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## CRITICAL EMOTIONS: TEACHING EMPATHY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Amelia Graves

John Carroll University, [agraves20@jcu.edu](mailto:agraves20@jcu.edu)

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CRITICAL EMOTIONS:  
TEACHING EMPATHY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

An Essay Submitted to the  
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College of Arts of Sciences of  
John Carroll University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Amelia A. Graves  
2019

This essay of Amelia A. Graves is hereby accepted:

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Advisor — Thomas Pace

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## **Introduction**

During my first semester as a graduate assistant at John Carroll University, the instructor of our teaching practicum course asked my graduate colleagues and me to consider what we wanted our EN 125: Seminar on Academic Writing course theme to be. When we returned a few weeks later, we each wrote our pending theme ideas on the chalkboards panels that moved around the classroom. One by one, we gave one another ideas for resources and assignments that aligned with our theme. When I glanced at the five chalkboard panels filled with theme ideas, I noticed something in common with most of our suggestions. Four out of the five graduate assistants had chosen a theme that encouraged a focus on a critical awareness of others. Creative titles like “Voices of the Unheard,” “Those Who Walk Behind,” and “A Voice for the Voiceless” and my own idea, “Reality,” all appeared to communicate a shared goal: to prompt students to explore current issues or historical events that, first, heightened students’ awareness of human experiences that were most likely unfamiliar to them, and second, called for a response after learning of these experiences.

Ultimately, I chose “Reality” as my own course theme for my first semester teaching EN 125 because I hoped the course would challenge students to consider different worldviews, lifestyles, and norms similar to and different from what I presumed many first-year students had encountered. This theme included pieces about dating in the Tinder Era, fast-food companies’ role in America’s obesity, the pressures of college, and living in Guatemala on one dollar per day. I wanted the comprehensive title to encourage students to contemplate all different “realities” in order to see that everyone experienced life differently, and there’s power in recognizing different human experiences. I knew

how largely my critical thinking skills had grown in college because of encountering many different lifestyles, even among the girls on my dorm floor, and I wanted my first-year students to experience something similar. Indeed, my theme would call for readings of texts and discussions that, ideally, would encourage students to look at their beliefs and decisions more critically. And, while I wasn't aware of it at the time, this theme also marked the early stages of teaching my students about critical consciousness, or as Paulo Freire names it in his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *conscientização*.

*Conscientização* can be defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 17n1). Freire argues that *conscientização* can free oppressed persons from oppression and can be taught through education. Although I didn't overtly prepare students to stand up to oppressors, I encouraged them to be more critically aware of their decisions and actions and of those around them. I wanted my students to understand that those around us often hold to their ideologies and worldviews with the same ferocity that we hold onto ours, and if we never leave our bubble, we lose opportunities for connection and expanding our knowledge about the world. Most importantly, we weaken our ability to experience and show *empathy*, a critical emotion that plays a large role in critical consciousness, and importantly, strengthens rhetorical skills.

Evidently, empathy already does play a role in our composition classrooms to some extent, whether instructors incorporate it intentionally or not. This incorporation of empathy became apparent when four of my fellow colleagues selected themes that encouraged a focus on a critical awareness of others for their EN 125 course. Many writing teachers feel a desire, even a duty, to encourage students to confront their comfort

and engage in critical consciousness, even indirectly, such as through a theme or specific text selections. However, what if we gave empathy a more overt place in our curriculum, because of how it encourages students to hone their critical rhetorical and writing skills, such as persuasiveness, awareness of audience, and clarity? Most research on teaching empathy argues for that empathy assists in starting social change. For example, in “Empathy and Democratic Education,” Michael Morrell argues for “empathy training” as it “will likely increase the healthy functioning of democratic society” (Morrell 381). While institutions like John Carroll University and many instructors like myself prioritize social change, this particular focus in empathic research often overlooks the benefits empathy can also bring to the rhetorical skill set.

This essay argues that teaching empathy should be an overt and consistent goal of writing teachers in the first-year writing classroom because of how empathy builds students’ critical consciousness and strengthens rhetorical skills. This goal of instilling empathy in writing students can be accomplished through an open and direct dialogue about empathy in the classroom and among instructors. To make this argument, I draw from two sites of inquiry. First, I use the work of Michael E. Morrell and Kristie S. Fleckenstein, citing how “[e]vidence indicates that empathic predispositions. . .contribute to a more properly functioning democracy” to support my argument for teaching empathy in the writing classroom (Morrell 385). Second, I pull from my own teaching experiences and from surveys of first-year writing teachers at John Carroll University to show how much of this work already occurs in the classroom, yet how making the discussion on empathy more overt allows students to become stronger critical writers and thinkers. In short, this research is significant because a direct correlation exists between one’s ability

to understand beyond his or her own experience and rhetorical skills that stretch across the disciplines, and writing courses have the opportunity to teach this skill through open and directed discussion and readings and writing assignments. In addition, research reveals how students will also become more aware of themselves, attaining the critical consciousness that Freire, and many others to follow, find urgent in a world of oppression and power abuse.

### **Compassion vs. Empathy**

Most of the discussion on empathy in the composition classroom begins with earlier studies of teaching critical *compassion*. In most of the research on this subject, compassion has been defined as “sympathy for and a desire to mitigate another’s suffering” as well as “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune” (qtd.in Fleckenstein 701). It seems that compassion’s denotation communicates an overwhelming, uncontrollable emotion that then spurs the observer into action in a state of pure affect. However, many critics, several of which inform my own argument, such as Martha C. Nussbaum and Matthew J. Newcomb, use the term “compassion” and argue compassion to be an emotion that involves both affect and cognition, and not as the unmanageable emotion some describe it to be.

Despite this term use, I find that the term “empathy” more accurately defines the emotion and cognitive function I attempt to invoke throughout this paper. While critics often interchange the terms “compassion” and “empathy” in these discussions, I have chosen to use the term “empathy” in my argument to eliminate confusion in term use. As Kristie J. Fleckenstein explains in her critical work on empathy, “empathy enables a person simultaneously to identify with and *evaluate* the suffering of another” (702,



emphasis mine). “Empathy” represents the observant, evaluative, and rational side of sympathetic emotions, and escapes the connotations often ascribed to compassion (Fleckenstein 701). Fleckenstein’s understanding of empathy, therefore, encourages an emotion that will show students how to observe one’s situation and understand the implications of it, without losing the ability to reasonably evaluate it, as suggested by “compassion.” By using the term “empathy” and its connotations, particularly regarding teaching writing, the connection between empathy and teaching rhetoric in the first-year writing classroom is more plausible than the inability “to act with initiative and reason” that is often connoted with “compassion” (Newcomb 108).

### **Literature Review**

The focus of my literature review examines whether researchers and authors regard empathy as a critical emotion that can be taught or strengthened in the writing classroom. As I began to research teaching empathy, I found that most discussion is centered on debating whether empathy is an affective or cognitive function, and teaching empathy as a reliable motivator of social action. These popular points of discussion most likely stem from Freire’s argument in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*— a critical work that informs many current educational theories and pedagogies. Freire believed that oppressed persons were often treated as deposits, or vessels to be filled with information that perpetuated their oppression and power in the perpetrator. To counter this abuse of power, Freire believes in teaching the oppressed how to liberate themselves through critical consciousness, or *conscientização*. Teaching empathy in composition classes would help educate students in how to attain critical consciousness in order to either free themselves, or help liberate oppressed persons, but also how to transfer that skill to other

rhetorical and writing skills. In this section, I will discuss these topics and the notable voices contributing to the field of empathy in composition courses, and in particular, how arguments about teaching empathy for *conscientização* and social change contribute to my arguments for teaching empathy in composition classrooms.

### **Empathy as an Affective and Cognitive Function**

To first see if empathy could be taught in the composition classroom, I investigated research that proved empathy's teachability. This search led me to the discussions on empathy as affective or cognitive in nature. Hannah Arendt spearheaded the discussion of using compassion as grounds for social change. Beginning with her critical approach of compassion found in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt's writings continued to reflect her belief that compassion was affective in nature, leading to its unreliable role in the public realm, specifically when it comes to social action (Newcomb 106). Arendt believes that because "compassion is something that overcomes a person, so that one cannot choose to act with initiative and reason," it is impossible for one feeling compassionate to "mak[e] appropriate action" (Newcomb 108). In other words, when one experiences compassion, space eliminates between the observer and the situation of the subject, ridding the observer of reason and logic that would ideally exist in that space. Arendt also asserts that compassion is "involuntary, it is not a basis for action," and instead only sparks a domino effect of emotion-based reactions (114). The involuntary emotion of compassion often leads to selfish actions, as it "bases any response on what one feels" (115). Because Arendt believes that compassion is purely affective with little rational thought involved, the involuntary human bent towards selfishness when compassionate means compassion

cannot be trusted to lead one towards selfless action, particularly regarding social issues. This debate relates, because the argument for affective “compassion” warrants that it is not logical or a cognitive process, and therefore unreliable as a basis for growing in critical consciousness, working towards social action, and strengthening writing and rhetorical skills. However, researchers and critics argue that empathy is partially or all cognitive, concurrently supporting my argument that empathy can be used for all the aforementioned contexts.

In response to Arendt, Matthew J. Newcomb, Kristie J. Fleckenstein, and Michael Morrell contribute their stance on the debate of regarding empathy as either or both a cognitive or affective function. In “Totalized Compassion: The (Im)Possibilities for Acting out of Compassion in the Rhetoric of Hannah Arendt,” Matthew J. Newcomb acknowledges Arendt’s criticism of compassion, and the public criticism of Arendt, both agreeing and challenging her discussion of compassion. Newcomb agrees with Arendt’s definition of “compassion” as affective in nature, but forwards Arendt’s argument by critiquing that her “definition of compassion is too either/or; it does not allow for the mixed feelings and motivates that are always prevalent in compositions related to the suffering or needs of others” (Newcomb 108). Newcomb believes that one can teach compassion in a way that does not lead to the elimination of space between the subject and observer that Arendt claims leads to selfish intentions for action in the observer. Instead “critical compassion is a way to consider the ties themselves. . . sometimes creating the space for more independent action” (111). Newcomb doesn’t see compassion as all-encompassing as Arendt, and instead argues that it can be taught in a way that leads to positive action in the public realm. He asserts that students can learn to how to analyze

their own feelings and respond appropriately to those in need, calling this response “critical compassion.” Although Newcomb ameliorates Arendt’s scolding review of compassion, his compliance that compassion is affective situates him in a similar camp as Arendt as other critical emerge who believe that empathy is cognitive in nature, at least in part.

In her critical work, Kristie S. Fleckenstein summarizes the notable voices in the field of critical empathy who disagree with Arendt’s claims of affective compassion to then later assert her argument that “empathy enables a person simultaneously to identify with and evaluate the suffering of another” (Fleckenstein 702). Using Martha Nussbaum and Newcomb as launches for her argument, Fleckenstein asserts that “all emotions. . .always include an element of rationality,” aligning her views with others who see empathy as cognitive in nature (Fleckenstein 702). Fleckenstein’s stance counters those of Arendt and Newcomb’s, particularly the belief that emotions operate “sans rationality” (702). Because empathy contains elements of rationality, “the interplay of evaluation and feelings. . .is the source of social action and community-building” and can “serv[e] as the foundation for social justice” (707). Fleckenstein’s argument, invoking Nussbaum’s “cognitive-evaluative view,” which stresses how “emotions always integrate thinking about an object,” provides support that empathy can be the foundation of critical growth and social change through its status as a cognitive function. Empathy is not the involuntary, uncontrollable response we connote it with, but the beginning stages of change as “discrimination, dialogue, and judgment can take place” after an empathic experience (704). Although Fleckenstein argues for teaching empathy to “motivat[e] other-centered social action,” her stance that empathy is a “complicated mixture of affect

and rationality” supports my argument for teaching empathy in composition classrooms (714; 707). If empathy involves rationality and logic, then it is a cognitive process, not a sporadic emotion. In addition, cognitive processes can be taught strengthened, leading to the growth of other cognitive skills, such as argumentation, as a result.

Similar to Fleckenstein, Todd DeStigter counters Arendt and asserts that empathy is needed within communities to fight for change in public spheres in “Public Displays of Affection: Political Community through Critical Empathy.” Using his lens of starting a literacy project, *Tesoros*, for at-risk Latino ESL students, DeStigter draws connections between separated communities through *critical empathy*, “the process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings. . .while always remembering that such connections are complicated by sociohistoric forces. . .” (DeStigter 240). DeStigter takes the stance that empathy should and can be taught, indirectly proving that it is a cognitive function. A person must choose for his or her self to give empathy, but educators and communities can provide opportunities through educational sites within and outside of localized communities to show empathy. Empathic interactions will feed change in the public sphere. Like Fleckenstein, DeStigter argues for *critical empathy* as a catalyst for social change. However, the idea of *critical empathy* seems to stem from *critical consciousness* and pushes “us to understand the powerful structures and ideologies that constrain us to think and act in prescribed (often exploitative) ways” (240). Comparable to Freire, DeStigter argues that awareness of our constraints and governing structures is the first step to breaking those very structures down. DeStigter describes the goals of my course theme, “Reality,” and designs ways to show students how to increase their awareness, and ideally as a result, capacity for

empathy. This will lead to lessened biases and heightened critical thinking skills, allowing for the enhancement of rhetorical and writing skills.

Finally, Michael E. Morrell contributes his voice to the affective/cognitive debate of empathy in “Empathy and Democratic Education.” Morrell argues that empathy should be included in democratic education, because “higher predispositions to empathy will likely increase the healthy functioning of democratic society” (Morrell 381). Morrell gestures to the debate on empathy as a cognitive or affective response, referring to Mark H. Davis’s reports that “empathy is actually a *multi-dimensional* construct that involves both affect and cognition” (382). Morrell also exposes the danger of debate, as “focusing on one aspect or the other is detrimental to an understanding of empathy and the impact of an empathic disposition on the society and individual” (382). Morrell’s insistence that empathy is both affective and cognitive shows that empathy is a reliable emotion, especially in how it improves society. Morrell’s indications of the benefits of empathy prove that those with greater empathic abilities create a stronger society, but also that the cognitive functions related to empathy agree with the idea of teaching empathy. While affective responses like “empathic concern and personal distress” may seem unteachable, instructors have the opportunity to teach the non-affective responses Morrell describes, such as “perceptual accuracy” and “evaluative judgment” through the rhetorical and compositional skills taught in first-year writing courses (384). These strengthened skills will lend themselves to other needs in rhetorical writing throughout the disciplines. Morrell’s argument is foundational to my own, as his analysis of non-affective empathic responses prove how closely linked rhetoric and empathy are, and the instruction of one can lead to strengthening of the other.

In short, these instructors, researchers, and authors suggest that empathy assists in building critical consciousness, which then prepares students for social action and change. While within these explorations there is support for teaching empathy for growth in rhetorical skills, the main focuses remain fixated on social action. However, these researchers, instructors, and authors importantly point out that teaching empathy and giving students opportunities to strengthen empathic qualities can be easily incorporated into the classroom, whether it be through writing assignments, discussions, or reading selections (or a combination of all). Despite if the goal of these authors stemmed from strengthening students' rhetorical skills, critical consciousness, or social awareness, these authors prove that empathy *can* and *should* be taught in the classroom.

### **Is Empathy Teachable?**

Before I explore how empathy can be taught to strengthen students' critical writing skills that connect to critical consciousness, I must confirm that empathy is in fact teachable as it is a cognitive and affective function. In addition, it should be made clear that composition classes can function as an ideal educational site for the teaching of empathy, which challenges notions of teaching empathy through other humanities, such as history or literature. However, we must backtrack to the discussion of whether empathy is affective, cognitive, or a balance of both, which has been an important focus of my research as reflected through my Literature Review. If empathy had cognitive aspects, then it can be challenged and strengthened through course activities, discussions, and readings.

In Morrell's "Empathy and Democratic Education," he leans into an evaluation of affective and non-affective (cognitive) responses "of the observer that result from the

exposure to the target,” or as he words it, “intrapersonal outcomes” (Morrell 383). Much of his research is based on the studies of empathy by Mark H. Davis. Davis’s research explains both affective and non-affective intrapersonal outcomes; non-affective intrapersonal outcomes “include perceptual accuracy, attributions and evaluative judgment of others” (384). Overall, these outcomes move beyond affective outcomes, such as feeling happy when you see someone smiling, and into the space of containing the “ability to discern the thoughts or emotions of the target,” offering the correct remedy for the target’s behavior, and completing “various judgments about the likeability, acceptability, or general characteristics of others” (384). There is a cognitive reaction in non-affective intrapersonal outcomes—the observer *thinks* about the situation of the target and evaluates possible remedies. Morrell, like myself, is “focus[ed] on educating for the *antecedents* to empathy,” or “empathic predispositions” (384). In other words, he believes that “[w]e can train citizens in a way that will likely increase their predispositions to be empathic” (385). While Morrell’s goal is to create a “healthy democracy” in teaching empathy, we share the belief that empathy can be encouraged through education because “[e]vidence indicates that empathic dispositions contribute to increases in concern for others and tolerance of outgroups, and decreases in biased judgments. . . contribut[ing] to a more properly functioning democracy” (385). While Morrell uses this research to argue his point of using empathy for the benefit of the public sphere, I found that his research also well-informed my argument for teaching empathy in the composition classroom, which will be examined in the Discussion portion of this essay.



In addition to Morrell's findings in empathy, several sources from neuroscience and behavioral research address how empathy, or empathic predispositions, can be learned and strengthened throughout one's lifetime. In "Empathy is Not in Our Genes," Cecilia Hayes challenges the idea that "humans are born with a propensity to feel. . .an instinct favored by evolution," and asserts that many of those functions develop throughout one's life (Hayes 499). Hayes describes a "dual system model" which "proposes that empathic responses can be produced by either or both of two functional systems," those functional systems titled as Empathy 1 and Empathy 2 (499). Empathy 1 "operates automatically, develops early in humans, and is found in a wide range of other animals," while Empathy 2 "involves controlled processing, develops later, and insofar as the controlled processing involves mindreading, may be uniquely human" (499). Controlled processing, as Hayes defines it, is "information processing that is relatively slow, serial, sometimes conscious. . .Behavior resulting from controlled processing is typically described as 'voluntary', 'intentional', or 'goal-directed'" (500). In other words, Empathy 2 is a cognitive function that slowly develops as the person becomes able to make intentional decisions and reactions. Working through memory and past experiences, "Empathy 2 processes information about the outcomes of various actions taken in the presence of this kind of emotional stimulus in the past" (501). Overall, Empathy 2 contains "cognitive and metacognitive processes. . .needed to select and launch intentional empathy-based action" (501). Hayes's argument aligns with Morrell's, but provides the neuroscientific evidence to support his assertions. Moreover, Hayes provides evidence that empathy derives from "Learned Matching," which challenges the notion that empathy is an "innate mechanism," an assumption that Hayes confronts multiple

times in her work. Hayes and Morrell's evidence also differentiates empathy from sympathy or compassion, backing up Ralph K. White's assertion that "[e]mpathy is cognitive; sympathy affective" (qtd. in Fleckenstein 708). Hayes's detailed research proved empathy as a cognitive process that is strengthened throughout one's life, and Morrell provides insight of how to strengthen that process. Both authors provide support for how empathy can then be brought into and taught in first-year writing courses.

Both Hayes and Morrell's individual research is compelling because they both reinforce empathy as a cognitive process, and therefore different from compassion and sympathy, emotions connotated as sporadic and reactionary. This discrimination is central to my argument because if empathy is cognitive (as well as affective, which is not as difficult to assert), then empathy can therefore be learned, as Hayes argues, and therefore should be taught. Because empathy is cognitive, empathy can be relied on as a rational emotion and not the spontaneous, uncontrollable outburst of emotion that eliminates logic. This point challenges Arendt's insistence that "compassion involves complete feeling with another, so any actions taken based on that pain are based on pain that you or I feel," and therefore, as Arendt sees it, making compassion (empathy) "strictly self-interested" (Newcomb 109). While this point supports the teaching of empathy for social action, it also suggests that empathy is a reliable process that could also inform important goals of EN 125, such as persuasion, argument, and audience.

### **Setting and Methodology**

As I started this project, I knew I wanted to include my own experience teaching EN 125 as support for my argument. I have taught two semesters of EN 125 for two consecutive semesters during my assistantship during the spring and fall of 2018. EN

125: Seminar on Academic Writing is John Carroll University's first-year writing course required of all students, unless they have already earned credits for a writing seminar course at another accredited university or college. My first semester teaching EN 125, I chose the theme "Reality." For this course, I defined "reality" as the worldviews and norms that serve as the foundations by which we see the world and react to it. Defining my course in this way allowed my students and me to use a broad variety of resources that did not necessarily all focus on a social justice issue, for example, but did show students worldviews, ideologies, and arguments that may have not connected with their own. This flexible course theme also allowed me to select texts and design writing assignments that would expose my students and give them opportunities to examine themselves and others. The theme proved elasticity and allowed for a broad range of conversations throughout the semester. However, for my second semester teaching, with this thesis topic in mind, I changed the theme to "The Power of a Story" to move our perspective towards others. While this does not speak to the theme of empathy directly, I wanted a covert theme, in a sense, that *gestured* to empathy without making the term the title of the course. Similar to "Reality," the theme title is broad and allowed many different "stories" or perspectives, but communicated the importance of critically listening and understanding others' "stories," while "Reality" seemed to focus more inward on oneself.

To encourage students to be open to others' stories and perspective, to give them a glimpse of my goal for the course, and to provide an opportunity to explore and communicate their own thoughts about our theme, I carefully selected our texts to read and discuss as a class, assigned writing projects that encouraged the exploration of

empathy, and gave out surveys to track my students thoughts and responses to the course and content. For our course textbook, I selected *They Say / I Say: Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* by Cathy Birkenstein and Gerald Graff. This textbook, written in simply vernacular and filled with examples and templates, served as a resource for students while learning the rhetorical and composition skills integral to EN 125. I assigned chapters out of *They Say / I Say* for homework and then dedicated class time to discuss the concepts assigned. Many of the writing concepts outlined in the textbook can be informed and supported by the teaching of empathy, and we discussed these connections during class time. Along with this textbook, I used several essays, journals, and videos to exemplify rhetorical skills. Whether I assigned the texts for homework or taught during class time, I selected these pieces with two requirements: first, they spurred a conversation within the class regarding the pieces' success or failure to implement successful rhetorical concepts, and second, the piece encouraged a discussion of empathy towards a certain subject or topic. An example of one of these pieces selected is the documentary, *Shalom Neighbor*, in which a team of filmmakers lived in a refugee camp in Jordan for one month. The documentary both implements persuasive techniques to inform its viewers of, and encourages students to feel empathy towards, the refugee crises as a result of those persuasive techniques. Finally, I assigned four major writing projects throughout the semester: a "They Say" Essay (rhetorical analysis), an "I Say" essay (commentary), research essay, and narrative essay. Each of these essays shared and taught new rhetorical concepts, and I weaved these units with pertaining texts, textbook chapters, and other resources to help students practice and become comfortable with the composition and rhetorical techniques involved with that unit.

As I went into my second semester teaching EN 125, I had a mindset planted in incorporating empathy into our curriculum, even if I had to gesture to it through our discussions. When I began to plan out this essay, I knew that I could use my growing research and knowledge to inform my instructional decisions. However, in addition to using experiences and insight from teaching my own course, I knew the experiences and mindsets of other EN 125 would shed light on this topic and my argument. As a result of my curiosity, I sent a survey to all of John Carroll University's instructors (full-time, adjunct, and graduate assistants included) for EN 125, the first-year writing seminar course required of most JCU students. My goal through this survey was to inquire if EN 125 instructors consider critical thinking skills that contribute to writing and argumentative skills, if they incorporate goals beyond writing in their course, and how those skills prepare students for learning outside of their course. I asked Instructors the following questions:

1. If you have one, what is the theme for your EN 120/125 course? If so, why did you select that theme? If not, why?
2. How does your theme necessitate including content (i.e. social justice, pop culture, literature, etc.) beyond writing/composition? How do you include that content in your course?
3. What critical thinking skills do you believe your theme teaches?
4. Do these critical thinking skills solely equip students to write more confidently, or do some move beyond writing? If they move beyond writing, what types of situations do these critical thinking skills prepare students for?

5. Do you consider empathy to be a critical thinking skill? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. Do your course explicitly teach empathy to your students? If so, towards whom/what? Through what methods (i.e. discussions, readings, assignments, essay topics, etc.)?
7. Does your course implicitly teach empathy to your students? If so, towards whom/what? Through what methods (i.e. discussions, readings, assignments, essay topics, etc.)?
8. How might empathy assist with writing and other academic situations?
9. Do you believe composition instructors have a responsibility to teach empathy? Why or why not?

Instructor's responses would inform me of explicit or implicit goals of their courses and if instructors drew connections between empathy and composition. Results from the instructor surveys would, I hypothesized, provide me with a grounding of how instructors incorporate empathy and critical thinking skills into their course planning, and show me how I could best recommend changes to EN 125 after concluding my research.

### **Results and Discussion**

EN 125 is a space that can welcome and easily involve the education of empathy. Because instructors have the freedom to choose their own themes and content, the course provides ample opportunity for inclusion of discussions, texts, and assignments that would encourage empathic responses and conversation. As I discussed in my Introduction, many instructors already set up their course with themes and content that encourage empathy and found their themes to be a crucial component of their course.

However, I find that by involving empathy in a more direct way, students could strengthen their rhetorical skills and social awareness. EN 125 is, by title, a seminar course, which instills the importance of discussion, deliberation, and argument. In EN 125, instructors encourage students to share their thoughts, experiences, writing, and ideas with one another. Through teaching empathy, students might be better positioned to listen, understand, and explain during readings and discussions. Thus, for this project, I sent a survey to EN 125 instructors to inquire if instructors were mindful of empathy through their course theme, texts, and discussions.

### **First-Year Writing Instructor Survey Results**

After receiving the results from my instructor survey, I identified three patterns emerging from the responses. The first pattern amongst responses communicated that most instructors include a theme for their EN 125 course that necessitates content besides writing skills. Instructors agreed that their course theme taught critical thinking skills, and many discussed similar critical thinking skills they saw their course teaching. The second pattern revealed that many instructors focused on teaching students to become self-aware so that they could become introspective and “well-rounded individuals,” voicing an outlook similar to Morrell’s argument of using empathy to create a healthier democracy. For example, many instructors said that their course taught students to be aware of their “inherent bias,” be more critically aware of themselves, and consider other perspectives, echoing Freire’s idea of *conscientização*. Finally, the third pattern that emerged exposed that all instructors saw empathy as a critical thinking skill that could assist with writing and other academic situations. However, while most instructors noted that they did not

teach empathy *explicitly* in their course, they did suggest that they taught it *implicitly* and believed they had a responsibility to teach empathy in some capacity.

### **Teaching Themes in EN 125**

Because of the theme similarities among my class of Graduate Assistants, I inquired to see if other instructors of EN 125 selected themes that called for awareness, and therefore empathy, towards a certain topic. Out of my responses, a handful of themes emerged from these responses that involved a social justice theme. Theme examples include: “Animal Studies/Sentience;” “Our Worlds, Our Spaces;” “Heroes and Villains;” “Voices of the Unheard;” and “Civil Rights Movement.” These themes represent instructors who selected a narrow social justice theme but who also initiated a broad investigation of social justice and human experience, similar to my themes of “Reality” and “The Power of a Story.” Instructors cited how theme selections stemmed from showing students how to “think more objectively about situations” different from their own. The themes selected varied, but many followed a social justice track or idea. I found this pattern to reflect the desire in many EN 125 instructors— to include content besides that of teaching writing and rhetoric because instructors see how a theme can include content essential to the goals of EN 125.

Many instructors’ reasoning for teaching critical thinking skills reflect Morrell’s argument in “Empathy and Democratic Education,” which asserts that “higher predispositions to empathy will likely increase the healthy functioning of democratic society by encouraging citizens to show more concern for their fellow citizens,” revealed by the many themes that incorporated social justice-related content (381). For example, one instructor selected the theme of “Animal Studies,” noting she held a “strong belief in



the importance of this theme as it pertains to conservation, climate, social justice, animal rights, and so on.” Other instructors selected their theme because of how it could connect to the goals of first-year writing, bridging social justice to composition and rhetoric. The instructor with the theme “Voices of the Unheard” chose so because she “wanted a social justice theme that emphasized voice, which is also an essential component to writing.” The instructor who taught “Heroes and Villains” articulated that she “required information and examples relevant to various social justice and pop culture topics of the present.” A few weeks into the semester, the class “quickly expanded our discussion to the quality of heroes and doing good, which allowed me to incorporate MLK’s ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail’ in this context.” This instructor reveals how she made the connection between her theme and EN 125 content, using the theme of “Heroes and Villains” to open up discussion about Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous letter and the rhetorical strategies he uses within it. Finally, an instructor included that “I emphasized social justice by using real-world examples of social issues to practice various lesson skills . . . I also set their essay assignments in the context of a social justice issue.” These examples of theme selections reveal that most professors incorporated other content into their first-year writing course. Moreover, instructors’ comments communicated that they often selected the theme because it involved content that interested the instructor, would spur classroom discussion, and most importantly, could easily incorporate composition and rhetorical lessons crucial to first-year writing curriculum. Through these responses, it became apparent that instructors consider composition and rhetoric when selecting a theme, often making associations between social justice and composition as a result. However, these patterns also disclose that instructors desire to teach their students skills

and lessons in addition to learning how to write and argue well. It seems that through theme, content, and topics of discussion, most instructors teach their students about empathy, though often for a goal other than strengthening rhetorical and composition skills.

### **Teaching Empathy for Critical Consciousness and Social Action**

The second pattern that emerged from the survey responses revealed that many instructors focus on teaching students to become more self-aware so that they can confront their own biases and assumptions, leading to stronger critical thinking and, as this project suggests, increased empathy. When I asked instructors what critical thinking skills they believed their theme taught, many instructors explained that they want their students to learn how to de-center themselves with a heightened awareness of their own bias and ideologies. Instructors wrote the following responses to my inquiry of what critical thinking skills their theme taught:

“Seeing beyond human-centric views, learning about perspective, challenging assumptions.”

“I believe it helps students not only recognize inherent bias in certain materials, but helps them learn with reading against the grain.”

“I believe my theme provoked students to think more critically about themselves and about the factors in the world around them that have significant impacts on their lives. . .”

“I believe that my theme helps students develop the skills of introspection . . . and analyzing another person’s point of view/arguments, as well as the critical writing skills. . .necessitated by an EN 125 course.”

“I believe exploring social justice issues challenges students to consider different perspectives, work together, and test logical situations.”

As revealed through these quotes, most instructors focus on how their course or theme exposes students to their “inherent bias” and desire for students to break down their own ideologies. I also found it particularly interesting that a few instructors connected the critical thinking skills to other skills taught in first-year writing, specifically regarding argumentation and audience. For example, the last instructor quoted drew a connection between critical thinking skills and rhetorical skills within their theme content, particularly “analyzing another person’s point of view/arguments.” In addition, these instructors see how EN 125 can teach critical thinking skills that break down biases, challenge worldviews, and teach students the importance of recognizing the importance of every human experiences

As I began my research on empathy, a recurring argument among criticism and research posited teaching empathy with the hopes of developing critical consciousness to then enact social change as the result of that consciousness. This recurring theme reflects the thoughts of many instructors in my survey, particularly that teaching critical thinking skills, like empathy, helped students recognize their “inherent bias” and “develop the skills of introspection” so that they could “think critically about broader issues.” Fleckenstein, Morrell, and DeStigter echo these very thoughts as they argue for teaching empathy with the basis that empathy employs a combination of affective and cognitive processes and can therefore act as a motivator for social action, which agrees with surveyed instructors’ opinions towards empathy. Fleckenstein explains that “the interplay of evaluation and feelings in empathy is the source of social action and community-building” (Fleckenstein 707). Fleckenstein cites skills that empathy enhances — many of which could also be used in the composition classroom — but for a goal of “negotiation

and social action” (707). Morrell echoes this outlook in his critical work, and references how the key to creating a healthy democracy requires “empathic dispositions [which] are positively related to the tolerance of, and favorable attitudes towards, outgroups” (Morrell 386). Finally, In “Public Displays of Affection: Political Community through Critical Empathy,” Todd DeStigter cites empathy as a crucial part of his *Tesoros* project, a literacy project for at-risk Latino ESL students which sought to “provid[e] an opportunity for these students to draw upon their own lives and literacies . . . to make connections among themselves and with Anglo students from whom they would otherwise have been separated” (DeStigter 236). In this piece, DeStigter explains and titles a new form of empathy: *critical empathy*. DeStigter relies on a conversation with a former colleague to inform this term as he uses it. He cites Jay Robinson, a former “teacher-scholar,” and his definition of *critical empathy* to describe how we might attain a desire “to participate in civic and civil literacy practices” (239; 240). Robinson defines *critical empathy* as:

the process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings, of thinking and feeling with them at some emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant level, while always remembering that such connections are complicated by sociohistorical forces that hinder the equitable, just relationships that we presumably seek. (240)

It seems that Robinson’s definition of *critical empathy* follows the same definitions of empathy found in other research referenced in this paper, yet there is an emphasis on what “goes beyond individualistic notions of caring” (240). In *critical empathy*, there is an acknowledgment of the forces that have shaped our worldviews and ideologies and

“constrain us to think and act in prescribed (often exploitative) ways” in effort to move beyond those constraints (240). DeStigter argues that instructors can teach students how to critically empathize through class environments, discussions, course themes, and selected text. If a student can understand *critical empathy*, then they might be able to more easily establish informed and affective connections with other human beings, “connections that yield civil relationships with civic potential” (qtd. in Fleckenstein 712). Civic relationships can in turn encourage the privileged to engage in social action, using their privilege for the betterment of others around them.

The argument for teaching empathy to encourage social engagement reflects the desires of many EN 125 instructors. We want our students to make connections with people, lifestyles, and experiences previously unfamiliar to us. Moreover, we want our course to help students learn how to critically empathize, or as an instructor worded it, “learn how to step outside of themselves and think AROUND issues in order to respond more fully and more thoughtfully.” The surveyed instructors have much in common with the sources cited here: there is an understanding shared by both instructors and researchers that empathy *is* a critical thinking skill, and one that can help students be more socially aware. However, there is also an element of transfer that is necessary during the process of using empathy to break down these biases.

In “Once Again with Feeling: Empathy in Deliberative Discourse,” Fleckenstein speaks to this necessary transfer when using empathy to encourage social action. She believes that “[a] critical leap is also necessary for the shift between empathy for another’s specific situation or life condition and the realization that such suffering is endemic to an entire group or class of people” (Fleckenstein 706). Fleckenstein and the

surveyed instructors' comments suggest that their students must start with understanding their own situation, worldview, and ideologies. Then, instructors introduce students to other examples of the human experience, often ones of oppression or abuse. Finally, students transfer that knowledge of one experience to groups of oppressed or abused persons, and ideally recognize the need for social action as a response. Many surveyed instructors cited that critical thinking skills taught in first-year writing assists students in thinking about "broader issues" and "more objectively about situations," articulating that EN 125 can instruct the critical thinking skills that guide students through this process.

I have attempted to mirror this practice in my own EN 125 course through selecting texts and clips that follow my theme, "The Power of a Story." This includes stories, articles, or videos that introduce students to a different or new way of thinking, one that often calls for an empathic response, while also providing opportunities to exercise rhetorical skills. As students learn about different "stories," I hope to encourage what Morrell describes as "empathic dispositions," which "are positively related to the tolerance of, and favorable attitudes towards, outgroups" (386). However, I often begin the semester by showing students that *they* deserve empathy, so students feel validated and valued before we move into more challenging and de-centering texts, where ideally, they connect that other people deserve this same validation and value as the students themselves are. I accomplish this by first asking students about their own stories through a private survey that only I see. I ask students about the stories important to them, the ones that shaped them, and want others to know about them. Then, we read "College Pressures" by William Zinsser. This article, written by a former "master" at Yale University, articulates the pressures he observes students caving into in college, often

writing about the very pressures my students face during our semester together. We talk about not only the rhetorical strategies Zinsser uses in his piece, but also what he is trying to say. What is the argument he makes, and is it convincing? As the students and I engage in a discussion about college, they receive empathy from another writer, feeling what it is like when (what Fleckenstein articulated as) the ability to “simultaneously. . . identify with and evaluate the suffering of another” occurs (Fleckenstein 702). My hope is that when students feel empathized with, they will more easily understand what it means to then empathize with someone else. In doing so, students are also increasing rhetorical skills, understanding how to persuade and connect to audience at a deeper level.

Moving from pieces that validate my students’ needs for empathy, we analyze pieces that call students to empathize with others, while also providing opportunities to therefore strengthen their rhetorical skills. An example of how I use this method is shown through teaching Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” After reading, we discuss how the piece exposes readers to the prejudices African Americans faced in the 1960s, and the few rhetorical options the King had when cornered and then jailed by the clergymen of Birmingham. As a class, we talk about the situation King found himself in, what his letter set out to do, and if he accomplished his goals successfully or not. This calls for a discussion that both involves empathy and rhetoric. Students can learn about the racist state of America through King’s anecdotes and information, and also observe the impeccable rhetorical skills that King exemplifies in this historical text in order to assert his position to the clergymen. In discussion, I encourage students to consider the state of all African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, and in particular, those who did not have the platform that King had. As a

class, students are called to make the “critical leap” that Fleckenstein describes, realizing “that such suffering is endemic to an entire group or class of people” (Fleckenstein 706). This leap calls for students to exercise empathy, and chiefly in how “empathy enables a person simultaneously to identify with and evaluate the suffering of another” (702). After students read one experience of an oppressed person during the Civil Rights Movement, they must use empathy to evaluate King’s argument, understanding his suffering, and then move to understand that whole populations have been affected by the same oppression.

Through teaching texts such as these, students are introduced to situations that call for empathy. In written responses, class discussions, and their own time to read and process information, students are exposed to the importance of empathizing for hurting communities. Simultaneously, learning about empathy, and ideally, strengthening the ability to empathize, then better prepares students for later writing situations that call for heightened rhetorical skills.

### **Teaching Empathy to Strengthen Rhetorical Skills**

When surveying instructors of EN 125, responses overall reflected a shared goal to teach critical consciousness for social change. However, several instructors noted how empathy could help writing and other academic situations and responded positively to my inquiries about bringing empathy to first-year writing. The third pattern that emerged from the survey given to instructors suggested that all respondents viewed empathy as a critical thinking skill that could assist with rhetorical skills taught in first-year writing and other academic situations, and should be taught in some capacity. As the essay moves into an argument for teaching empathy alongside rhetoric and composition, the patterns



found in the instructor survey will work as support for explaining where empathy can fit into the composition classroom, how empathy prepares students for rhetorical situations, and the importance of teaching empathy in EN 125.

In my survey, I directly asked instructors how critical thinking skills better equipped students for writing situations. One instructor mentioned that he/she hopes critical thinking skills taught in EN 125 “prompt students to. . . anticipate arguments that others may have about those [argument-related] issues.” Another instructor responded that critical thinking skills “prepar[e] the students to do more research before accepting a POV [point of view].” Another response articulated that critical thinking skills “also guid[e] students to dialogue/debate more respectfully and effectively,” while another agreed, explaining that “[students] should be able to communicate more effectively verbally, they should be able to navigate around their online spaces, and they should be able to be more well-rounded individuals.” In another response, an instructor mentioned that his/her “hope is that some of these critical thinking skills prompt students to think before they speak, and to anticipate arguments that others may have about those issues.” These responses communicate that overall, instructors saw how first-year writing taught critical thinking skills that could help students become more mindful in their arguments and interactions, and particularly how they can debate more effectively; however, instructors referenced critical thinking skills and first-year writing, not empathy. And while these answers prove the value of critical thinking skills taught in first-year writing, I wanted instructors to think specifically about empathy’s value in EN 125.

To guide this thought process, I first asked instructors if they viewed empathy as a critical thinking skill that could strengthen rhetorical skills. One instructor articulated that

teaching empathy would assist in “helping students realize there’s more than one side to any argument,” and could help students to “better understand the people they are trying to persuade, and will therefore result in more thoughtful, engaging, and sincere prose.”

These instructors are speaking to some of the ways that I find empathy to help teach rhetorical strategies crucial to the curriculum of EN 125. Specifically, these instructors indirectly refer to Mark H. Davis’s “[n]on-affective intrapersonal outcomes” that are crucial to Morrell’s research, which “include perceptual accuracy, attributions and evaluative judgment of others” (Morrell 384). In other words, these outcomes refer to the observer’s ability to observe a situation, the cause of the situation correctly, and evaluate the characteristics of a person/situation. Morrell’s research and connection to Davis’s researched outcomes suggest why teaching empathy could help rhetorical skills, particularly through examining the “affective and non-affective responses of the observer that result from the exposure to the target” when one is predisposed to empathic responses (qtd. in Morrell 383).

In EN 125, a large focus of the course is to teach students how to evaluate arguments and rhetorical situations in order to respond accordingly in their writing. In my syllabus, I articulate that one of the four goals of my course is learning: “Articulation of an Argument,” which includes teaching students how to:

- Select and develop an appropriately complex argument for a given audience and purpose
- Develop and support an argument appropriate to context, audience, and purpose

I find that these goals of first-year writing closely align with Davis’s intrapersonal outcomes of “perceptual accuracy, attributions, and evaluative judgments of others,”

notably through the teaching of “They Say / I Say” ideas and language (384). The entire first two units of my course are dedicated to what “They Say” and what “I Say,” based on our course textbook: *They Say / I Say: Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* by Cathy Birkenstein and Gerald Graff. Our first unit, “They Say,” focuses on rhetorical analyses, or teaching students to understand the audience and purpose of a work and evaluate an author’s effectiveness based on the rhetorical triangle. In the beginning unit of EN 125, I teach students how to have “perceptual accuracy” by instructing the rhetorical triangle and other persuasive methods, and then through teaching students how to read texts in an evaluative way, looking for the strategies and arguments made to persuade readers. For example, when we read “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we discuss King’s call for attention to segregation and racism in the United States, but we also evaluate the persuasive techniques King uses throughout his letter, which is painted with ethos, logos, and pathos to reach his audience. We continue to work on our “perceptual accuracy” throughout this unit as we read other texts to look for successful and unsuccessful attempts at persuasion.

During EN 125, instructors also work to strengthen students’ ability to have a successful “evaluative judgement of others,” as they are taught to evaluate the “likeability, acceptability, or general characteristics of others” (Morrell 384). Instructing students to have an “evaluative judgment of others” begins in the “They Say” unit, but also continues into the “I Say” and research essay units, when students move into articulating their own beliefs about a topic or argument and ensure that they create sound argument. Teaching empathy can help students understand these persuasive methods more easily. As Fleckenstein argues, “empathy lends itself to deliberative discourse — to

negotiation, debate, and persuasion — in the public sphere and serves as the foundation for social justice” (Fleckenstein 707). I would also assert that empathy lends itself to negotiation, debate, and persuasion in the composition classroom, and is even “*necessary* for negotiation and persuasion” (711, emphasis mine).

As mentioned earlier, we teach students in EN 125 how to “develop and support an argument appropriate to context, audience, and purpose.” Teaching empathy, as many instructors mentioned in their survey responses, can help students with their development of arguments, and as instructors mentioned, can “pus[h] students to consider other perspectives and try out other voices” as well as “better understand the people they are trying to persuade. . . therefore result[ing] in more thoughtful, engaging and sincere prose.” In Morrell’s work, he articulates Davis’s “multidimensional measure of empathy,” which includes “four specific empathy subscales: fantasy, personal distress, empathic concern, and perspective taking” (Morrell 385). As we instruct first-year writing, “perspective taking,” or PT as Morrell refers to it, is essential to developing rhetorical skills. Morrell describes it as a “respondents’ propensities to view situations from the viewpoints of others” (385). In the composition classroom, PT is a part of empathy that can bring a student success when writing to rhetorical situations. For example, we might see PT benefit a student’s writing when it allows them a deeper understanding of their topic and therefore a clearer argument. They might also foresee the arguments within their topic that deserve the most attention and could garner the most enthusiastic response from their readership.

When students write with an ability to empathize, they will be more prepared to, as an instructor articulated in my survey, “realize there’s more than one side to any

argument” and balance multiple voices and perspectives in the discussion of their topic. Morrell argues that “people with higher predispositions for perspective taking are, at the least, more consistently open to opinions that conflict with their own” (386). A surveyed instructor’s answer agrees with this assertion, as she articulated how “[critical thinking skill] also guid[e] students to dialogue/debate more respectfully and effectively.” I found many of the instructor responses to reflect the arguments of Morrell, as well as Fleckenstein, echoing how empathy leads to the “perspective taking” subscale discussed by Morrell, and the idea that empathy “should be taught because it weds emotional commitment with ethical action, providing a basis for and a monitor of dialogue” (Fleckenstein 712). Though these authors are speaking to how empathy aids in encouraging social justice-minded citizens, their arguments also support how empathy can aid first-year writing courses. In this case, empathy can aid in students developing a healthy and mindful point of view.

Writing about “naysayers” is a rhetorical skill that is heavily focused on in EN 125, and one that is found in most subjects across the disciplines. I dedicate a few classes to the idea of a “naysayer,” and require students to write about one in their research essay. As I describe it in my handouts and slideshows, a “naysayer” is a counterargument, or an argument that simply disagrees with the writer’s. Teaching students how to confront naysayers shows students how to produce work that is credible, thorough, and trustworthy. In EN 125, we read several texts that exemplify a “naysayer” author, or how an author responds to naysayers. Students then set out to find their own naysayers for their persuasive research essay. It is quite often that I have a few students who are unable to find or come up with a naysayer. They cannot imagine someone who

would disagree with them or what that person could say against them. In teaching empathy, students' increased capacity for perspective taking would help them with this rhetorical skill—one that will reoccur in countless career paths beyond the classroom.

Finally, the pattern of connecting composition to empathy emerged again in the survey's final question when I directly asked instructors about their thoughts on teaching empathy in the composition classroom. At this point in the survey, most instructors considered empathy a critical thinking skill, one even asserting that "[e]mpathy is vital," and another instructor articulated that empathy is a "counterpart to analytic/factual thinking" and involves "incorporating the pathos in Aristotle's rhetorical triangle." However, despite the benefits of teaching empathy that many instructors saw and wrote about, no instructor said that they teach empathy *explicitly* in their course. One instructor mentioned that empathy often "was their most natural response to some of the stories we were reading," yet instructors admitted that they did not discuss the term in their courses and found it more likely that they taught empathy *implicitly*, not mentioned directly, or even intentionally some of the time.

One instructor stated empathy as "an important part of the theme," and another echoed my own argument, referencing empathy as part of the "inclusion of pathos in their first assignment essay" and present through readings and discussions that "encourage students to approach others with a more open, empathetic outlook." Indeed, most instructors saw empathy at play in their course, even if they didn't use the word in their course discussions. I find it unsurprising that empathy is usually implicit in first-year writing courses, mostly because of the lack of research and discussion on teaching empathy in composition courses. For most instructors, empathy is involved in their

courses to some degree, mostly as an indirect response to discussions or readings, and instructors are comfortable with involving empathy in their curriculum in a gestural manner. However, this lack of discussion on empathy should not be excused, most importantly because of empathy's direct connections to issues of social justice and change and its role in improving rhetorical skills crucial to first-year writing curriculum. Talking about empathy in an explicit way, such as using the term, defining it as a course, and relating texts, assignments, and essays back to empathy can only encourage students to move towards critical consciousness, while also helping to reinforce rhetorical skills crucial to first-year writing.

After inquiring about empathy's role in first-year writing courses, whether it be implicit or explicit, my final question asked if instructors felt a responsibility to teach empathy in EN 125. Surprisingly, most instructors agreed and saw a responsibility to teach empathy, as it helped students become "well-rounded" as a natural counterpart when instructing "perspective, voice, counterarguments, etc." However, a few instructors did not see it to be their responsibility, "like a bullet point in a Teacher's Guide." Part of the reasoning behind this derives from the belief that requiring the teaching of empathy "goes too far if only because it is a lesson that extends beyond writing." In short, this final response reflects the common response to teaching empathy in composition; while some instructors see the natural overlap between empathy and first-year writing content, many see it as a separate "lesson," much like the social justice content of a theme. The research in this essay attempts to break down this mindset and prove that just as empathy helps create critical consciousness and social action, empathy can also bolster rhetorical

skills taught in EN 125, and therefore *should* be a bullet point when planning the curriculum for first-year writing.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion: Bringing Empathy to the Composition Classroom**

After concluding my research and analyzing instructor survey responses, I find my recommendations only leaning in one direction: we must make empathy a more explicit and overt part of our dialogue, intentions, and discussions in first-year writing. Instructors shouldn't be afraid to show out students about "other worlds, other ways of seeing, thinking, being," as Stacey Freed writes about in "Subjectivity in the Tutorial Session: How Far Can We Go?" (Freed 41). In addition, talking about empathy more explicitly and incorporating it into the teaching of rhetorical skills suggests empathy's elasticity as a cognitive function. While teaching empathy can begin or continue students' journey to critical consciousness, it can also feed back into the rhetorical skills that are foundational to first-year writing and academic situations across content areas.

Ways to accomplish this ongoing conversation in the classroom involve first believing students are capable of learning empathy, and then allowing students to exercise and practice empathy towards their current interests. This can be an effective way of preparing students to receive other worldviews and ideologies, such as how I began the semester with teaching "College Pressures" by William Zinsser. Our students *are* passionate and empathic, they just might extend it towards topics we are unaware of. If we first show them the importance of their lives and interests, they may be more apt to show the same interest towards unfamiliar ones. This open and engaging dialogue is a beginning step in creating a classroom environment that prepares students to learn



without bias, write using persuasive and rhetorical techniques, and transfer their growing skills to other courses and academic situations for the entirety of their academic and vocational careers.

As a final recommendation, I want to suggest that empathy should be incorporated into first-year writing, even if it isn't a measurable learning outcome or a bullet point in the curriculum requirements. Usually when creating a goal for a course, or adding a requirement in a curriculum, the standard or goal should be measurable. I acknowledge that to require or incorporate empathy into a university's first-year writing courses' curriculum, it must be shaped into a learning outcome that can be assessed. Although I do not tackle that discussion of incorporating empathy in this essay, I posit that even if empathy is not worded into a measurable learning outcome, it can still be taught explicitly as a rhetorical skill. Similar to Kathleen Yancey's argument in *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Writing, and Sites of Writing*, we can teach empathy by making it explicit in our classroom discussion

In conclusion, empathy and the rhetorical skills it teaches justifies its incorporation in first-year writing. Through teaching empathy overtly and consistently in courses like EN 125, students can attain critical consciousness and mindfulness of others, establishing skilled rhetorical writing that is mindful of audience and persuasion. Finally, teaching empathy prepares students to have a mindset that seeks justice for all, thereby consistent with the goals of John Carroll University's mission statement:

The educational experience at John Carroll University provides opportunities for the students to develop as total human persons. . . alert to learning as a life-long process; open to change as they mature; respectful of their own culture and that of

others; aware of the interdependence of all humanity; and sensitive to the need for social justice in response to current social pressures and problems. (“University Mission Statement”)

EN 125 is a required seminar course at John Carroll University because of the rhetoric skills the course teaches, all of which are crucial to succeed in and beyond academia. However, through teaching empathy, the first-year writing course also can fulfill the mission of John Carroll University as students become critically conscious. Although many instructors already shape their courses to align with this mission statement through a social justice-oriented theme, the explicit teaching of empathy will only compliment this endeavor, alongside informing the writing skills vital to EN 125. This essay suggests that emotions like empathy are critical in more ways than one, ultimately encouraging students to engage in “learning as a life-long process,” during and beyond their time in our classrooms.

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