Tactics, Resistance, and Bad-Ass Teaching in a Generation 1.5 Basic Writing Classroom

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Bad-ass

> *1. A person who defines supreme confidence, nearly divine ability, and a frequent disregard for authority . . .*[1]

I
N THE LITERATURE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, the categories of "remediation," "learning support," "developmental education," and "basic-skills training" mean different things to different people. Likewise, the arguments for and against postsecondary coursework for raising students' collegiate readiness span a continuum of (un)certainty (see, Salas, Portes, D'Amico, & Rios-Aguilar, 2011). Less elusive are the sheer numbers of community college students interacting with remedial curricula at some point or another in their postsecondary trajectories—some 60% nationally (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). As remediation continues to be a key feature of the community college enterprise, it has grown to include specific curricula geared toward speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL), often U.S. high school graduates of Latino heritage who have come to be known in college composition as "Generation 1.5."

While the construct of Generation 1.5 is widespread in basic writing circles (see, e.g., Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009), relatively few studies have attempted to capture the experiences of faculty who teach remedial coursework for that specific population or the hesitations that mediate their professional subjectivities. This representation is a small piece of a larger story of a full-time temporary ESL developmental writing instructor named Roberta Ware[2] whose professional charge was to ready, as described in her institution's website, "not-American English speakers" [sic] for college level writing courses.

Roberta and her colleagues have been the protagonists of a series of previous narratives[3] (Salas, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012)—distinct glimpses of a three-year ethnographic study examining the fluctuating subject positions of the five ESL Learning Support faculty at a small two-year

institution at the epicenter of "the new Latino South" (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2004). As I have written, a wide variety of tensions complicated Roberta and her colleagues' fluctuating understandings of the "figured world" (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998) of ESL Learning Support at Sweet Water College, Georgia. Among other things, the faculty negotiated the interrelated dilemmas of gatekeeping and advocacy, the racialized politics of Latino immigration, and their own highly personal struggles that coincided with their professional duties.

Here, I return to my discussion of Roberta, revisiting her professed "bad-ass" teaching, to focus on a critical incident I witnessed early in our relationship involving a spoof of the five-paragraph essay. Theorizing the reoccurring incident through neo-Vygtoskian understandings of "tactics of resistance" (Wertsch, 2002), I argue the need for more contextualized understandings of ESL developmental writing faculty's agency in the face of institutional policies and remedial curricula that perpetuate the notion of ESL writers as inherently inferior to their "native" counterparts.

Who Teaches What, to Whom, Where?

This representation of Roberta's bad-ass-ness was grounded in three theoretical and empirical perspectives: the emergence of a so-called "Generation 1.5" in postsecondary writing classrooms, sociocultural conceptualizations of ESL teachers' personal practical knowledge, and post-Vygotskian theorizations of "improvisation" within activity settings. The combination of these literatures provides both a backdrop and analytic framework for understanding Roberta's construction of her agency (however precarious) within the setting of a two-year college in North Georgia. Nevertheless, as my analysis demonstrates, postsecondary faculty such as Roberta, working within a curriculum of remediation, conceptualize their practice as transformative (however fleetingly) because they teach students to maneuver the gatekeeping assessment structures of higher education.

Generation 1.5

Coined in Korean and Korean-American communities to designate the "in-between-ness" of a generation neither completely Korean nor completely American, the term "Generation 1.5" has gradually come to signify in basic writing parlance K-12 U.S. educated transnationals (re)categorized as English Language Learners (see, Roberge, 2002, 2009). That is to say, students categorized as "Generation 1.5" might (not) have exited ESL programming during some point of their K-12 trajectories. In other cases, students never considered English Language Learners in their K-12 careers might find themselves suddenly labeled as such in postsecondary institutions For these and other reasons Generation 1.5 has been critiqued as potentially debilitating, especially for two-year college students of Latino origins (Salas et al., 2011). That said, an extensive body of "best practice" literature has addressed the characteristics of Generation 1.5 academic writing (Di Gennaro, 2009; Doolan & Miller, 2012), assessment and placement practices (Di Gennaro, 2008), and faculty members' recognition of and instructional overcompensation for their experiences in high school classrooms (Riazantseva, 2012; Thonus,

2003)—including two editions of an volume devoted to issues surrounding their place in college composition (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Roberge et al., 2009).

The Sociocultural Turn in Second Language (L2) Teacher Research

Despite an abundance of contemporary scholarship for Generation 1.5, relatively little has been said about the complexity of ESL professionals' engagement with the postsecondary remedial curriculum—a scarcity indicative of a broader disciplinary focus on the phenomenon of language learning and an underestimation of the roles teachers play in that process. In an attempt to refocus ESL on teachers and teaching, Freeman and Johnson (1998) argued for teacher-centered inquiry encompassing, "Who teaches what, to whom, where?" (p. 405). Or, as they elaborated, "Through grounded examinations of language teaching within the broader framework of teacher-learner, contexts of schools and schooling, and the pedagogical process will emerge a deeper understanding of how language teachers teach and their students learn" (p. 405).

Along with Freeman and Johnson (1998), more researchers for second language (L2) teacher education have leveraged sociocultural theories of human cognition to underscore the highly contextualized nature of teachers' knowledge-in-use and its implications for the knowledge-base of L2 teacher education (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). For example, examining narrative descriptions of tensions the teachers' faced in a classroom, Golombek (1998) argued that L2 teachers' "personal practical knowledge" is embodied in people, shaped by the particulars of context, and marked by moral, affective, and consequential concerns (see p. 461). Also with a pronounced sociocultural framework, Golombek and Johnson (2004) proposed the function of narrative inquiry as a "mediational space" where teachers draw upon various resources—private journals, peer and "expert" theoretical knowledge—as they re-write new understandings of themselves as teachers and their teaching (see also, Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

Using a Vygtoskian lens, Sharkey (2004) presented findings from the first year of a three-year qualitative case study of teacher knowledge and "voice" in an ESOL curriculum development project to argue "contextualizing" as a form of teacher praxis. Conceptualizing context as a series of "swirling concentric circles" of classroom, school, community, state, and nation, for Sharkey, the learning processes of her 10 participants as they negotiated a curriculum innovation could only be adequately documented or understood when situated in the sociocultural contexts where that negotiation took place. Or, as she maintained, "It is not how much compartmentalized knowledge teachers have, but how they use the different kinds of knowledge to successfully negotiate the complex contexts in which they work" (Sharkey, 2004, p. 297). Likewise, this narrative of Roberta's teaching practices was framed in sociocultural understandings mediated action (see, Portes & Salas, 2011), specifically Wertsch's (2002) theorizations of tactics of resistance.

The Space of a Tactic

Unpacking the "irreducible tension" between human agency and the tools women and men have created, in his study of Estonian's resistance to Soviet representations of cold war history, Wertsch (2002) brought Vygotskian understandings of "mediated action" to de Certeau's

(1984) notion of tactics whereby, "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power . . . . it is a maneuver within enemy territory" (p. 37). Elaborating on the concept of tactics of resistance, Werstch described how, in order to pass their exams in Soviet Moscow, Estonian university students were obliged to recount the "official" Soviet version of the occupation of the Baltics. Resisting that official narrative, Estonian students either deadpanned the textbook version or they dramatized it in a way that communicated, "Here you have your story, but I am telling it differently than any other stories I tell you . . . another thing you could do was to make the same thing clear in an opposite way: make your story too emotional" (pp. 152-153). Thus, Estonian students had not necessarily internalized the discourse of Soviet colonization. Rather, they simply knew how to use the tools—in this case the imperial propaganda of the colonizer—with extreme facility (p. 50) and, at times, with cunning—mastering the Soviet "story" without, Wertsch maintained, necessarily buying into it.

In this tale from the field, I argue that although Roberta did engage in teaching to the various tests that characterized ESL Learning Support at Sweet Water College, there were brief, reoccurring moments when, in so doing, such teaching was a "space of a tactic" wherein she resisted institutionalized notions of academic writing.

The Study

Sweet Water College Learning Support

Sweet Water College first opened its doors to North Georgia in 1964 with an enrollment of 419 students. That headcount grew as Atlanta crept steadily northeast. By Fall 2005, the college's total enrollment was at 5,985 with 5,819 classified as "Georgia Residents", 79 as "Out of State", and 87 as "Out of Country". Out of 5,985, 5,210 students self-identified as White Non-Hispanic, 289 as Hispanic, 235 as Black Non-Hispanic, 145 as Asian or Pacific Islander, 84 as Multiracial, and 22 as American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Graduates of accredited high schools who came to Sweet Water were sorted into one of two admission categories: Full Freshman Admission and Provisional Freshman Admission. Full Freshman Admission from high school depended on two considerations: the applicant's official college entrance examination scores (489 Verbal and 460 Math on SAT-1; 21 English and 19 Mathematics on the ACT) and a high school transcript indicating that the applicant had successfully completed a College Prep Curriculum (CPC).

Those individuals falling short of the requirements for Full Freshman Admission were granted "provisional" status requiring them to take designated sections of the COMPASS (Computer-adaptive College Placement Test)—a pre-packaged assessment technology developed by the ACT and in use across the System of Georgia—prior to registration. COMPASS scores determined their consequent placement into approved Learning Support coursework addressing determined College Preparatory Curriculum (CPC) deficiencies. Of the 1,567 first-time freshmen at Sweet Water in Fall 2005, 803 were enrolled in one or more Learning Support courses (approximately 51%).

Roberta Ware

Roberta's reliably high count of students exiting ESL Learning Support by the end of her course—an average of 85% per exam cycle—had earned her a reputation as an excellent instructor. Even so, as the sole and comparatively young Asian-American faculty member in Learning Support, Roberta was sometimes confused for one of the college's ESL students herself. She explained, smiling between her teeth, that she had even received compliments on her "nearly perfect accent" from Sweet Water colleagues who knew next to nothing of her personal history. In fact, Roberta was adopted as an infant by Evangelical North American missionaries in her native Thailand and had no memory of a language other than English.

Subjectivities

My affinity with Roberta was ignited in part by our proximity in age and our shared cultural histories as ethnic minorities in a profession dominated by late middle-aged European American women. Before Sweet Water, my exposure to community colleges had been limited to the Annandale campus of The Northern Virginia Community College. A mile away from the high school I attended in the mid-1980s, I enrolled at "NOVA" for two-consecutive summers to pick up 30 credits hours to complete various tag-on teacher-licensure requirements.

Roberta was the friend of a friend of a friend and my choice of Sweet Water as a research site was initially one of convenience. However, after a relatively effortlessness approval from my university's institutional review board, the rapport that I struck with Roberta, the other Sweet Water ESL Learning Support faculty and administrators, and my lived experiences with standardized testing as an incoming graduate student to the University of Georgia (see, Salas, 2011), all eventually led me to extend the project for five semesters distributed across three years.

Data Generation and Analytic Method

Fieldwork included more than 250 hours of site visits as documented in 300-plus pages of fieldnotes, 10 hours of audiotaped classroom interactions, and more than 10 hours of structured audiotaped conversations with Roberta and the four other ESL composition instructors involved in the study. These data were complimented by examination of electronic and printed articulations of the University System of Georgia's policies for remediation in its two-year institutions and Sweet Water's application of those policies to its ESL/Learning Support Programs. My roles ranged from silently taking notes on an electronic keyboard to actively helping with small-groups or individual work in the classroom to substituting for the participating teachers.

Data analysis was an interplay of description, analysis and interpretation consistent with qualitative traditions of participatory inquiry (Wolcott, 1994). The ensemble of data compression and analytic procedures that accompanied data generation and continued afterwards were informed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) strategies for ethnographic fieldwork. These included in-process analytic writing, initial and integrative memo writing, and content analysis of archival data. Reading and re-writing the data set, I first identified "quotations" as bracketed segments of the data recorded through initial line-by-line open coding by hand or with the comment function in Microsoft Word. These bracketed segments or "quotations" were then

grouped into the themes that formed the basis of a series of initial and integrative memos. Bringing a specific critical incident in Roberta's classroom to Wertsch's (2002) framework, I crafted the narrative that follows.

"Favor de no usar tabaco en este campus"

During my weekly commutes to Hogg Mountain, Confederate banners waving carelessly from the shade of white porches were joined by stray, white chicken feathers escaping from crates piled high on the trucks taking the birds to the processing plants for which the region was famous. The closer to Hogg Mountain, the more the billboards spoke the language of the immigrant workers who would receive the poultry: *Pupuseria, Ahora Rentando, Nuevo Manager*, *Mercado Latino.* Not surprisingly, with approximately 30,000 Mexican immigrants settling in the northern county where Sweet Water College was located in 1990's (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2004), ESL Learning Support's most visible population was its Latinos commuting from Hogg Mountain, its neighboring counties, and greater Atlanta.

On campus, the idea that Sweet Water knew best was a reoccurring, and at times, bilingual message that prevailed: "Thank you for not smoking. *Favor de no usar tabaco en este campus*." Equally firm reminders to maintain decorum were posted to the sixty computers in the lab that divided the Academic III building in half: "No Food, No Games, No Offensive Material." Sweet Water's tobacco-free policy, similar to its interdiction of pornography in the computer lab, was a moral stance not uncommon across the state where alcohol was not sold on Sundays and where, in some of the drier counties, not sold at all. Rules and regulations were not, simply decorations for the hallways and spaces of Academic III. Rather, as I shall explain in the sections that follow, teaching and learning ESL Learning Support, was likewise a highly structured activity regulated by a complex system of local institutionalized practices.

ESL Learning Support

In its beginnings, Sweet Water's ESL program was first housed in Learning Support under the organizational leadership of the Division of Humanities. In Fall 2005, Learning Support became a freestanding Division—directly administrating the three Grammar/Writing courses, three Reading courses, two Communication courses, two Vocabulary courses, and one College Orientation course that in their ensemble constituted the ESL subprogram.

Roberta and her colleagues were well aware of their low rank in the Sweet Water pecking order and, consequently, were motivated that their work should count. Talking about four-year college faculty members' perceptions of two-year college faculty, Roberta explained,

It's not that they're condescending necessarily, but there's that—you know—low expectation maybe when people hear that you teach at a community college. And it's not necessarily true though and I think maybe we work even harder with our students to get them to certain high standards so that they—you know—carry our reputation on into the four year university.

It was not only what four-year faculty thought of the ESL program that mattered to Roberta and her colleagues, but also what Sweet Water faculty thought of the ESL program. Above all, she and her colleagues did not want English 1101 professors or anyone else to think they weren't doing their jobs, i.e., cleaning up her students' writing so that the English professors wouldn't have to "deal" with it in 1101. Or, as the ESL Learning Support program coordinator explained, "We're very reluctant to send anybody out there before they're ready. We know that it's going to reflect badly on the students and also on us."

A web of regulations determined students' placement into ESL Learning Support and an equally complex set of institutional practices controlled their ability to (not) exit the program. As I have written in my various discussions of Sweet Water ESL Learning Support (Salas, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012), institutional protocols required that the lowest scoring English learners follow a ten-course sequence of Grammar and Writing, Vocabulary, Reading, and Communication. Enrollment in more than two ESL Learning Support courses triggered the additional requirement of the ESL version of College Orientation. Those incoming first-year students who had scored sufficiently well on COMPASS placement exams in Writing and Reading but whose writing sample for the English Department was "non-native" were also urged to take ESL Advanced Grammar and Writing. Once enrolled in ESL Advanced Grammar and Writing, students would have to pass the exit essay—but not the COMPASS— again. On rare occasions, students who had already passed both COMPASS exams would register for one or both of the Level III courses of their own volition or at the advice of a faculty member. The signature course of ESL Learning Support, ESOL 0099 was the gate to freshman composition: ENGL 1101. It had become Roberta's forte.

Exiting ESOL 0099

To exit ESOL 0099 and access ENGL 1101 students had first to pass the capstone ESL Advanced Grammar and Writing course. Second, they had to pass an exit essay and, finally, the COMPASS in writing (in that order). Were students to fail any one of the three components, they would be required to retake the course and re-attempt the entire sequence. After three successive failed attempts at exiting ESOL 0099, students would be ineligible to register for more Sweet Water coursework for a period of three years.

The three-day exit essay marked the semester's end. A maximum of three members of the faculty scored the essays. The first two readers were either (1) a combination of two English professors, or (2) an English professor and an ESL faculty member other than the one who had taught the student whose essay was being scored. The first two readers assigned a score of Pass, Fail, or Borderline. With one Fail, the student failed. In the event of a Pass and Borderline or two Borderlines, a third reader's score was taken into consideration. That third reader was always the ESL instructor whose student's performance was under review.

Passing the exit essay, students were eligible to take the COMPASS in Writing Skills—a standardized assessment developed by the ACT and in use across the University System of Georgia that simulated the editing process by presenting several 200-word essays and requiring students to locate and then correct grammar, usage, and style errors. Were they to score sufficiently high enough on the COMPASS, those students could then, finally, enter English 1101.

Maneuvering within the Enemy's Territory

Roberta's students, for the most part, were not internationals (F1-Visas). Rather, semester after semester, they came from Hogg Mountain and the surrounding counties north of Atlanta where they had been educated in K-12 public schools. She explained:

> Most of them are graduates from American high schools—not all of them, but most of them. So they—if you can imagine—they come from a background where maybe the discipline is not very strong in their classrooms. And it's amazing to me because a lot of these high school students—graduates of American schools—might have graduated with honors from high school with all As and Bs. Then all of a sudden they take the placement test to get into college and they find out they cannot write at the minimum required for the college level . . . . So I might have to deal with attitude problems at first. The second reason why I'm really strict is I think I overcompensate for my age. I am probably one of the youngest instructors at this school and I have always been the youngest instructor at a school. And as I get older [laughing] as I get older though, even though I'm getting older, I should say that because of my looks I might run into problems with, for example, male students who may not respect females. I might run into females, in general, who don't respect younger females. . . . I'm also very hard I think and strict when it comes to the grading of the actual papers—and the reason for this is that the English professors grade our exit exams.

A self-styled "Bad-ass" and known for her straight talk, tough grading, and lack of patience for Tomfoolery (unless initiated by Roberta herself), Roberta kingly bragged to them, "Even when you go into 1101, I will haunt you."

Roberta's reputation as a demanding and, consequently, effective teacher was buttressed by the rate with which her students entered ENGL 1101 every semester. However, I argue that Roberta, like Wertsch's (2002) Estonians, was not Sweet Water's dupe. That is, despite the preponderance of rules and regulations at the college, there were ways to smoke at Sweet Water—inside a car, for example—and opportunities for eating, playing games, and watching pornography in Academic III. There were also ways, as Roberta's practice suggested, of resisting Sweet Water's hegemonic notions of academic literacy.

With some five-years of teaching ESOL 0099 under her belt, Roberta had come to know the assessment cycle inside and out and had developed something of spider-sense as to the particular sort of errors that would most enrage the English professors scoring the exit essay. She spent the semester teaching her students the distinction between dependent clauses, independent clauses, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound/complex sentences. These understandings subsequently informed their composition of sentences, paragraphs, and, finally, the various types of essays (persuasive, comparison and contrast, and so forth) they would compose in the timed writing portion of the exit exam sequence.

What distinguished her teaching from that of her colleagues was the gusto with which Roberta drilled her students on the very specific errors that would prevent them from passing the essay—an abbreviated litany she penned in her feedback to students' practice essays (SS: Sentence Structure; RO: Run-on; CS: Comma-splice; FG: Fragment; VB: Verb Tense; Non-English; Non-Parallel Structure; SV: Subject-verb Agreement; WF: Word Form; WW: Wrong

word; Sp: Spelling; MW: Missing Word; NW: Needless Word; Prep: Preposition; ProRef: Pronoun Reference; A: Article; CP: Capitalization), and the insights she peppered the course with as to what exactly the English professors were looking for. Her clarity also included, for example, the approximate length that their exit essays should be. Roberta put it this way:

Roberta: No teacher really wants to say how long an essay should be, but this is what you should be aiming for:

[Roberta begins writing on the board]

A.   Introduction (3 sentences) + closed thesis statement
B.   Body Paragraph #1 (Topic Sentence = 6-8 sentences)
C.   Body Paragraph # 2 (Topic Sentence
D.   Body Paragraph # 3 (Topic Sentence
E.   Conclusion

Roberta: Anything smaller than that and the English professor might say this is not really developed. [To the class] How many sentences after the topic sentence?"

Elida: Five?

Salvador: Six to eight?

Pedro: Three?

Roberta: Three will fail you. I have seen English professors write, "Lovely essay but too short." Too short means underdeveloped. For them, if you only have three or five sentences in a paragraph, it's too short.

Rachid: Simple sentences?

The Class: [Laughter].

Roberta: They're looking for approximately two examples to support each body paragraph. The English professors do not want to see the closed thesis statement again! The conclusion, in fact, should be a summary. It should give closure without restating that thesis statement all over again. They're not looking for the thesis statement again. Let me tell you at the college level that is considered very elementary and I want you to write at the college level.

The practice essay prompts that Roberta normally chose generally aligned with institution's mores and those of the greater region. For example, "The United States has a high rate of teen pregnancy. What are some of the causes for this high rate? What do you believe causes violence in schools?", "What are the effects of smoking?", and "What are some of the effects of divorce on children?" However, in the first guided essay of every semester, Roberta's prompt was a spoof of Hogg Mountain and, I would argue, of Sweet Water College itself.

The Spoof

Pacing the whiteboard, Roberta began the semester's first full rehearsal of the high-stakes assessment her students would encounter on the Compass Exam in Writing. She used the following as an exit-essay question, "Do you like living in Hogg Mountain?" Roberta modeled the closed thesis statement, first body paragraph, and the start of a second. Reading aloud to the class, she wrote in black marker on the whiteboard:

I really do not like living in Hogg Mountain because of its lack of nightlife, public transportation, and shopping areas.

Roberta: Welcome to Hogg Mountain! [laughter]. Alright, this is a closed thesis statement.

Hogg Mountain definitely lacks a variety of activities in order to have a great nightlife. For instance, there are only three clubs in town, and all of them play country music. My friends and I love rock music. Unfortunately, there are not bars or lounges that play this type of music. I have to drive to Atlanta to hear great bands. In addition, there are really no places to go for fun. For example, Hogg Mountain only has one bowling alley. I do enjoy bowling with friends, but it gets very boring to go there every Friday night. The only nightlife option that I have is to stay home and watch television.

Roberta: If you don't have a car you walk—

Salvador: --That or taxis!

Roberta: I love the Red Rabbit—the Red Rabbit is just an oversized van on steroids [Laughter]. Another aspect that Hogg Mountain lacks is decent public transportation. I do not have a car, so I must rely on Hogg Mountain's only public transportation. It consists of a van called the Red Rabbit . . .

Her closed thesis statement (without which, she explained, students would lose thirty points) and the concrete examples that followed in a variety of simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences—were all things that the English 1101 professors who would score their exit essays would be looking for. Remarkably, in Roberta's hands the essay format became—if only for one afternoon every semester—a vehicle for satire that Roberta's students appeared to understand—brainstorming all things ridiculous about Hogg Mountain.

Of course, her students knew that Roberta did not live in Hogg Mountain. They knew she had a car and they knew she did other things than watch TV on Friday nights. Roberta was making a joke at the expense of Hogg Mountain and by extension, Sweet Water College. In short, Hogg Mountain was, as Roberta sighed under her breath, "Stupid"—and Roberta all the more fabulous because her closed thesis statement and the concrete examples that followed were what the English 1101 professors demanded. However, the joke was on the English professors. Roberta and her class had fooled them. They delivered what they required and nothing more.

When it Takes a Bad-ass

Incoming analyses of 2012 American Community Survey data indicating a "Hispanic nativity shift" such that the numbers of second-generation Latinos have outpaced their foreign-born peers (see, Krogstad & Lopez, 2014). More focus is needed on the postsecondary systems of remediation that U.S. born Latinos will encounter in two-year colleges—institutions that have historically been their entrée into higher education and, as such, portals of opportunity (see, also, Portes, Salas, Baquedano-Lopez, & Mellom, 2014; Salas et al., 2011). At the same time, the scarcity of nuanced representations of "who teaches what, to whom, where" continues to underscore a broader disciplinary underestimation of the roles faculty play in the postsecondary pipeline of Generation 1.5/Generación 1.5 undergraduates provisionally admitted to institutions such as Sweet Water College. Examinations of postsecondary basic writing need also to consider the sense that ESL Learning Support faculty make of their work and themselves—and the possibility of improvisation therein.

Despite her occasional disregard for Hogg Mountain and by proxy Sweet Water College—and even if Roberta repeated the spoof every semester with a new batch of students—her "resistance" was hardly unconditional. At other times in the semester, if not during the same two-hour session, Roberta held the Sweet Water party line. She exhorted her students to study hard, to do their best, and to "turn in something they were proud of" (see, Salas, 2011). All the while, she warned them that a comma-splice would fail them, that no cell phones were allowed, that Sweet Water was not high school, but college, and that there might be a "pop" quiz the following Monday.

What was also true, however, was that no matter how hard Roberta's students worked, Sweet Water ESL Learning Support coursework would not count for transfer/degree credit—even though it cost as if it did. Rather, ESL coursework and the larger Learning Support curriculum were de facto institutional gateways for provisionally admitted first time students hoping for a two-year or four-year college diploma. Roberta was a part of all this and she knew it.

Roberta, however, rationalized her professional choices through her students' success—that 85% of them regularly did satisfy the English professors' understandings of college-level writing readiness. Not believing that the English professors understood "where the ESL students were coming from," Roberta consistently positioned herself as their implied binary both in our conversations and in her conversations with students:

> Now the English professors have a different type of class in the sense that they allow revisions in their classrooms—or they give a student two weeks to write a paper. Yet, at the end of the English professor's class they have a TIMED writing—a timed final exit essay.

Roberta was able to poke fun at the absurdity of the curriculum driven by a somewhat silly timed and handwritten essay about "whatever." But the space of a joke could not contain her colleagues' obsession with a dropped article or stray comma splice—errors that might jeopardize her students' futures.

At Sweet Water and, more broadly, two-year colleges, certain curricular artifacts do carry more legitimacy, more *respeto*, and, consequently, more cultural capital than others; exerting what Harklau (1998) characterized as "enormous yet tacit pressures on newcomers to conform to institutional norms and values" (p. 635). As such, the five-paragraph essay and the Educational Testing Service/Pearson's Inc. have emerged as the 21st Century progressive

educator's white whale—like Melville's preternatural, ubiquitous, and mythical Cetus. At Sweet Water College, the remediation of U.S. educated English Language Learners' was grounded in what I understood as emulation of and loyalty to a larger, pervasive, and postsecondary mythology of "rigor".

Theorizing the preponderance of postsecondary remediation at the two-year college, Merisotis and Phipps (2000) argued that students tested for remediation were that much more likely to be identified as needing it. Thus, one of the potential reasons that so many U.S. two-year college students enter remedial coursework is simply because identification procedures are in place—and are enforced *en masse*. If the construct of "learning support" exists at an institution, then degree-seeking students specifically tested for remediation will increasingly find themselves directed to such programs—in the same way that individuals with high blood pressure don't necessarily know they have the condition until their pressure is measured.

In his justification for two-year college remediation, Grubb (2013) noted that despite a political will to leverage local postsecondary institutions in the development of human capital, "None of these goals . . . can be realized without the mastery of basic skills" (p. 1). Grubb's certainty—and that of other stakeholders—makes it unlikely that learning support and its various postsecondary iterations will suddenly dematerialize. In the meantime, Roberta's students were locked into ESL Learning Support until they could pass the various assessments that would allow them to enter "college-level" coursework. The tests drove the curriculum.

Roberta did succeed in teaching many of her students the institutional specificity of the handwritten, timed, five-paragraph essay in legendary numbers. She did so with an éclat that oozed supreme confidence, nearly divine ability, and a frequent disregard for authority. It almost seemed that if so many of her students entered the mainstream, it was by singular force of her person. But I wanted to know if she thought her Uncle Tom agency was worth it all—was teaching to the test worth the complicity it required of her—an ethnic minority and a woman? So, I finally asked her.

In the empty privacy of a yellow cinderblock classroom in Academic III, Roberta explained that there were many things of which she was uncertain including the ambiguities that surrounded the curriculum she was charged to deliver. She explained that, no, she could not teach every one of her students to pass the test and that, yes, a student's failure caused her to doubt the choices she had made. Yet, one thing she knew for sure—at Sweet Water College, the test mattered. Thus, Roberta's local and contextualized resistance to the ESL Learning Support curriculum—her way of making sense of "who teaches what to whom, where" in the swirling concentric circles of context of Sweet Water College—was to teach to the test. So, yes, it was worth it. Teaching to the test was worth it, because, despite all of the things she wished for, this was, at minimum, what Roberta *could* do.

Notes

[1] *Retrieved 25 August 2010, http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bad+ass*
[2] Roberta Ware, Sweet Water College, Hogg Mountain, and other individual and community identifiers are pseudonyms.

[3] This is one of a series of manuscripts generated from a single qualitative dissertation. As such, descriptions of the study, system-wide policies surrounding Learning Support, the Sweet Water ESL sequence, and institutional practices for exiting the program are constant across these distinct analyses.

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