

The Power of Story: Rhetorical Empathy and Antiracist Organizational Change

By

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ABSTRACT

This abstract is more of a note on how to read this thesis because (like this abstract) it is written in an unconventional way. This abstract can also serve as a key for the several recurring acronyms that I use throughout this thesis. In this thesis, I analyze the moments and meeting that resulted in Asao Inoue's call for a boycott of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) in 2021. I argue that personal story and empathy are important rhetorical tools when creating antiracist organizational change—or any organizational change for that matter.

In 2020, the CWPA Executive Board (EB) created or invited, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force (TF) to help them revise the Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition (OSFYC) with the goal of making it more antiracist. However, during the process, the CWPA EB and the DEI TF experienced a breakdown of communication that resulted in Asao Inoue publishing a blog post accusing the CWPA of unintentionally participating in a white supremacy culture and calling for a boycott of the organization. While Inoue's call for a boycott of the CWPA was a polarizing, emotional, and otherwise traumatic event for many people in the field of composition and rhetoric, at the time it occurred, I had not heard of the CPWA, knew

very little about what a Writing Program Administrator (WPA) does, and knew just as much/little about DEI and antiracist scholarship. To be honest, I mostly learned about all these things while interviewing the people on the CWPA EB and the TF. It is for these reasons that I wrote this thesis in the way that illustrates how I came into it.

The Power of Story: Rhetorical Empathy and Antiracist Organizational Change.

A Thesis

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by

Brent M Cameron

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DEDICATION

This thesis is first and foremost dedicated to my amazing wife, Joyce Cameron. Without Joyce cheering me on and encouraging me to keep pursuing my dreams there is no way I would have finished this thesis, completed the English MA program at ECU, or even have gotten this far in life in the first place. I cannot thank her enough for always believing in me and standing by my side. All achievements of mine are extensions of her strengths.

I also dedicate this thesis to Dr. Travis Webster whose encouragement, mentorship, and academic and emotional support have been integral to my belief in myself as an academic and as a future professional in the field of composition and rhetoric. I am ever grateful to have Travis Webster as a mentor and a friend.

Finally, I also dedicate this thesis to Dr. Tracy Ann Morse who not only encouraged me to step beyond my fears and take on this research project, but she has been there for me and with me for every step of it. Without Tracy Ann Morse I would still be staring at a blank page and a blinking cursor wondering how start.

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I also want to thank all the people on the DEI TF and the CWPA EB who interviewed with me including Dr. Asao Inoue, Dr. Susan Thomas, Dr. Melvin Beavers, Dr. Kat O'Meara, Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez, Dr. Mark Blaauw-Hara, Dr. Dominic DelliCarpini, and Dr. Iris Ruiz. I would also like to thank Al Harahap who interviewed with me as well; however, the contents of our interview are not included in this thesis due to time constraints. Interviewing and learning from with all these wonderfully brilliant, kind, and patient individuals has been the absolute height and joy of my academic experience. Every one of them gave me so much time, attention, and encouragement. I cannot thank them enough for inviting me into and trusting me with their personal stories. I only hope to one day be able to pay forward even half of their kindness and support.

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PREFACE

In this thesis, I tell the story of how I came into this research, the story of the cultural, political, social, and organizational contexts that led up to the CWPA wanting to revise the OSFYC to make it more antiracist, and the story(s) of what led up to Inoue's call for a boycott of the CWPA. Throughout, I argue that personal story and empathy are important rhetorical tools when creating antiracist organizational change—or any organizational change for that matter. Below is a brief outline and explanation of each chapter.

Chapter 1. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE. The first section of this chapter is titled “Crossing the Threshold.” In this section I tell the story of my positionality, how I first began learning about antiracism and antiracist scholarship, and how I came into this research. This personal background information is important because it serves as an admission of my imperfect and ever-growing understanding of the topics, people, and organizations at hand. It is also important because each interview that I conducted began with me telling the interviewees my positionality and how I came into this research. I wanted the interviewees to understand that I was not well versed in DEI or antiracist scholarship and that I was sincerely trying to learn more about it, as well as how they felt about and/or experienced what occurred.

The second section of this chapter is titled “The Power of Story.” This section is the literature review. It is divided up into three subsections titled, “Antiracism,” “Empathy,” and “Organizational Change.” In each section I emphasize/synthesize the central importance that personal story plays in antiracism, empathy, and organizational change. My intent in this chapter is to illustrate how personal story can serve as a gateway to antiracism by allowing people to cultivate empathy for the lived experiences of marginalized people, which can in turn help foster

the kinds of deep understanding and mindfulness needed to create lasting, antiracist organizational change.

Chapter 2. THE SEPARATION. The first section of this chapter is titled, “The Road of Trials.” In this section I write about the cultural, political, social, and organizational contexts that surrounded the OSFYC revisions and the meeting that resulted in Inoue’s call for a boycott of the CWPA. These contexts are relevant not only because they serve as the setting of the story(s), but because they played integral roles in the CWPA wanting to move quickly to revise the OSFYC. Each person I interviewed—both on the EB and TF—emphasized how important it is to keep in mind how the feelings of uncertainty and isolation created by things like Covid-19, the racial tensions the nation was experiencing under the Trump presidency, and the viral video of George Floyd’s murder and resulting BLM protests, significantly added to the exigency for revising the OSFYC to make it more antiracist.

The second section of this chapter is titled “Methods/Methodology.” In this section I introduce the composite story that I created from all the interviews that I conducted. I also explain who I interviewed, what the interview processes entailed, and how I went about creating my composite story from all the interviewees stories.

The third section of this chapter is titled “The Composite of the Story.” This composite story is created from all the stories of the people I interviewed on the EB and TF. It explains what motivated the CWPA to revise the OSFYC to make it more antiracist, how the DEI TF came together, and what the TF’s expectations were regarding the 2020 revisions to the OSFYC.

The fourth section of this chapter is titled “The Apotheosis: The meeting.” The section tells the story of what happened at the meeting that resulted in Inoue’s call for a boycott of the

CWPA, how people on the EB and TF experienced or felt the meeting, and how the two groups interpreted or felt about each other's reactions to the TF's revisions to the OSFYC.

Chapter 3. THE BELLY OF THE WHALE. The first section of this chapter is titled "Recrossing the Return Threshold." In this section I analyze the EB and the TF personal and organizational stories with rhetorical empathy to illustrate how they were all trying to do the most for DEI, but each had separate aims for what they were trying to achieve. Ultimately, I argue that because the EB and TF did not create a story of change together, the CWPA EB's local goal of empowering and helping WPAs with administrative work, and the TF's universal goal of questioning and challenging all white language supremacy met with a conflict of interest.

The second section of this chapter is titled "Conflicting Games: Finite Outcomes vs. Infinite Goals." In this section I analyze the EB and TF's local and universal goals with game theory. I argue that by giving the TF free rein over the revisions in the beginning of the process, the EB consented to the infinite rules of the TF's universal goal (questioning and challenging all white language supremacy). However, after the EB saw the revisions and realized how they conflicted with the CWPA's local goals (helping WPA with administrative work) they attempted to apply finite rules to an infinite "goal" that had already been set in motion. This created an impasse, which game theory suggests can occur when finite games and infinite games collide.

Chapter 4. "THE RETURN"

This chapter is the conclusion. The first section of this chapter is titled "Returning with the Boon." In this section I reflect on what I learned from listening to and analyzing the TF and EB personal and organizational stories regarding the events that led up to Inoue calling for a boycott of the CWPA and offer some suggestions for going forward.

The second section of this chapter is titled “The Call for More Adventures.” In this section I acknowledge the limitations of my research and offer potential areas of further research that could broaden mine.

CHAPTER 1. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

Black Elk's word, "The center is everywhere," is matched by a statement from a hermetic, early medieval text, The Book of the Twenty-four Philosophers: "God is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere." The idea, it seems to me, is in a most appropriate way illustrated in that stunning photograph taken from the moon, and now frequently reproduced, of an earthrise, the earth rising as a radiant celestial orb, strewn light over a lunar landscape. Is the center the earth? Is the center the moon? The center is anywhere you like. Moreover, in that photograph from its own satellite, the rising earth shows none of those divisive territorial lines that on our maps are so conspicuous and important. The chosen center may be anywhere. The Holy Land is no special place. It is every place that has ever been recognized and mythologized by any people as home. Joseph Campbell

The stories that we hear and tell about ourselves and others shape the ways we see the world, shape the ways we see each other, and how we make meaning out of experience. When any person or group controls a narrative, they position themselves at the center of the story while positioning any "Others" outside of it. This is how division works—a group stories their own values and looks at the Others' story and values with shifty-eyes, whether consciously or not. This is the archetype of Us vs. Them, the Templars vs. the Assassins, the Democrats vs. the Republicans, the Hatfields vs. the McCoys. It is this hydra-headed, shape shifting twain that Joseph Campbell's quote above looks to reunite. Campbell is challenging the notion of "their story" vs. "our story." By putting Black Elk, the Medieval philosophers, and the Universe's perspectives in agreement, Campbell is illustrating how each story is a center of its own, as well as a unique element of the whole—that there can be no Whole unless we recognize that every story is Our Story.

Crossing the Threshold

While many people in the field of Composition and Rhetoric read about Asao Inoue's blog post, "Why I Left the CWPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators)," when he first published it on April 18th, 2021—or no doubt heard about his boycott of the CWPA shortly

after—I didn't hear about it until six months later when I read it in a Writing Program Administration seminar course taught by Dr. Tracy Ann Morse. To be honest, at the time Inoue published his blog post, I had never heard of the CWPA, barely knew what a Writing Program Administrator (WPA) is or does and had a nascent understanding of what antiracism is. But let me back up a bit.

A lot of my myopia in terms of understanding antiracism and white privilege (pre-ECU) stems from the fact that I was a blue-collar, high school dropout who worked as a tree climber for 15 years in one of the wealthiest, and no doubt, whitest areas in southern New York. Let's just say the tenor of my work environment and my mentality at that time was more, pick-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps, and my position in the socioeconomic hierarchy of Westchester, New York seldom felt like one of privilege to me.

Not only did I work at estate properties every day—where Bentleys and Maseratis with Harvard and Yale stickers in the rear windshields were basically the status quo—but I was working eight plus hours a day, living paycheck to paycheck, humping brush and climbing trees so I could afford to take classes at a local community college at night so I could hopefully get a step further in my life.¹ I was also a white minority in a tree company (and industry) where the majority of my superiors (who were also my heroes and best friends) were Central and South American immigrants. All this to say that I did not see my white privilege—especially in comparison to the overt privileges that I saw around me at the properties that I worked at every day. I did not understand how things like my level of literacy or my boss being white like me

¹ This is not to say that I think tree work or manual labor is any less valuable than any other work. I truly admire the abilities of every person I ever worked with. To me, tree workers like Angel Lopez, Nestor Panjon, and Matt Friedland are heroes of mythological proportion who risk their lives every single day when they ascend a tree or pick up a lowering line and take-a-wrap. If I was even marginally as talented and as brave as them, I would gladly have stayed in arboriculture. However, my fear of heights and my love for reading and writing suggested to me that my entelechy was elsewhere.

worked in my favor, or how 100% of the homeowners would assume that I was the foreman instead of one of my Ecuadorian and Guatemalan coworkers—who were the foreman. At the time, I did not recognize any of this as white privilege or as racism and did not consider the many dimensions of their pernicious and taciturn natures.²

The first time I even heard the term antiracism was in Fall 2020 at the beginning of my first semester at East Carolina University (ECU), during both the onboarding process at the University Writing Center (UWC) and in Dr. Nikki Caswell’s Teaching Composition: Theory and Practice course. During the UWC onboarding process, consultants-in-training complete a series of modules made up of reading materials and writing prompts, one of which is titled “Antiracism in the Writing Center.” The module is broken up into several subcategories of racism ranging from antiracism to structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual racism as well. Being white and coming from a working-class background, having racism and white privilege defined so precisely was a lot to unpack. Completing this module was the first time that I was faced with the fact that I can perpetuate racism in a litany of ways, regardless of whether I am not consciously aware of it. It was the first time I thought of grammar as being shackles. It

²I remember working on a property in Chappaqua, New York one cold winter morning with my boss Tim (who was white) and Junior and Carlos (who were both Guatemalan immigrants that spoke very little English) when the wealthy white homeowner came outside and asked us if we wanted coffee. My boss Tim gladly accepted his offer and moments later the man smilingly returned from the house juggling three steaming mugs. He handed a mug to Tim and a mug to me, and I was sort of waiting for him to excuse himself to run back in to grab some more coffees for Junior and Carlos, but he never made the move. He just started sipping his coffee and talking to us about the job. I remember standing there for a few long frozen-seconds thinking “did this racist asshole really just not bring Junior and Carlos a coffee?” These guys were like brothers to me. However, at the same time, I could also feel Tim nervously waiting to see what I would do. I knew Tim was just as surprised as I was by the man’s actions, but I also knew that if I caused a stir, I could very well compromise the job, work which we all needed—considering that tree work does not always come readily in the winter months. So, I swallowed back the swarm-of-bees in my throat and began sipping my coffee in guilty silence as Junior and Carlos unloaded the gear from the truck. I did not consider at the time how my passive actions were working to uphold a white supremacist culture and that being handed this mug of coffee reflected my white privilege. I only could think about how awfully racist the homeowner was. I did not see how my inaction was validating his racism.

was also the first time that I was exposed to the idea of white privilege as being more than some classist notion where someone's rich parents can afford to donate a wing or a library to Harvard or Yale, or funnel bribes through a made-up charity to get their daughters accepted into USC—figuratively speaking of course.

Later in that same fall 2020 semester in Dr. Caswell's class, I was further exposed to antiracist concepts and pedagogies like April Baker-Bell's book *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* (2020) and Iris Ruiz's book *Reclaiming Composition for Chicano/as and Other Ethnic Minorities: A Critical History and Pedagogy* (2016). This was also when I was first introduced to Inoue through his 2019 CCCC's address, "How Do we Language so People Stop Killing Each Other, or What do we do About White Language Supremacy?," which had a paradoxically profound effect on me. When I first heard his address, I was taken back by his liberal application of the term "white language supremacy" and by his suggestion that by merely being present a white teacher can perpetuate white supremacy (Inoue, 2019). White supremacy is something I want no connection with. It was something that I had previously, exclusively associated with things like Nazis, white-hooded-robos, and burning crosses. I did not (could not) think of myself as being associated with white supremacy—not in the least, especially just by being present.

However, while listening to Inoue's address something clicked in me that made me start to reflect on the other antiracist works that I had been reading that semester. It happened when Inoue asks his white colleagues in the room how it feels when he addresses only his colleagues of color? When he asks them how it feels "to be talked about and not talked to? To be the object of the discussion and not the subject?" (Inoue, 2019). Something about this slight-of-perspective—where he purposely made the white people in the room feel marginalized because

of their race—made me start to empathize with perspectives in a way I hadn't before. It made me stop and question some of the tacit and unearned privileges that I did not realize I had been enjoying at the expense of others. It made me think about how if I am not part of the solution, then I am part of the problem.

It was not until the Fall 2021 semester at ECU in Dr. Tracy Ann Morse's Seminar in Writing Studies Pedagogy: Writing Program Administration, that I finally learned what the CWPA is, what WPAs are, and how nebulous and dizzying WPA work can be. This was also when I first learned about Inoue's call for a boycott of the CWPA. In Dr. Morse's seminar, we analyzed Inoue's boycott of the CWPA, by reading and discussing his blog posts about the boycott. We also read the "CWPA Executive Board Statement in Response to the Recent Call to Boycott the Organization," and the "Toward Antiracist First-Year Composition Goals" that Inoue and the DEI TF created. The controversy immediately intrigued me, partly because of the revelatory impact that Inoue's 2019 CCCC's address had on me, and partly because reading about these top DEI experts meeting this kind of systemic resistance felt disheartening—like antiracist change in academia is a Sisyphean task.³

At the end of the semester, to my surprise, I entered the conversation about the boycott with two of the key people involved when Inoue (co-chair of the DEI TF) and Susan Thomas (president of the CWPA) agreed to interview with me for an Ignite style video that I was creating for a final in Dr. Tracy Ann Morse's class. My original intention was to focus my video on what

³ The claims in Inoue's blog post about the boycott made me reflect on the language inclusivity practices that I had been learning about and trying my best to promote as a Writing Center consultant and GTA. It amplified the paradox I had been struggling with, where one can empower BIPOC students in the Writing Center (or a classroom) by helping them understand the validity, sophistication, and beauty of their language(s) and encourage their language uses all day, but if the people in places of power outside of the UWC (or the classroom) do not acknowledge this and take action against it, then these efforts seem unlikely to ever fully take root and flourish.

WPAs can do to make their programs and schools more antiracist, but after reaching out to Inoue and talking to him at length about antiracism and the boycott, I decided to shift the focus of my project to the boycott. I then reached out to Thomas, at the urging of Dr. Tracy Ann Morse, to gain a more balanced understanding of the events from the CWPA's point of view. Talking to Thomas gave me another, whole, unsung perspective that simultaneously complemented, complicated, and challenged aspects of Inoue's interpretation of the boycott and what led up to it. One thing that really struck me about both interviews was the deep respect and admiration Thomas and Inoue each consistently voiced for each other and for everybody else involved—even in this moment of trauma and division, their empathy for one another was evident. That they held each other and each other's work in such reverence made me wonder how they could have met with such an unfortunate outcome with the OSFYC revisions.

While I created my 5-minute Ignite style video around select portions of the interviews I had with Thomas and Inoue, I quickly found myself with all these other scholars from the CWPA EB and DEI TF reaching out to me who were willing to talk (as Thomas had sent out a group email on my behalf encouraging others within the organization to reach out to me). To be honest, at first, I did not feel like I was the right person to be having all these conversations. I was worried about the fact that I am a straight, cis-gendered, white male who is new to DEI and antiracism scholarship and I didn't want my ignorance in any of this to unintentionally offend anyone. I also did not know much about the CWPA and WPA work and I was afraid that I would have little to offer in these conversations. However, each person that I interviewed assured me that I was the right person to do the work and invited me into their stories—teaching me and making me feel like I belonged.

Being able to talk to all these wonderful people helped me understand how moments like these are never as binary as they seem. Before talking to members of the TF and the EB, I knew as much as the public did—I knew what Inoue’s blog post conveyed to me. Without hearing the perceptions from the other people involved, we, the public are only presented with the very valid trauma of one person’s experience of the events and so are faced with the motif of the oppressor vs. the oppressed—because that is how Inoue experienced it. This starting narrative makes it easy to empathize only with Inoue and the TF—especially for people who were not there, do not know any of the other people involved, and who may have little to no real understanding of what the CWPA is or does. Without having access to the EB members’ perceptions, intentions, or feelings of the events, we are not able to empathize with them in the same intimate way that we are with Inoue—their individuality becomes absorbed into all that is being leveled against CWPA and to some extent, institutions in general.

I am not suggesting that any one person or group is right or wrong, or that boycotting, or not, is or was the right or wrong decision. What I am suggesting is that every individual that I interviewed on the EB and the TF are good people who want just as much for diversity, equity, and inclusion as each other does—something that is evident from listening to all their personal stories of the events. Without hearing other dimensions of the story and considering the surrounding contexts that led up to the boycott, it is easy to only empathize with one aspect of the story and to not consider the nuances of the very human breakdown of communication that prevented these very like-minded, well-intentioned people from achieving the shared outcomes that they were all aiming for.

The power of story

When people's personal and cultural stories are silenced, erased, negated, or dismissed, they are not included in the dominant narrative or are falsely represented within it. Therefore, if there is ever going to be diversity, equity, and inclusion, the stories of marginalized people or groups not only need to be heard by the dominant culture but the people in the dominant culture need to listen to these stories with rhetorical empathy; to not just feel for Other's experiences but to deeply understand them as if they were one's own (Blankenship, 2019). Doing this not only allows all people to begin to become aware of the many unearned privileges and (dis)advantages in the structures and organizations in our culture but it allows people to begin to actualize the collective stories of antiracist change that center all people of all backgrounds, so there can be real changes made to the structures that keep marginalized people, marginalized.

Antiracism

If there is no struggle there is no progress. Fredrick Douglass

Personal story is essentially the seed from which all antiracism grows because it invites the kind of deep empathy that is needed to start the process understanding how simply, safely saying, "I am not racist" is never enough. Bryce Michael Woods, host of the social justice/antiracist podcast *For Your Discomfort*, suggests the difference between not being racist and being antiracist is like knowing better versus doing better. In other words, knowing better and not being part of the solution is still being a part of the problem—it is still racism. What's more, it's essentially an engine of it (CBS News, 2020). However, to offer a more definitive definition, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests that,

Antiracism begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality.

In the most basic sense, antiracism is waking-up to the actualities of all forms of racism and discrimination and doing something to help make a change. However, Barbara J. Love's offers a more strategic approach to antiracism, a four-step process she calls adopting a "Liberatory consciousness" involving "awareness, analysis, action, and accountability or ally-ship" that "enables humans to live 'outside' patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process that helps to perpetuate oppressive systems" (n.d., p. 471). Although, one cannot even approach the first stage of "awareness" if they do not listen to and empathize with marginalized people's personal and cultural stories.

Many composition and rhetoric scholars center story in their classrooms to promote antiracist thinking because it "allows students and professors to evaluate their own places of privilege or non-privilege within society while trying to displace instances of racism both in the composition classroom and in the larger society" (Pimentel et al., 2016, p. 112). Ann E. Green (2003) for example, centers story in her classroom to promote antiracist thinking by having her students analyze and reflect on their own personal experiences of race and class, to help them see themselves and each other more clearly. Green (2003) also shares her own personal stories about race and class to help her students understand "the ways that race and class are fluid terms that can be unpacked through stories. . . about how race has affected and continues to affect, not just [her] scholarship or [her] academic writing, but [her] life" (p. 294). When we investigate the

history and the power of language in these constructive and empathetic ways, we help ourselves and others unearth white language supremacy that positions all languages and modes of expression as being inferior to standard written English.

Addressing white language supremacy in the classroom and in society is fundamentally important for cultivating an antiracist mindset as people—white people especially—are taught and reinforced from the dominant culture not to see it (McIntosh, 1990). To combat this, April Baker-Bell (2020) suggests people must commit to challenging the dominance of “white mainstream English” because racial equality is impossible when the language of power silences, erases, and devalues marginalized peoples’ histories and modes of expression. In other words, antiracism must be the fulcrum that all writing instruction and assessment operate from if we are ever going to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive future because language is the cornerstone for meaning making (hooks, 2021; Inoue, 2015; Young, 2007).

Ultimately, for antiracist change to really take root the dominant culture needs to amplify and include the personal and cultural stories of marginalized people, otherwise the unearned privileges and (dis)advantages that have been constructed to feel as natural as gravity will go unchecked. So, when Bonilla-Silva (2006) says that “antiracism begins with understanding” or Love (n.d.) points to “awareness” as the first step to adopting a “Liberatory consciousness” (471) they are not talking about simply knowing better, they are talking about actively listening to and embodying real stories of marginalized peoples’ struggles to feel how not being antiracist perpetuates racism and how simply, safely saying, “I am not racist” is never enough. In other words, antiracism begins with empathy. It begins with “listening with intent” (Ratcliffe, 1999) to deeply understand an Other’s experiences as if they were one’s own.

Empathy

The Promised Land is a corner in the heart.

-- Joseph Campbell

Empathy is a term that has been defined in a litany of ways by many kinds of scholars in several different fields over the last century. While the term empathy as we know it in the West was first translated into English by psychologist Edward Titchener in 1908 from the German word “Einfühlung,” which literally translates as “feeling into,” (Maibom & Debes, 2019, p. 286) today empathy has become more commonly associated with the ability to understand and grasp the cognitive and emotional experiences of others (Lanzoni, 2018). However, my research is more concerned with empathy as a rhetorical theory that recognizes the power of individual story and deep listening as vehicles for antiracism and antiracist organizational change.

In *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy*, Lisa Blankenship (2019) puts forth a theory of Rhetorical Empathy, defining it as “both a topos and a trope, a choice and a habit of mind that invents and invites discourse informed by deep listening and its resulting emotion, characterized by narratives based on personal experience” (p. 4). Rhetorical empathy places a lot of value on personal narrative/story, not just to simply hear or feel for another’s experiences but to deeply understand them as if they were one’s own. Blankenship (2019) further views empathy as a mode of invention where the listener rebuilds the Other’s experiences as well as the accompanying feelings and emotions, etc.—such to inhabit them with the teller to gain a wholistic understanding of the teller’s unique, embodied, lived complexities and positionalities. The inventive or constructive element of rhetorical empathy is essentially the crux of antiracism because it places onus on the listener to consciously and actively, though silently, cultivate understanding with and through the speaker, allowing the listener to understand how their inaction and/or unearned privileges create a ripple effect of (dis)advantages, whether they know it or not.

Rhetorical empathy—and its constructive and enlightening characteristics—are very much in conversation with, Krista Ratcliffe’s many writings on rhetorical listening. In “Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a ‘Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct,’” Ratcliffe (1999) describes rhetorical listening as “listening with intent” as opposed to for intent, such that one should not be looking to appropriate, smooth over, or simply find agreement in what someone else is saying but they (the listener) should be looking to holistically understand (personally, culturally, politically, etc.) the speaker and their discourses (p. 209). Ratcliffe frames this kind of understanding as a “standing under” or “letting [discourses] wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics” (p. 205). This kind of listening is central to antiracism in that it requires the listener to immerse themselves in the language and the culture the speaker’s discourse is situated in and to become unguarded enough to consider one’s own intentions, blind spots, and biases in the process.

Essentially, rhetorical listening and rhetorical empathy can be gateways for antiracist organizational change in that systems cannot be made more diverse, equitable and inclusive unless the change-makers intimately understand the experiences of those who have been excluded. In other words, personal story is foundational to antiracist organizational change because it allows people to cultivate the kind of mindfulness necessary to challenge the stories that keep the unequal structures in place, so everyone can build new antiracist ones together.

Organizational Change

*The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old,
but on building the new. Socrates*

When Obama was running for president in 2004 and 2012, he ran on a platform of “Progress,” “Hope,” and “Change.” However, he didn’t just absently campaign the words, he

created a story behind the change that illustrated who and what it included. The visual rhetoric of Obama's iconic campaign posters alone, the ones that featured his stylized, letterpress printed, blue and red shaded bust over the words "Progress," "Hope," and "Change," set the narrative for creating a constructive equilibrium between the right and the left, of the first African American president mending the ideological, political, and racial divides in the US to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive America.

This is an example of what Brenton Faber (2002) refers to as creating "interpretive stories of change," which are integral to creating any level of antiracist organizational change (p. 79). In *Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, and identity*, Faber claims that "the ways we act, think, and even become creative are known to us only through the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic structures that frame our world. . . [and that] to change the ways we behave, think, or learn requires a change in the structures we use to interpret and frame daily life" (p. 79). In other words, the only way to create deep, meaningful, and lasting antiracist change is to reinvent or redirect the story (or culture) of an organization and to mindfully invite people to see themselves in it, and vice versa. Faber (2002) goes on to suggest that if organizations do not create "interpretive narratives" through which people can "pre-interpret" the organizational changes, then they will not only likely end up with serious miscommunications, but people may also begin to "invent stories to justify [their] resistance, avoidance and rebellion" to that change (p. 101). Basically, it comes down to the fact that organizational change—especially antiracist organizational change—cannot just be thought of as mere strategy made by a few key players, but as changes to living cultures, that require maps of meaning through which people can pre-interpret the story of change.

However, one of the biggest problems with reinventing an organization's culture is that a lot of the nuances of the stories that define organizations are often tacit concepts that have not been fully articulated (Gray et al., 1985). Jim Suchan (2006) refers to these tacit concepts as "cognitive underpinnings," which he posits "need to be surfaced, described, and discussed—that is, brought into awareness through language—before they can be expanded, made more robust, or modified in some significant way" (p. 32). In other words, when an organization is attempting to make antiracist change, they not only have to investigate all potential tacit biases within the organization's distinct culture and make them known, but they also must investigate their own individual unearned privileges or (dis)advantages as well. However,, this kind of deep-dive investigation cannot happen without creating an open—and often non-linear—dialogue(s) with the many stakeholders who define an organization's culture.

Scholars such as Kenneth Gergen et al. (2002) liken this kind of investigative dialogue to free-form jazz where there is a head-of-the-tune that defines the structure of the song, but where each musician takes a turn uniquely expressing themselves around and through it. Similarly, Nancy Roberts (1993) maintains that promoting this kind of introspective and inclusive organizational dialogue that acknowledges the existing structure and reveals the "polyphony" of an organizations "dialogic culture" is "the stuff of organizing and change" (2002, p. 129). This kind of dialogic listening is even more critical when making antiracist organizational change because antiracism aims to change and challenge the stories that have kept the unequal structures in place, and those stories cannot be challenged or changed unless they are unearthed and heard.

Ultimately, personal story can serve as a gateway to antiracism by allowing people to cultivate empathy for the lived experiences of marginalized people, which can help foster the kinds of deep understanding, reflection, and mindfulness needed to begin to create lasting,

antiracist organizational change. Simply put, there can be no real change for diversity, equity, inclusion unless we invite everybody's stories and histories into the center.

CHAPTER 2. THE SEPARATION

The Road of Trials

Before getting into the actual details of and tensions surrounding Asao Inoue's boycott and the meeting, one must consider the proverbial pressure-chamber-of-time that 2020 and 2021 were. The culture of this meeting and the boycott cannot be divorced from the chain of political, social, cultural, and organizational contexts that they were steeped in. Each person I interviewed—both on the EB and TF—emphasized how important it is to keep in mind how things such as the feelings of uncertainty and isolation created by Covid-19, the racial tensions the nation was experiencing under the Trump presidency, and the viral video of George Floyd's murder, and the resulting BLM protests significantly added to the exigency for revising the OSFYC to make it more antiracist.

One cannot talk about anything that took place in 2020 to present without acknowledging the breath (breadth) of Covid-19 that was (and unfortunately still is) on the nape-of-the-neck of every event that has taken place within it and since. The collective uncertainty, fear, and anxiety brought about by Covid-19 has saturated(s) every aspect of life, especially at the time of this EB meeting—which occurred just a little over a year after March 11, 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 an official pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). This also placed the DEI TF drafting their revisions under the unprecedented, nerve-wrenching conditions of a newly born global pandemic.

Shortly after the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic, the normal way of life in the United States along with the rest of world effectively flipped on its head. Most countries sealed their borders, issuing foreign travel bans and domestic travel restrictions. Lockdowns and stay at home orders were enacted. Schools and business were closed, non-essential workers were

ordered to work from home. Essential workers were pushed—white-knuckled and doe-eyed—out onto the frontlines, and social distancing, wearing masks, and voraciously washing hands became the new norms (Turna et al., 2021; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Katella, 2021). Essentially, we found ourselves living in a time where a friendly handshake could prove fatal and where holding funerals for loved ones had become unjustified risks.

Beyond the immediate physical threat of getting sick (and dying), there was also the ever-looming threat of widespread economic doom. Not only were their historic numbers of Americans filing for unemployment (approximately 1 in every 4 workers) but in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic alone thousands of businesses shut their doors for good (Roberts, 2020; Fairlie, 2020). However, the Covid-19 pandemic was not just creating a maelstrom of economic uncertainty it was taking its toll on the psychological well-being of pretty much every living/breathing person. Not even a week into the Covid-19 pandemic people were mobbing store shelves and hoarding everything that they could get their hands on (toilet paper proving to be chief among the coveted items—in some cases people were literally coming to blows over it—I don't think I will ever fully understand why). In short, people were harried and afraid on every front. Many psychologists' studies have found that the myriad of overt stressors in the environment, along with the loneliness and isolation caused from social distancing, stay at home orders, and lockdowns, resulted in large portions of the population of the United States suffering from Covid-19-related mental health issues ranging from anxiety, to depression, to Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (Kar et al., 2021). To top it all off, in 2020, the United States was also going through one of the most contentious presidencies and presidential elections in recent history.

Politics and policies aside, Donald Trump is a controversial character whose rhetoric many consider narcissistic, misogynistic, racist, and all-around offensive. Trump not only routinely portrayed women with an unfiltered amount of misogyny, publicly referring to them as pigs, dogs, and slobs, but he built his 2016 presidential campaign around xenophobic slogans like “Build that Wall,” and publicly criticized NFL players who took a knee to peacefully protest police brutality against people of color—and that is barely skimming the surface (Darweesh & Abdullah 2016; Skinnell & Young, 2018). Scholars like Anna M. Young (2018) suggest that Trump’s “populist” and “apocalyptic rhetoric” not only “offered his beliefs and his followers cover for white nationalism” (66) but created “the perception of a constant and never-ending stream of crises” that “[served] to galvanize and organize his in-group against his out-group” (63). Scholars like Elliot Benjamin (2020) argue that while more and more people were dying from Covid-19 every day in 2020, Trump “appear[ed] to be putting his own political and economic aspirations and narcissism, while utilizing destructive political and racist rhetoric, over the reality of hundreds of thousands of Americans dying” (253). It is conflagratory and solipsistic rhetoric like this that many suggest Trump placed above everything else—including the Covid-19 pandemic—which added to the panoply of pressures that broke like a levy with the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

The agonizing 9 minutes and 29 second viral execution video of George Floyd at the knee of Derek Chauvin flooded the internet just a little over two months after nearly all the states in the United States issued lockdowns and stay at home orders—meaning that everyone was home, everyone was anxious, and everyone was a witness. Watching Derek Chauvin’s complete lack of concern for George Floyd’s desperate pleas for breath and his disregard for the relentless cries of concerned bystanders who begged him and the other officers to do anything for Floyd as

he slowly died, was a tragedy the nation could not ignore. His murder amplified the egregious realities of systemic racism and police brutality that Black Americans have been enduring for far too long. Almost immediately after the video went viral, appalled people of all ages, races, genders, sexualities, and ethnicities began dismissing stay at home orders to join BLM protests all over the country.⁴ Countless businesses also began stepping up to show their support for BLM and social justice as well, doing anything from placing a BLM placard in their windows, to publishing official statements, to donating to the cause. The collective demand for antiracist change had created something of a kairotic moment in the United States for the voices and sufferings of Black Americans to be well-seen and well-heard.

Many schools, universities, and academic organizations of all kinds also began releasing statements in support of BLM and social justice, including the CWPA who have long been supporters of DEI and antiracism. On July 11, 2020, the CWPA published a video statement on their website titled “WPAs Share Responsibility for Racial Justice.”⁵ In the video, then CWPA president, Mark Blaauw-Hara speaks to the socio-political turmoil of 2020, specifically addressing, empathizing with, and supporting “the demonstrations sparked by the death of George Floyd” (0:14). In the statement, Blaauw-Hara encourages WPAs to join him in investigating and challenging the “entrenched racial biases” (2020, 1:10) in the hiring practices, teaching, training, and curriculum in their institutions and writing programs. Blaauw-Hara concludes the video by expressing his sincere grief for the violence and racism he has seen

⁴ George Floyd’s death magnified the wrongful deaths of Black people at the hands of police like Trayvon Martin (whose death set the Black Lives Matter movement in motion), Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Daunte Write, and Breonna Taylor—just to name a few—and this is not to mention the countless other wrongful deaths of Black Americans that did not have the “privilege” of going as viral, like DJ Henry who was a student athlete at Pace University in Pleasantville, New York who was wrongfully shot by police on October 17th, 2010 while out with friends in rural Westchester county.

⁵ The CWPA has taken steps in previous years to support BLM and antiracism like with [Sacramento BLM activist Sonia Lewis’ 2018 keynote](#) “Racially-Motivated Brutality and Micro-Aggressions” at the CWPA annual conference.

perpetrated against people of color in 2020, acknowledging both his white privilege and his responsibility as a WPA and a human to “better support students and colleagues of color” (1:57), encouraging all WPAs to do the same.

A little over a month after publishing their video statement, the CWPA also published an “Antiracist Reading List” and a “Statement on Racial Injustice and Systemic Racism” on their website condemning all forms of racism and discrimination, expressing support for “Black Lives Matter activists and social-justice allies” and acknowledging the history and scope of systemic racism and white supremacy in the United States education systems—“especially as it directly applies to writing program administration, writing curriculum and instruction, placement, and assessment” (CWPA, 2020). The CWPA conclude the statement with a commitment to “building a truly antiracist, inclusive, and supportive organization; and supporting equitable and just writing programs,” vowing to create a system to hold themselves accountable to their antiracist efforts (CWPA, 2020). Working to uphold this vow, the CWPA and its members began earnestly investigating different aspects of the organization to see how they could continue to do more for diversity, equity, and inclusion—particularly at the academic and language level—when CWPA members Jeff Klausman and Inoue approached Blaauw-Hara with the idea of revising the OSFYC to make it more antiracist due to its power and reach.

The OSFYC is a document that is not only used to inform many first-year composition programs all over the country, but several books and dissertations have also been written about it since it was first published in 1999 (See Ericson, 2003; Dryer et al., 2012; Behm et al., 2013; Sills, 2018). As Kathleen Blake Yancey (2001) asserts, the OSFYC is “used as a context for specific programs; to create a new program, to revise an extant one. . .to create a dialogue among different faculty. . .about what it is that we expect of students” and it is “used to inform

administrators and members of the public particularly about what is that we do in our composition classrooms” (as cited in Harrington et al., 2001, p. 322-323). In other words, the OSFYC is central to how writing is taught in universities, and by default—whether directly and/or indirectly—has strong influence over how and what language(s) and language usage(s) are valued in composition classrooms in the [United States](#). This well-grounded influence makes the OSFYC a particularly fecund site for antiracist change, a potential the CWPA actively acknowledged in 2020 by putting together a DEI TF with the goal of making it more antiracist

Methods/Methodology

The following section is a composite of the story of how the DEI TF came together, how they drafted the Goals Statement⁶, the TF’s reasoning behind changing the “Outcomes” in the OSFYC to “Goals” the breakdown in miscommunication the TF and EB experienced throughout the process, and the resulting call for a boycott of the CWPA. This composite story is based on the interviews that I conducted with members of the CWPA EB and the DEI TF. The people I interviewed are:

- Susan Thomas (then vice president of the CWPA)
- Asao Inoue (co-chair of the TF)
- Beth Brunk-Chavez (co-chair of the TF and EB member)
- Melvin Beavers (TF member)
- Iris Ruiz (TF member)
- Mark Blaauw-Hara (then President of the CWPA)
- Dominic DelliCarpini (then Immediate Past President)

⁶ The TF’s “Goals Statement” is now published as “First Year Composition Goals Statement” by the Institute of Race, Rhetoric, and Literacy. However, throughout this thesis I refer to it as the “Goals Statement” because I didn’t want to add another acronym.

- Kat O’Meara (EB member)⁷.

It is important to note that this composite story is only my interpretation of the events as I understood them from listening to the stories of the people I interviewed. I fully acknowledge that my perceptions are limited by my own understanding of their stories, WPA work, the history of the work that CWPA has done, and the OSFYC as well. I acknowledge that my story is in no way a complete rendering of the complexity of ways that the individuals that I interviewed, as well as the many others that I did not interview, may have experienced these events.

All the interviews were conducted with synchronous video technology such as WebEx or Zoom. Having virtual face-to-face meetings allowed me to see my interviewees’ facial expressions and body language, elements of emotional nuance that would otherwise be lost with a phone call or through email. Each session lasted anywhere from forty minutes to an hour. The synchronous sessions were audio and visually recorded and I later transcribed them to text.

The interviews were mostly informal and opened-ended. I did not prepare many questions in advance. Instead, I would share with interviewees a bit of my personal story and positionality and explain to them how this project grew out of an Ignite style video that I created in Dr. Tracy Ann Morse’s WPA seminar. I wanted each interviewee to understand that I was interviewing them to learn. I then would ask each interviewee to share with me their recollections and feelings of the events and meeting(s) that resulted in Inoue calling for boycott of the CWPA. Some of the main questions that I focused on are:

- What is your understanding of what the process was for the meeting(s) regarding the proposed revisions of the 4.0 version of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, and what was your experience of the relevant meetings surrounding it?

⁷ I also interviewed a member of the task force who asked for his interview not to be included in my data set. There were also several members from the CWPA EB who I reached out to who declined to be interviewed.

- What was and is your response to the “Goals Statement” that the TF proposed?
- Do you think the TF’s Goals Statement is “usable?”
- What was and is your response to Inoue’s call for a boycott of CWPA?
- Do you think the call for a boycott of the CWPA could have been avoided? If so, how?

While the interviews dealt with many other topics and were at times discursive, they mainly focused on the topics of DEI, the OSFYC, and the events preceding and succeeding Inoue calling for a boycott of the CWPA. Generally, the interviews consisted mostly of me listening to the interviewees’ stories and intermittently asking more about a certain topic, opinion, event, or feeling. Further, due to the time limitations of this project, I cannot fully relate all the details of everyone’s interviews—most of which exceeded an hour in length. It is for this reason that I have chosen to create a composite of their stories, focusing on elements that seem most important.

Throughout this composite story, I have included several textboxes with corresponding bracketed numbers that contain direct quotes from many of the people I interviewed in an attempt bring in more of their thoughts and feelings in particular places. Additionally, after writing my first draft of the composite story, I emailed all the people I interviewed to ask them if I could read my composite story back to them to see if they thought it was an accurate rendering of what had occurred. I read my composite story back to Brunk-Chavez, Blaauw-Hara, Inoue, O’Meara, and Thomas all of whom helped me adjust my composite story to make it as accurate as possible.

Composite of the Story.

The CWPA have long been supporters of DEI and antiracism. However, at the town hall portion of the 2019 conference in Baltimore, there was a lot of interest among members in taking

more action to make the CWPA a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization (Thomas, 2022). While in 2019 the CWPA began undertaking several antiracist initiatives, in 2020—with the recent deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd fresh in everyone’s hearts and minds, and BLM protests happening all around the country—there was added interest in expediting antiracist change. That year, the CWPA acted by publishing several antiracist initiatives on their website, including a video statement “WPA’s Sharing Responsibility to Advocate for Racial Justice,” an antiracist reading list, and a “Racial Injustice and Systemic Racism” statement. They also put together a DEI TF to revise the OSFYC to make it more equitable and inclusive.

Inoue (2022) says, that around the time of the 2020 CWPA conference—which was moved online due to the pandemic—CWPA member Klausman (who is a senior professor of English and WPA at Whatcom College in Bellingham, Washington) approached him with the idea of examining the OSFYC for implicit bias and revising it to make it more actively antiracist. After discussing the idea for a while and realizing the depth of its importance, they approached Blaauw-Hara (then CWPA president) about making the revisions a reality. Blaauw-Hara agreed with the importance and their assessments and was quickly on board [1]. The idea was then brought up at the town hall portion of the 2020 CWPA conference and not before long revising the OSFYC to make it more antiracist became a shared point of interest among many members.

[1]. “I have been working on antiracism within a classroom for quite a while, but it was definitely my first time trying to promote organizational change from an antiracist perspective. And I think that is the case for a lot of people who were involved in this process” (Blaauw-Hara, 2020, 11:11).

While Inoue was asked by Blaauw-Hara to co-chair a DEI TF to help undertake the project, Blaauw-Hara (2022) and Inoue (2021) say that Jeff Klausman—who “identifies as

mixed race, primarily white” (Klausman, n.d.)—was not asked to be a member because they thought it was important to give the few TF seats they had to scholars of color. However, they did ask EB member Brunk-Chavez—who is white—to co-chair the TF because of her previous experience with the 3.0 OSFYC revisions in 2014 and her extensive expertise in the areas of composition and WPA work.

When putting together the DEI TF—due to the CWPA membership being so overwhelmingly white—Blaauw-Hara, Brunk-Chavez, and Inoue felt that it needed to be predominantly comprised of BIPOC scholars. They also agreed that there was just not enough expertise in antiracism within the CWPA and decided they needed “to look outside of the organization. . .to get some expert advice from the people who are really immersed in antiracist work” (Blaauw-Hara, 2022, 10:11). They reached out to Vershawn A. Young, Tanita Saenkhum, Melvin Beavers, Iris Ruiz, and Niesha-Anne Green, all who graciously agreed to join the TF to help do this very important, volunteer, antiracist work.

The TF met virtually at least once a month, though often as much as twice a month, over a seven-month period to draft their revisions (Beavers, 2022; Blaauw-Hara, 2022; Brunk-Chavez, 2022; Inoue, 2022; Ruiz, 2022). According to Brunk-Chavez, the process began with getting to know each other’s personalities and feeling out how each other worked, since most of them did not have previous personal working relationships with each other (Brunk-Chavez, 2022, 3:55). In the first meetings there was a lot of discussion about what the document needed to be and what it needed to look like in order to do the most good. This included questioning the OSFYC’s current state, its limitations, its potential and if it could do what they needed it to do as

an “Outcomes” statement [2]. At one point the TF played with the idea of calling it names like

[2]. “I remember talking through what revisions might look like [and] how it was something that I thought had a really strong and important exigence. And one of my questions was. . .what if we just blow the whole thing up? What if we just say it doesn't exist anymore. I was just thinking, how do we think bigger? How do we think beyond what we already have here? And we all laughed and then said, no, it's not the right idea. But I think that thread sort of carried through into some of our conversations about how to approach it.” (Brunk-Chavez, 2022, 3:09).

“The Dream Statement”

before seriously settling on the

name “First-Year

Composition Goals

Statement.” They felt that the

word “goals” fit the context of

the antiracist work they were

doing much better; that it promoted the vital questioning necessary to keep the document awake

and alive (Brunk-Chavez, 2022, 4:03). However, the TF decided to keep the format of the

document the same—

modeling it after the

existing OSFYC—

keeping the sections or

“planks” relatively

intact to help maintain

the documents image-

power in First Year Writing programs. [3]

[3]. “So, the heart of the CWPA is their Outcome Statement because so many places use it as a starting point. But I have also seen some colleges and universities pretty much wholesale use it as their outcomes for their First-Year Writing programs. So, it's a pretty powerful document. And it's not that it's a bad document. There's a lot of great stuff and we wouldn't want to lose all of it. But it ain't critical enough. It doesn't look at the history. It doesn't even gesture to the history or politics of race in our language practices or in our language instruction (Inoue, 2021, 25:18).

In terms of top-down direction from the CWPA EB, the TF members say that Blaauw-Hara gave them support and encouragement to rebuild the OSFYC with their expertise. Ruiz (2022) recalls how in the beginning of the process Blaauw-Hara was both considerate and apologetic—giving the TF free rein of the revisions while acknowledging the scope of the work, their busy schedules, and its volunteer nature. According to Ruiz (2022) and Brunk-Chavez (2022), the TF worked collaboratively, with Inoue bringing most of the initial drafts to the table and everybody revising them together. The process was very hands-on and synergistic—with lots

[4]. “If you look at both documents side by side, the areas that I’m going to call dimensions or planks, are not too far removed from what’s still in the third version of the outcomes statement. They’re questions, right. A lot of things have been turned into questions. And a lot of questioning helps us think about the ways that language has become so racialized (Beavers, 2022, 18:43).

of conversation as they were writing and problem-solving. They approached each existing outcome or “plank” one by one, creating counter narratives out of each—turning them into questions to make them less like

wholesale, bankable products [4]. Throughout this drafting process the TF had a lot of engagement with Blaauw-Hara and Brunk-Chavez; however, as a group they had little contact with other members of the CWPA EB along the way.

After creating a draft that they were proud of, the TF submitted the Goals Statement to the EB for its first round of feedback on a shared Google document. When the TF received the EB’s feedback, they were mostly optimistic about it, but they were concerned over a few of the comments made about the change to the statement’s title from “Outcomes” to “Goals” and the documents “usability” [5].

[5]. “What is usable? If usable is recognizable as a set of outcomes like we’ve had before, then what you get is a set of outcomes like we’ve had before. So those aren’t really good conditions for antiracist work” (Inoue, 2021, 25:21).

However, after spending a good amount of time addressing the EB’s concerns and making several revisions—being careful not to sacrifice any of the document’s antiracist power—the TF agreed that it was time to officially present their revised draft to the EB so it could move on to the next group of scholars (namely scholars of color), both inside and outside of the CWPA, for further consideration—a necessary next step in the process that had previously been discussed between the TF and Blaauw-Hara (Beavers, 2022; Blaauw-Hara, 2022; Brunk-Chavez, 2022; Inoue, 2021; Ruiz, 2022).

Instead of just submitting their revisions to the EB, the TF asked Blaauw-Hara if they could all attend the EB meeting to present the Goals Statement together to explain the antiracist reasoning behind each change or “Goal.” Generally, the way this type of business is handled in the CWPA is a member prepares a report and then there is discussion by the EB before it advances to a vote (DelliCarpini, 2022, 12:05). In this case, Blaauw-Hara was able to get special permission from the EB for all the TF members to attend and present together. However, according to the CWPAs bylaws (“Bylaws of Council of Writing Program Administrators”), the TF could not be present for unrelated business or when votes were cast, and the EB had to have a vote at the beginning of the meeting to grant them access.

The TF decided that Brunk-Chavez would introduce the project discussing how it diverged in content and process from the 3.0 OSFYC revisions and then other TF members would present individual “planks” or “goals” that they had the most involvement with or expertise in and field any related questions regarding them. Ultimately, the TF headed into this

meeting excited to present their Goals Statement to the EB and for it to finally move on to a larger group of scholars for consideration [6].

[6]. “I think our impression was very much, like, okay, we’re ‘finished’ with our part. Now, we would like to present it to the executive board. Not necessarily for approval [but for] acknowledgement of the work and then feedback, or questions with how to bring it forward” (Ruiz, 2022, 10:45).

The Apotheosis: The Meeting.

The virtual meeting took place on April 6, 2021 and according to then vice president Thomas (2022) it “began really badly” (18:21). In order for guests to attend an EB meeting—per the CWPA’s bylaws—the EB has to vote agreeing to admit them. However, as Thomas explains (2022), some of the EB members had the wrong meeting link—causing them to receive an error—which delayed the beginning of the meeting, and even further delayed the vote, placing the TF in a virtual waiting room for approximately twenty minutes. DelliCarpini (2022) recalls there being tension among the EB members about the TF being kept in the waiting room for so long, which in his opinion caused the process to be delayed even longer.

After the delay and the vote, the TF was eventually permitted into the meeting and began presenting their Goals Statement, explaining each “goal,” and addressing the revisions they made. Brunk-Chavez (2022) says that the TF’s presentation was not long, that “there was 5 or 6 of [them] who were there for the meeting and each of [them] took 3, 4 or 5 minutes at most” (11:15). After the presentation, the TF put a list of five questions into the chat box that Saenkhum had previously generated, which were shared with me by Brunk-Chavez:

1. Is the statement bold and clear in supporting antiracism in writing (language) instruction and its assessment? Explain features you think are most important for readers to consider.
2. What other scholarship do you think is helpful to include as resource in the different dimensions we identified?

3. In what ways do you find the document usable as a teacher or for writing programs in developing learning goals and assessing them? Do you have any suggestions to increase the usability of the document?

4. How can you support CWPA in advancing the social justice agenda of the document in the work you do?

5. In no more than a few sentences, what else must the task force consider in the revision?

These questions were designed to constructively steer the conversation so that they could collectively make the document as strong and effective as possible—in terms of both its antiracist power and its usability.

While some EB members began selecting which questions they wanted to answer, Ruiz (2022) recalls a barrage of other questions and comments quickly generating both vocally and in the chat box. Instead of sticking to the five questions the TF posted, the EB began asking more questions and making comments such as “How would you implement this? I have forty faculty members; how would I be able to train them using this? This would take so much labor. We don’t have the resources. Some people have never taught before, how would you be able to implement this kind of training and professional development?” (10:43). To Ruiz and other TF members, the EBs’ responses felt a bit more like an interrogation of their work than a celebration of it. Basically, they felt like the EB were asking them for verifiable outcomes in “planks” that were now “goals,” or heuristics designed to make WPAs ask themselves some of these very same and difficult to answer questions. Further, they felt like their expertise was being questioned and as if they were being asked for a complete WPA-answer-key to antiracism [7].

[7] “I think we weren't ready to answer all the questions of usability, because we weren't asked to tell you how to use it. We were asked to revise it so that it reflects a more antiracist viewpoint or perspective (Beavers, 2022, 16:02).

However, DelliCarpini (2022), O’Meara (2022), and Thomas (2021) suggest that the EB were not questioning the TF’s expertise or looking for all the answers but were trying to make sure that the document would not unintentionally disadvantage any WPAs or FYC programs that the OSFYC is intended to help. The substantial shift in the document’s genre from an “Outcomes” statement to a “Goals” statement was also a bit of a surprise to the EB because—to their knowledge—this was not what they had asked the TF to do. Some EB members such as DelliCarpini (2022) argued that Blaauw-Hara had disregarded the democratic process of the CWPA—as well as their bylaws—by giving the TF free rein to completely change the document in this drastic way without getting permission from the EB first—something that he did not have the power to do. However, O’Meara (2022) says, that the majority of the EB felt like these changes were “also a good surprise because [the task force was] using all this language they have been trying to imbue into CWPA with processes and best practice statements for ten or fifteen years” (8:15). O’Meara (2022) suggests, the EB was just trying to make sure that the document would not lose any of its

administrative power, because if it did, its antiracist power could be negatively impacted as well. The EB also say that their concerns with the document’s usability were not meant to feel interrogative but were concerned questions for all

[8] “The only criticism that I heard in that meeting of the document, or of their work, in their Google doc that had been circulated weeks prior was one of usability. Because people were saying well, what happens when a new WPA walks into a classroom with the Outcomes Statement, which universities use for their accreditation? There are so many things tied to that document that we would have to go through a series of channels to make big sweeping changes. I think we can. And I certainly think we need to, but we work in an imperfect system. We work in the institutions where systemic racism is embedded” (Thomas, 2021, 13:10).

WPAs who use the OSFYC as an administrative tool to improve their writing programs [8].

Thomas (2021), O’Meara (2022), and DelliCarpini (2022) say the majority of the EB members

loved the “goals,” but they were worried about how a WPA, especially a new and/or inexperienced WPA—who is not yet well-versed in antiracism scholarship, and is just beginning to navigate all of the tenebrous expectations of WPA work—would present this document to their upper administration to do things like secure more funding for revamping their curricula, or for hiring more tenure track professors, without having actual outcomes to point to. DelliCarpini (2022) suggests that changing the OSFYC into what he considered to now be an “anti-outcome statement” would be like saying “we don't want to follow the rules of higher education any longer,” which would be “a disservice to [CWPA] members—including [their] members of

[9] “This would have been a fine document for 4Cs because that's about writing teachers. CWPA is a small organization, focused on people that have to do administrative work” (DelliCarpini, 2022, 16:02).

color” (13:30) because it would put WPAs at a disadvantage when dealing with their deans and provosts who predominantly speak in the language of outcomes and assessment [9].

While the EB did not think the Goals Statement could necessarily replace the OSFYC, DelliCarpini (2022) recalls the overwhelming majority of the EB members agreeing with Thomas when she said that she loved the document and thought it could serve as a guide to the existing OSFYC and/or even as a guide for all the CWPA’s DEI work going forward.

However, as the conversation got more passively contentious, the miscommunication about what the EB had expected versus what the TF were told to do became obfuscated in questions of processes, power, and usability. According to Brunk-Chavez (2022), there was a lot of concern from the EB about the document not being in the language of assessment. There were also debates about who should receive the new revision suggestions going forward, the EB or the TF, as well as if and how the document should go out to the next round of reviewers. During this

debate Brunk-Chavez (2022) says she asked if they could pause and think more about the question of process because with 3.0 Outcomes Statement, decisions were made about process as the TF made them. In her opinion, this presented them with both the opportunity and challenge of not having set processes to adhere to, which gave them the freedom to make decisions. She also brought up the fact that the TF had already had much more interaction with the EB than the previous TF did with the 3.0 revisions. However, Brunk-Chavez (2022) recalls several EB members such as DelliCarpini arguing that the TF was not revising the OSFYC but were proposing to abolish and replace it with goals, which, they said, made it an entirely new policy and according to CWPA bylaws, made all processes pertaining to it subject to a EB vote.

As all this was converging, O’Meara—who was a newer member of the EB—recalls just keeping her head down and watching to see how more senior members were reacting. Having just recently been a grad student herself and a chair of WPA GO, she was concerned how the WPA GO members in the virtual room were experiencing the breakdown of communication. Ruiz, on the other hand, recalls TF members doing their best to counter the stream of questions

that were coming their way but as the questions/arguments started to feel cyclic, she and some of the TF members like Beavers decided to leave the meeting early as progress seemed unlikely [10].

[10] “I don’t think that there was really a moment where it felt like. Oh, wow! We just feel completely welcome in this meeting. It almost felt like we were the bad guys. Like, what are you guys doing here, doing this work? And we were asked to do this work, you know what I mean? Like, how dare you do this? That’s what it felt like. It really did” (Ruiz, 2022, 17:22).

By now the meeting had reached the forty-five-minute mark or so—moving in a sort of slow downward spiral—when an EB member unmuted and said something to the effect of, “Hey,

[11] “We were basically saying can we just pause, because we don’t want to roll this out until the CWPA fully understands how we can give the correct language and the practicality of this statement to the masses of WPAs. In the task force’s document, they don’t use writing as a term at all, they use languaging, which I’m fine using, but try to explain that to your administration when you have low prestige. Many WPAs are not on the tenure track. They’re in precarious positions and there’s so much austerity that they’re up against. (O’Meara, 2022, 8:44).

we have so much more stuff to do, clearly we’re at an impasse.

Can we put a pin in this?”

(O’Meara, 2022, 23:19) [11].

O’Meara says it is important to remember that this meeting was not a special meeting scheduled to

only discuss the revisions to the OSFYC, but it was an annual meeting that the EB had allotted the first fifteen-minutes of, for discussing the TF’s revisions—meaning they still had several other items on their 60-plus page agenda to discuss that day. However, for many of the members of the TF this comment was the icing-on-the-cake of what already felt like an intentional slow-footing of the process by the EB, that would inevitably result in their Goals Statement being indefinitely kicked-down-the-road.

Shortly after the suggestion was made to move on to other business, Thomas (2021) recalls then EB Member and now vice president Lilian Mina—who is a woman of color—expressing how she felt uncomfortable because she didn’t know how to train her WPAs to use the document and asked if it would be possible to put in more steps regarding that. Thomas (2022) says, Young quickly acknowledged Mina’s concerns, noting them as perfectly valid criticisms and began suggesting ways to add more fundamental direction into the document when Inoue unmuted and said, “I say this with deep love and compassion for everyone in this room and for the organization. What I have felt and seen in this meeting today participates in

white supremacy culture” (Inoue, 2021). Inoue then pointed to how things like the bylaws were operating as tools of white supremacy and put a link in the chat box offering further characteristics of white supremacy culture. He closed by expressing his deep care for the organization and said, “it is tiresome to hear ‘we love what you’re doing, but not this though.’” (Brunk-Chavez, 2021 21:12). According to Thomas (2022), many EB members were taken aback by Inoue’s sudden comment about white supremacy culture—especially Mina who was speaking when Inoue unmuted. After making his statements, Inoue (2021) suggests that—while most of the EB members remained quiet—a few took offense and became otherwise verbally combative. After the brief exchange calmed, the EB decided it best to move on to other business, feeling like progress was unlikely. Not long after Inoue and the remaining TF members left the meeting.

After the meeting ended many EB members such as Thomas (2021), Blaauw-Hara (2022), and O’Meara (2022) say they felt like while the meeting had not gone particularly well, they didn’t feel like it had gone all bad either. They suggest that they left feeling mutually optimistic about working further with the TF on their Goals Statement—whether as an accompanying document to the OSFYC or as a totally new document. However, in the days following the meeting there was a group email exchange between several members of the EB and TF that further conflated the questions of process, power, usability, and white supremacy—with some people calling out what they felt were instances of sexism and misogyny taking place in the meeting as well [12]. It wasn’t until twelve days after the meeting on April

[12]. “I think people experienced that meeting through their own cultural associations. While Asao was seeing the racist overtones, women in the room were seeing the sexist overtones. We see things through prisms of our experience” (Thomas, 2021, 17:02).

18, 2021—after having received the other TF members’ consent—that Inoue published his blog post, calling for a boycott of the CWPA, and the optimism for going forward with the revisions to the OSFYC was finally lost on both fronts.

CHAPTER 3. THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

Recrossing the Return Threshold

In Aristotle's *Poetics* the word hamartia refers to a character's fatal flaw; however, it derives from the ancient Greek archery term "ἁμαρτάνειν hamartánein," which in modern English translates as, "to miss the mark" (Dryer, 1965). The ancient Greeks believed that it was integral for an archer to know where and what their target was before drawing their bowstring back to avoid committing a fatal flaw. The somewhat obvious idea being that, even with the best intentions, without having a proper aim, an archer's arrow can end up hitting anything or nothing, a disorientation and danger further compounded when there are many archers who do not agree on the target.

I believe the EB and TFs fatal flaw(s) regarding the OSFYC revisions originated in much the same way, from failing to establish a unifying narrative about what their individual and cooperative aims were. By not listening to and sharing stories about their intentions with the OSFYC, the EB and TF did not unearth the intimate complex culture of their goal(s), and so could not make informed and constructive changes for the collective good they were trying to accomplish (Moore, 2013). Looking at aspects of each groups' stories through a lens of rhetorical empathy illustrates how "us vs. them" narratives can emerge from the best intentions. By considering the feelings and internal experiences of the EB, TF, and individual members of each, it becomes clear that they all wanted to achieve the most for DEI, but they did not create "interpretive stories of change" through which they could "pre-interpret" their shared target, or the scope of it (Faber, 2002, p. 79). Ultimately, the separate organizational stories the TF and EB had from the start, created a central fissure between the two groups that branched out as the

process continued, consistently moving their expectations for the OSFYC further and further from the communal mark.

When looking at the EB and TF's stories with intent (Ratcliffe, 1999) one can see there was a difference in the scope of change between their orientations and expectations regarding the OSFYC revisions. The EB, on one hand, was looking to make local changes to empower WPAs because, like DelliCarpini (2022) says "The CWPA are a small organization focused on administrative work" (16:02). The TF, on the other hand, was looking to make universal antiracist change because this is what antiracist scholars do. They "[understand] the institutional nature of racial matters and [accept] that all actors in a racialized society are affected. . . [and] are committed to the goal of achieving racial equality" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In the broadest sense, the EB's local focus was and is to empower WPAs to help them make important administrative changes, positioning administrative work as the field of change and deans and provosts as the gatekeepers of it. In contrast, the TF's universal focus was and is challenging how all languaging is taught and thought about in universities, positioning all language and writing instruction as the field of change and the underlying white supremacist culture as the gatekeepers.

The EB's local focus is reflected in the EB members comments, such as in Thomas's (2021) acknowledgment of the OSFYC's vital connection to university(s) accreditation. Thomas (2021) suggests that to make the Goals Statement recognizable to people like deans and provosts—who look at outcomes as something like verifiable units of return on investments in student learning—institutions would have to "go through a series of channels to make big sweeping changes" (Thomas, 2021, 13:10). While Thomas (2021) thinks this needs to happen, one of her biggest concerns, which O'Meara (2022), and DelliCarpini (2022) share, is how a new

WPA—especially one of color (DelliCarpini 2022)—who generally has “low prestige” and are up against a lot of “austerity” (O’Meara, 8:44) can use the TF’s Goal Statement in the current “institutions where systemic racism is embedded”—without WPAs and students being marginalized or disadvantaged in the process (Thomas, 13:17). Speaking the language of deans and provosts is a particular concern for WPAs because they are “in a unique institutional position, answerable not only to the department chair but also in effect to the entire university,” as “first-year writing course[s] [are] usually the only courses that all students in [an] institution are required to take” (Mcleod, 2006, p.9). In this sense, the EB’s focus and concerns, particularly when it comes to “usability” and changing the document from an “Outcomes Statement” to “Goals Statement,” were local to WPAs and administrative work, but they were also universal, in that the CWPA aims to empower all WPAs, so they can empower their writing programs, and the diversity of teachers, students, and staff within them.

Ultimately, when listening to and attempting to inhabit the EB’s position (Blankenship, 2019) it becomes clear that they didn’t want to forestall any institutions or writing programs becoming more antiracist, or more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, they just didn’t want to get rid of the OSFYC completely—at least not at that point—because they felt like it would be like sending new or inexperienced WPAs out like sheep-amidst-the-wolves in the current systems they all must navigate daily—as they are. In other words, the EB wanted to arm WPAs with both the shield and the sword of the OSFYC and the Goals Statement—which they say they loved—to help them work with(in) the default language of assessment in the current imperfect systems, as they mindfully mount their antiracist offenses for students’ rights to their own languages.

Conversely, the TF’s universal focus had them running headlong into the same kinds of “big sweeping changes” that Thomas refers to, because they see them as the only real way to

make lasting, antiracist change in these vertiginously unequal systems. The TF’s universal focus is reflected in the TF members’ comments, such as in Brunk-Chavez’s (2022) half-jovial suggestion in the beginning of the process about blowing up the whole OSFYC in order to think beyond the “outcomes” there. What Brunk-Chavez and the TF recognize is that “changing a bullet point here, or a word or two there” (Brunk-Chavez, 2022, 7:13) will not disrupt the fact that writing, learning outcomes, by their very nature imply equality of opportunity and language inclusivity as a starting point, which of course is far from the case. For the TF, keeping outcomes that do not “question how language has become so racialized” (Beavers, 2022,) or “even gesture to the history or politics of race in our language practices or. . . instruction” (Inoue, 2021, 25:18) reinforces the “Racial Habitus” (Inoue, 2015) that dominates institutions—keeping the systems in place that keep marginalized people, marginalized. In other words, making some revisions to the “outcomes” would be like keeping the pillars of white language supremacy in place and bedecking them with hopeful ornaments of good intention. Changing the “outcomes” to “goals” was a way for the TF to keep the document awake and fluid, so it could, (like Bruce Lee says), “be more like water,” capable of adapting to the unique needs and cultures of each WPA and writing program that uses it.

However, some TF members did agree with the EB about the value of having two separate documents, an Outcomes Statement, and a Goals Statement—at least for the time being, while WPAs learned the extensive antiracist scholarship, figured out how to implement it, and figured out how to teach it to their writing teachers—but the consensus was that having both, risked creating an uneven power dynamic between them. Understanding that “Dominant groups, by definition, set the parameters within which the subordinates operate” (Tatum, 1997), and knowing how writing outcomes favor white language supremacy, the TF was concerned that the

Goals Statement would become subordinate to the OSFYC as it questions/challenges the dominance of it. This is not to mention that if there are two documents, many WPAs who are traditionally juggling all sorts of administrative duties, may not have the time, energy, or the want to investigate that “Other” antiracist statement—especially if the OSFYC is putting-out-fires for now.

When listening to and attempting to inhabit the TF’s position (Blankenship, 2019), I argue the TF was looking to make universal changes to the OSFYC in the hopes of substantively changing the dominant culture, instead of strategizing against or within it. While the TF did not want to disadvantage any WPAs during the process—especially WPAs of color—they saw it as a worthwhile, short-term risk, as every minute of every day, where big systemic changes are not braved, all marginalized WPAs, students, faculty, and staff are perpetually disadvantaged by the imperfect systems that are currently in place. Further, the TF realize that there is no way to avoid the manifold discomforts that accompany questioning the many unseen “isms” in ourselves and in our institutions because it means facing hard truths. It means acknowledging the illusions that keep the unearned privileges and (dis)advantages in our culture conveniently concealed. In other words, the TF recognizes the “outcomes” in the OSFYC as “the master’s tools” that will “never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1996) and want to arm WPAs with new tools/goals capable of cracking the beams of white language supremacy to begin building a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive foundation(s).

Ultimately, while each group had good intentions, they did not set terms, definitions, and goals at beginning of the process to help them build a foundational story that considered both of their aims for the revisions—possibly because neither group fully understood what their own expectations and limitations were. For instance, while each EB member may have innately

understood the central importance that “outcomes” play in the OSFYC, or what “usable” means in context of the CWPA’s organizational story, as a group they may have never “surfaced, described and discussed—that is brought into awareness through language” the importance of these ideas until they were faced with a version of the document that was lacking them (Suchan, 2006, p. 32). Similarly, being a new group, the TF could not know the document would not do what they wanted it to do as an “Outcome’s Statement” or that “goals” would keep the document wake and alive until they started brainstorming. In fact, it is this kind of collective melding of individual ideas that turned the TF into a group in the first place because it allowed them to get to know each other’s stories and how each other worked. Through the process of brainstorming, the ideas and values of everyone became shared goals of the TF’s new community.

Conflicting Games: Finite Outcomes vs. Infinite Goals.

If both groups came together before the OSFYC revisions were started to map out new terrain—to become one community instead of two separate tribes—they may have been able to calibrate their aims to locate an acceptable mean-in-between that reflected both of their universal and local goals. Or, if the EB communicated their community’s particular goals and values to the TF members before asking them to take on this special task, the prospective TF members would have been able to accept or decline the prerequired conditions/goals of the special project or make compromises before getting in too deep.⁸ However, one must also keep in mind the unique contexts that both groups were working within. Not only was all of this taking place virtually, during Covid-19 lockdown but things like the viral murder video of George Floyd and the BLM

⁸ When someone is joining a community organization like the Elks Lodge, or the Girl Scouts for instance, they are first introduced to the community’s values and goals and then asked to take some kind of vow to agree to uphold them before becoming a member of the group. Perhaps when organizations are forming task forces composed of people that are not members of their community, they need to explicitly communicate the values and goals of their community before asking people outside of their community to undertake any special projects.

protests that were happening all around the country had created a shared want to take antiracist action as soon as possible in every EB and TF member alike. Perhaps the political, social, and cultural contexts that were swirling around these individuals like a tempest and the importance of their tasks, made them feel coalesced in purpose(s) and intent(s). However, by not unearthing or articulating crucial expectations or limitations from the beginning, the stage was set for both groups to “invent stories to justify [their] resistance, avoidance, and rebellion” to each other’s questions regarding the change in title from “Outcomes” to “Goals” and the documents usability (Faber, 2002, p. 101). Trying to reframe these elements after the fact, to center both groups’ stories/goals, created an impasse, which, game theory suggests, can occur when finite games and infinite games collide (Ross, 2019).

Game theory in its most basic sense is the study of how people or groups make choices to produce certain outcomes (Ross, 2019). In game theory a finite game is a game or a problem that has fixed rules and an ultimate finish line, like chess, where each game ends in a win, a loss, or a draw. An infinite game, on the other hand, is a game or a problem that has no fixed rules and has no ultimate finish line, like trying to solve climate change, where each new discovery unearths more questions, problems, and solutions. The potential for an impasse to occur is heightened when one set of rules is applied to an opposite game (Ross, 2019). For example, if a chess player decides to implement a new rule that allows their King piece to move off the board to avoid checkmate, people aren’t going to want to play chess because there would be no way to ever win the game; it would be a violation of the finite rules of chess. Similarly, if climate change scientists were told they can research whatever they want to help curb global warming, except for the effects that man-made CO₂ emissions have on the atmosphere, every single one of them would be abhorred because it would be a violation of the infinite goal(s) of climate change

science. Essentially, by not setting terms, definitions, and goals at the beginning of the process, any change that threatened to significantly reduce the Goals Statement’s antiracist potential—after the fact—was always going to feel like a colonization of it to the TF because the EB were now (unintentionally) trying to apply finite rules to an infinite “goal”—rules of which that had already been tacitly agreed to.

Through the lens of this theory, the TF’s goal of challenging the ways languaging is thought about and taught in academia, and the CWPA’s goal of empowering WPAs, would both be considered infinite goals because they are both never-ending processes that continually seek to unearth more questions, problems, and solutions. However, when the EB gave the TF free rein to revise the OSFYC to make it more antiracist, they tacitly agreed to whatever revisions the TF produced and/or differed to the TF’s infinite antiracist goal(s). It wasn’t until after they saw the TF’s revisions and realized how they could significantly diminish WPAs’ administrative powers, that the EB articulated their finite conditions in the form of questions and concerns around the terms, “Outcomes” and “usability” —conditions that the EB may have never even defined among themselves until being faced with a version of the document that was lacking them.

These implied-questions and concerns unintentionally changed the infinite goal(s) that had already been set in motion into a finite one, because they implied new non-negotiable rules, such that “outcomes” must remain, because they are the language of assessment that deans and provosts speak, and the document must be “usable” in the context of empowering WPAs in their many administrative duties. These new rules not only violated the TF’s infinite goal(s), but they targeted the central elements that arguably bound the TF’s members visions and goals into a shared story of change when brainstorming changing the OSFYC into a Goals Statement at the beginning of their revisions. This created a stalemate between EB and the TF where to proceed,

the EB needed “Outcomes” to be kept in the title and for the language of assessment to be prevalent in the document, or for the Goals Statement to become an entirely new document—meaning the CWPA would have the OSFYC and the Goals Statement as well. However, the TF did not want to put the “Outcomes” back in the document because the foundation for all their other revisions were contingent on changing them to goals, and they didn’t want to make the Goals Statement an entirely new document of its own because they believed it could easily become separate-but-equal to, or Othered by the OSFYC.

Unfortunately, at this point, trying to find a shared center was near impossible because neither group had pre-interpreted any of these rules or limitations and were attempting to navigate the miscommunications in real-time (Faber, 2002). Trying to apply finite rules to an infinite goal can be difficult even when all parties agree on the conditions beforehand but trying to reconcile these kinds of conflicts when they unexpectedly occur is like trying to bail water out of a sunken ship. Ultimately, creating a shared story of change is so important when entering a multi-group venture because it helps people locate where all their goals intersect, so that they can break ground where that communal X-marks-the-spot and draw their bowstrings back in unified aim.

CHAPTER 4: THE RETURN

Returning with the Boon

After listening to and analyzing the stories of how the DEI TF came together, what the EB and TF's expectations were regarding the revisions to the OSFYC in 2020/2021, and what happened at the meeting that resulted in Inoue's call for a boycott of the CWPA, I have to say that I do not think the EB and TF could have met with better outcomes in the time and space that was 2020/2021. Had there not been a global pandemic ramping-up the ubiquitous uncertainty(s) and anxiety(s) in absolutely everybody, or had the cultural, social, political, and racial tensions in the United States in 2020/2021 been less critical, I imagine that the TF and EB would have likely been able to problem solve their differences over the OSFYC revisions with more clarity and calm. However, the contexts of 2020/2021 that were stalking around the OSFYC revisions like a pack of hungry wolves (around a cornered fawn), set the stage for a very human breakdown of communication that resulted in a "us vs. them" narrative that was fueled by everyone's good intentions.

While many people on the EB suggest that the miscommunication of aim was created by Blaauw-Hara giving the TF free rein over the revisions, when looking at the collective story with rhetorical empathy, it stands to argue that the omnipresent pathos of 2020/2021 played the most significant role in the good intentions that led to OSFYC's hamartia. At the time the CWPA asked the DEI TF to undertake these revisions, the new normal was not-knowing-what-to-expect and the collective anxiety had reached an otherwise prompt criticality. Further, the racial tensions that had been building up all throughout Trump's "Make-America-Great-Again" presidency had erupted with the viral murder video of George Floyd that acted as a lightning rod

for all the other instances of race related police brutality, resulting in BLM protest all over the country. This faced the nation with the gruesome actualities of how not acting against racism absolutely perpetuates it and created a sort of kairotic moment for antiracism in the US.

Looking to seize this kairotic moment for antiracist change by doing something more than offering statements and vows of support, was a big part of what spurred the CWPA and its members into wanting to act quickly to revise the OSFYC to make it more antiracist. The CWPA and its members recognized making the OSFYC more antiracist as a way to question and challenge potential biases in writing learning outcomes to help save the lives of marginalized people like Breonna Taylor and George Floyd who pay the ultimate price every day when systemic and institutional racism are left unchecked. With this heavy pathos as the impetus for the revisions, it is not hard to imagine Blaauw-Hara assuming that everybody on the EB would be on board with him giving the TF free rein to revise the OSFYC to make it more antiracist. It was essentially like he was holding a running hose while standing next to a house fire with bystanders yelling for him to help, or better yet, like he was parked in front of a fire hydrant and all he had to do was move so the firemen could start saving lives. In other words, while Blaauw-Hara's actions may have set the stage for the conflict in expectations between the TF and EB, the exigency and pathos for antiracist change led him to become the kind of ally that he believed any other CWPA member in his place would become—and this is not to mention that he could have never pre-interpreted how or if the TF's revisions would or could affect the OSFYC's local goals of the CWPA of empowering WPAs; nobody could at that point. All Blaauw-Hara wanted to do was answer the resounding call for change in the quickest way possible, by standing aside and letting these BIPOC antiracist scholars do what they do best. Ultimately, this pathetic, well-intentioned breakdown in communication illustrates how “us vs. them” narratives can easily

arise from the best intentions, and it emphasizes how important story and rhetorical empathy are when trying to create antiracist organizational change, or any change for diversity, equity, and inclusion for that matter.

However, similar things can be said about the good intentions of each EB and TF member involved in the OSFYC revision process. Each one of their actions and perceptions suggest they wanted to achieve the most for DEI and antiracism but because they didn't listen to each other "with intent instead of for intent" (Ratcliffe, 1999) along the way, they didn't meet each other where they each were. If they had, they may have been able to realize that the "us vs. them" narrative they were caught in was really an "us" vs. "us" narrative. This may have allowed them to recalibrate their drifting aims to find a golden-mean-in-between empowering WPAs to make changes in the imperfect systems as they are and questioning and challenging all white language supremacy.

While I am very aware that I still have far more to learn about WPA work, antiracism, and antiracist scholarship, and I am still wrestling with my own white privilege and unconscious biases (and in no way feel like an authority on any of these topics), listening to the stories of the people I interviewed taught me a few important things about antiracism and antiracist organizational change that I think are worth sharing—or at least reaffirming for myself. The first one is that being an ally requires one to "yield in a stance of self-risk and vulnerability" (Blankenship, 2019, p. 55), meaning that one's allyship could leave them in a more vulnerable position than from where they started. In other words, being an ally or being antiracist is less about achieving some immediate good and much more about continually sacrificing one's comforts for the ultimate Good of Equity. This means losing battles along the way. However, these losses are failures for success when they are truly motivated by creating equality. For

example, while the EB and TF did not meet their intended outcomes with the OSFYC revisions, the fallout they experienced did create an interpretive story(s) of change that anybody looking to undertake antiracist change in the future can learn from. Further, the TF's First-Year Composition Goals Statement was born into existence out of this moment and Inoue's call for a boycott of the CWPA did expedite antiracist change in that it resulted in the CWPA initiating an antiracist audit of their entire organization. So, the EB and TF may not have achieved the exact outcomes they were hoping to achieve with these revisions, all their good intentions are rippling out from this moment and creating more antiracist good.

Another big lesson I have learned from their story(s) is that antiracist change on an organizational/institutional level should always be met with special processes. This is because antiracism by its nature looks to challenge and question the overt and covert disparities that keep unequal systems in place—meaning that it can be near impossible to pre-interpret the unique challenges that may come. For example, the EB approached these antiracist revisions very similarly to how they approached previous revisions. They put together a TF, had an EB member as co-chair of the TF to represent the EB, had the CWPA president acting as the liaison between the two groups, and let the TF revise the OSFYC without much starting direction. They also used the same meeting rules and allotted 15 minutes of discussion for the revisions in their annual meeting. This general process had worked totally fine for all the other revisions because none of them had challenged the CWPA's local goals or went against the language of assessment. Had the EB recognized beforehand how different the DEI TF's revisions would/could be from the previous ones, they could have created special meetings and special processes that allowed them to pre-interpret some of the challenges they faced in trying to balance their local goals and the TF's universal goals before creating a draft. This would have provided them all with a safe space

to brainstorm and potentially unearth some of the limitations that became topics of contention, allowing them to create a symbiotic story of change together.

Although it doesn't seem likely that the EB and TF could have had done much to avoid the miscommunication with the OSFYC revisions in the unprecedentedly turbulent point in time and space that was 2020/2021, I do have one suggestion to offer that I think could serve as a potential compromise—however oneiric it may prove to be. To satisfy both of their local and universal goals, the EB and TF could create and sign an agreement to have both documents for “X” number of year(s), with the end goal of phasing out the OSFYC after the agreed term is reached. This would let the EB, and TF figure out an acceptable amount time they think they would need to train WPAs on how to use the First-Year Composition Goals Statement through opportunities like professional development, seminars, articles, documentaries, videos, etc., while also raising awareness to deans and provosts, before allowing the First-Year Composition Goals Statement to stand on its own.

While this would not be an immediate fix, it does consider both the EB, and TF's positions and it would also allow people to adjust to the antiracist languaging changes more gradually—which is how many experts suggest language acquisition tends to work in the first place. For example, psychologist Lev Vygotsky's theory, the zone of proximal development, suggests that children gain fluency in language comprehension by their parents talking to them just above the threshold of their understanding, such that it provides children with the comfort of the known while steadily positioning them to integrate new unknown concepts (Eun, 2019). In other words, if the First-Year Composition Goals statement was gradually introduced, people could gain a steady fluency of the new language of antiracism, instead of being inundated by all the new concepts at once. This would allow people like me, who do not know much (or

anything) about DEI or antiracism scholarship, to approach antiracist languaging as the new standard of communication, as opposed to being an element of it.

The Call for More Adventures

It has been more than enlightening to hear all the different nuances of how people on the TF and EB perceived the First-Year Composition Goals Statement and how they experienced the events that led up to Inoue calling for a boycott of the CWPA. However, as enlightening of an experience it has been for me, I realize that my research only provides a relative keyhole view into all the complexities of the story(s) at hand, and that to broaden my perspective(s) I would need to at least consider:

- Interviewing more people on the TF and EB to get more perspectives.
- Analyzing the CWPA bylaws.
- Analyzing the digital element of the meeting that resulted in Inoue calling for a boycott of the CWPA, being that it took place with virtual video technology, which is much less intimate than in person meetings.
- Analyzing the emotional aftermath of Inoue's call for a boycott of the CPWA, including the group email chain that occurred after the meeting between EB and TF members, as well as any blog posts or social media post related to the boycott.
- Analyzing Inoue's actual blog post and/or any of his blog posts relating the boycott of the CPWA or the First-Year Composition Goals Statement.
- Analyzing all the CWPA's official responses to the Boycott.
- Analyzing the both the 3.0 OSFYC revisions and the First-Year Composition Goals Statement.

I am sure that there are many more elements that I am not considering. However, I am sure each of these threads would lead me or another researcher to more threads to consider.

Ultimately, I am ever grateful that these truly brilliant scholars invited me into this visceral moment—someone who knew very little about any of the people, organizations, or scholarship involved—and openly shared their personal perceptions and emotions with me. They not only all treated me like family, but they took the time to teach and encourage me, while offering me continued support and guidance along the way. Analyzing this moment made me really think about how easy it is for like-minded, well intentioned people to experience a terminal breakdown in communication—let alone people who are already divided. However, it ultimately made me realize how deeply listening to others’ stories—especially those who have been marginalized—is the only way to hear the real story that is Our Story. It is the only way to see that everywhere anyone is, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, ableness, sexuality, gender, etc., is the center. All we have to do is open our hearts and minds to it.

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Appendix A: IRB Notification of Exempt Certification



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
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600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Brent Cameron](#)
CC: [Tracy Morse](#)
Date: 2/15/2022
Re: [UMCIRB 22-000138](#)
Rhetorical empathy and Institutional Change

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/15/2022. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2bc.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Consent Paragraph (0.01)	Consent Forms
Final Recruitment Script(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Informed Consent Form. (0.01)	Additional Items
Interview Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Thesis Prospectus.(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APENDIX B: IRB Recruitment Script

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “Rhetorical Empathy and Institutional Change” being conducted by Brent Cameron, an MA student at East Carolina University in the English department. The goal is to interview approximately 10 individuals in synchronous/virtual face-to-face meetings on WebEx or Zoom. These interviews will be recorded. The interview will take approximately 35-45 minutes to complete. The purpose of this research is to analyze the personal stories of members of both the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force and the Council of Writing Program Administration (CWPA) Executive Board who were involved in the creating, drafting, and/or meetings pertaining to the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition that resulted in Asao Inoue calling for a boycott of the CWPA through a framework of rhetorical empathy. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. If you wish to participate, please email Brent Cameron at cameronb20@students.ecu.edu to schedule a day and time that is convenient for you. Brent Cameron will email you a link to the WebEx or Zoom room where the virtual interview will take place.

