and intellectual understandings to do so. I needed a way to pull my thoughts and feelings together to say something that explained to myself the world in which I lived. (124)

This is what writing/literacy can accomplish: helping others feel seen and loved and understood, just like the love notes left around my childhood home. This, I believe, is what we should be striving to help our students achieve—that same ability to express and connect that Love felt with what hooks wrote. This is the heart that connects writer and reader and represents the relationship between writer and reader that Vieira never fails to address in her literacy classes, that should be the focus of literacy education and the focus of developing one’s writing process. Teaching writing as/for love can help students realize how to leverage their own writing for social action, for change, for peace, for connection. The question for writing instructors isn’t what makes writing hard and easy for students, nor is it what kinds of writing will get them through the “real” world. The question is: How do we write and teach writing in a way that is safe, empowering, and loving? I write because I love writing, and whatever I must do to help others love it too, I’ll do—we should all do.

Notes

i My mom is an example of Martin Nystrand’s assertion that teacher evaluation can stall the writing process (96); she was incredibly hampered by anxiety over how to correctly and intelligibly answer her professors’ prompts. Teaching writing as a practice of love could help relieve some of that anxiety, especially with a move away from sole attention on product and toward more attention on writing process.

ii In the powerful words of Raúl Sánchez, “Contrary to common sense, writing does not simply record or commemorate. As both an event and an object in the world, writing actively participates in the world...” (78); this is true in just the microcosm of my family—we write love, and our notes serve as a record of our love for one another. Bringing a conception of writing as both an event (process/action) and an object (product) that can enact and spread love can help challenge depictions of writing as painful and experiences of literacy learning that are indoctrinating and dominating.

iii In “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” bell hooks writes, “I am grateful that I can stand here and testify that if we hold fast to our beliefs that feminist thinking must be shared with everyone whether through talking or writing and create theory with this agenda in mind we can advance a feminist

movement that folks will long, yes yearn, to be a part of” (10). She goes on to say that “[i]t is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that location” and that such work is “liberatory” (11). Writing is an act of love because it connects readers and writers within and across experiences, allowing people to heal by closing the gap between theory—that critical analysis of our lives (and as hooks specifically writes about here, our pain) in our heads—and practice—the actions we take in response to the “charges and challenges” of the experiences writers share to collectively build a revolution (11).

iv As Deborah Brandt reveals in *The Rise of Writing*, I am one of the “millions of Americans [who] now engage in creating, processing, and managing written communications as a major aspect of their work” (3). As a graduate student in writing studies, I definitely spend more than 50 percent of my “workday with [my] hands on keyboards and [my mind] on audiences” (3). What this points to is the importance of finding a sustainable writing process unique to my needs and style; teaching writing as/for love can help students come to and recognize that process for themselves.

v Many scholars, such as David Bartholomae, Carmen Kynard, Eric Darnell Pritchard, Ralph Cintron, Mina Shaughnessy, and Spencer Schaffner, have intimated or written explicitly about the violence writing can perpetrate in academic and nonacademic spaces. Thus, flipping the script by writing (and teaching writing) to practice love is important equity work.

vi Vieira writes about this lesson in her monograph *Writing for Love and Money*, but I’ve also been in class with her for such a lesson. The heart truly affirms the loving act that writing can/should be.

vii Love provides an exhaustive list of justices in the first chapter of *We Want to Do More Than Survive*. She writes that “educational justice can only happen through a simultaneous fight for economic justice, racial justice, housing justice, environmental justice, religious justice, queer justice, trans justice, citizenship justice, and disability justice” (12).

viii Writing (re)produces possibilities for inequity because it is not “a basic, ideology-free skill” (Wardle & Adler-Kassner 16); in fact, writing is infinitely caught up in the “messiness of political and cultural ideology” (Byrd 2). Deborah Brandt’s revolutionary research demonstrates that literacy is fertile ground for the perpetuation of power inequities: literacy sponsors, or economic and political forces, affect how, what, and why people write (*Literacy in American Lives* 168). As such, these forces determine what and how literacies are valued and devalued (Miller 35), especially when those forces operate from a standard language ideology (Young 67-68), and they feed systemic inequity through the restriction of literacies of certain groups of people (Marotta) in racialized ways (Inoue; Vieira et al.).

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