

EVENT TITLE: Teaching Toward Justice: Student Voice and Power in Creative Writing

Event Description

For too long, creative writing courses have held themselves outside politics and current events, invoking ideals of the “timeless” and “universal.” But anti-racist creative writing classrooms can be sites of transformational action and resistance, led by students. Our cross-genre teaching methods include an anti-racist writing workshop, student-led projects, community-based fieldwork, student publishing on digital platforms, collaborative storytelling, and intentional community building.

Event Category: Pedagogy

Event Organizer and Moderator

Catina Bacote is a 2021-2022 Jerome Hill Artist and American Association of University Women Fellow. Her essays have appeared in *This Is the Place: Women Writing About Home*, *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and others. She teaches at St. John’s University in New York City.

Event Participants

Felicia Rose Chavez is an award-winning educator with an MFA from the University of Iowa. She is author of *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* and co-editor of *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNEXT*. Find her at www.antiracistworkshop.com.

Leora Fridman is author of *MY FAULT*, among other works of prose, poetry and translation. She holds degrees with honors from Brown University and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and has taught online and in person for universities, homes and community groups since 2004.

Steven Alvarez specializes in literacy studies and bilingual education with a focus on Mexican immigrant communities. He teaches courses at St. John's University ranging from ethnographic methods, visual rhetoric, and "taco literacy." He is the author of two books and three volumes of poetry.

Helen Betya Rubinstein's essays on teaching and writing have appeared in Literary Hub, Poets & Writers, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and The Millions, and her creative work in venues like Gulf Coast and Jewish Currents. Her book FEELS LIKE TROUBLE: TRANSGRESSIVE TAKES ON TEACHING, WRITING, & PUBLISHING, is forthcoming from the University of New Orleans Press. She teaches at The New School and practices as a writing coach.

Opening Remarks:

*Welcome to Teaching Toward Justice: Student Voice and Power in Creative Writing. I'm the moderator, Catina Bacote, and join you from Queens, NY, the unceded land of the Lenape people.

*I'll say a few words about why we're here and then introduce the panelists. They will each speak about their practice, and then we will have plenty of time for a Q&A.

*Please remember that this panel is being recorded.

*We want to have this conversation with you today because we believe as educators, we can consciously work against classroom traditions of oppression, silence, and exclusion. We can disrupt harmful teaching models and help students connect their academic work to the social justice issues that matter to them. The panelists will offer practical strategies that have helped them transform their classrooms into spaces where power is distributed more equally, and the instructor is an artistic ally.

I began teaching as an undergraduate student and, during my career, have taught middle school students, high school students, college students, and educators. I continue to grow as a teacher and think a great deal about what it means to be a just educator. The four people on this panel are some of the teachers I continually learn from and look to as models.

With that said, I will introduce them.....

Participant Initial Remarks:

Felicia Rose Chavez

I was curious what might happen if we challenged the norms of what is rewarded, if we defied a white publishing industry and wrote for ourselves, in our own words. What do we find energizing, pleasurable, rigorous, repetitive about our own work? I call this independent workshop. Before we give persuasive power to other people's readings, writers go inward with perspective and intention to gauge their personal progress on a draft. The goal is for my students to cultivate artistic intuition and serve as their first — target — reader. As a result, students study their own writing just as closely as they might study the work of published authors, affirming their agency and bolstering their confidence.

Leora Fridman

I will speak about the role of transparency in the covid-era classroom, and how we might integrate principles of disability justice and accessibility to develop spaces of learning where students can take agency over anti-oppressive principles and educators can model humane labor conditions.

Steven Alvarez:

This presentation draws from an ethnographic case study of an after-school learning community that enacted trust between caring teachers and emergent bilingual high school students. High school teachers sponsored the grassroots Kentucky United Latinos (KUL) club, which was originally organized by students who met informally in their school's library. The club became a social unit in the school, as well as a space for students to practice composing bilingual poetry, as well as a space to navigated questions about Latinidad in the South connected to immigration status and racialized linguistic discrimination (Flores and Rosa, 2015).

Helen Betya Rubinstein

I share student projects that resulted from theme-based writing courses progressing from inquiry to action—courses that culminate in an invitation to collectively “share out” an idea, message, or question from our work together. I explain the process we’ve used to get there, and then share reflections on the benefits of these experiences. I ask: How can we teach writing courses that engage with the world around us, rather than with student egos, which too often become the focus of courses that center around the “traditional” workshop? How can we teach writing courses where students are thinking about what writing can *do* in the world—and then actually doing it?