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Review of Robert Eddy and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar's *Writing Across Cultures*

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Eddy, Robert and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar. *Writing Across Cultures*. UP of Colorado, 2019. 264 pp.

In May 2020, the United States was in the middle of a resurgence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the possible re-election of a presidential administration that refused to condemn white supremacy. Now, over a year later, critical race theory is under attack, and support for BLM is waning. Though the issue of multiculturalism in higher education is constantly in flux in the media, most students matriculating to college have to learn to adapt in some ways. Whether it be increased personal freedom and responsibility, a new and sometimes very different environment, or changing personal and professional relationships, there is always something that students will have to learn to adjust to in college life.

In *Writing Across Cultures*, Robert Eddy and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar argue that “entering college is akin to visiting a foreign land for the first time” (9). This enculturation can be a shock for students who have not grown up within rigorous academic contexts, especially for those who are asked to change fundamental values and beliefs in order to thrive or even just survive in this new environment. One of the most important lessons that many students must learn to adapt to is academic writing and Standardized American English (SAE). The authors present the Eddy Model of Intercultural Experience as a “streamlined, classroom and interculturally tested method of introducing students to academic writing via sequenced assignments” (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar 8). Modeled around a thesis-driven research paper that explores a culture chosen by the student, the six stages of the Eddy Model (the preliminary stage, the spectator stage, the increasing participation stage, the shock stage, the adaptation stage, and the reentry stage) are metacognitive. The stages represent both the student’s foray into their chosen new culture as well as their movement into the culture of academia.

The Eddy Model framework asks students to confront their own cultural biases and appreciate cultural differences and asks teachers to do the same. Currently, the authors write, “the overwhelming majority of teachers of college writing and multimedia authoring are white, but students are increasingly of color, and ... these same white writing teachers are often early-career graduate students or other early-career writing professionals” (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar 203). As teachers, we are constantly having conversations to do with racism and the institutional systems that uphold racism. I found this work especially significant for myself as a graduate student one year into teaching first-year composition (FYC), though this book could offer insights to more experienced writing professionals as well.

In *Writing Across Cultures*, the authors examine “the unearned racial and cultural privileges that come from demonstrated competence with Standardized American English” (xii), and set up an important ideology in teaching: that it is essential for first-year students and especially first-year writing instructors to consider culture within the classroom. Though I am a white passing, fourth-generation immigrant, I was raised in a white low-socioeconomic household, and I was taught in secondary school that racism is a thing of the past. Because I know that I have and will likely continue to unintentionally perpetuate unearned white privilege

and institutional racism, I want to recognize that it is incredibly important that we as teachers examine our own cultural biases alongside our students, and this is modeled by Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar throughout the six stages of the Eddy Model.

The first Eddy Model stage is the preliminary stage, which involves pre-writing and context-building activities in which students brainstorm about culture (37). In this stage, the authors share with students how they outline their own values and cultural constructs (38) and how they approach freewriting. In the second stage, the spectator stage, students typically use writing to learn strategies in their first draft of the main academic paper that is intended to introduce students to academic writing (79). In this stage, Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar discuss their idea of what a “draft” is and how this informs their own writing processes (85-86). The third stage is the increasing participation stage, in which students compose working drafts and revise their work using metacognitive feedback (99). The shock stage comes next. In this stage, students often resist changing early drafts, and experience writer’s block due to the realization that “what worked in the past, in high-school culture, does not work in college culture” (130). In this stage, Eddy speaks individually with his students about his personal ideology on adaptation to the white dominance of academia (134-135). These hard conversations prime students for stage five, the adaptation stage. At this stage, students produce final drafts in which they present a cohesive argument congruent with their own preferred beliefs (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar 165-166). The last stage is the reentry stage, in which students realize they have changed after this process, and realize that writing is cyclical as they begin to prepare themselves for the second paper. Within these stages, Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar take the time to tell a story or invite the students into their own lives and internal writing processes in some way. They also emphasize the importance of teachers taking the time to become co-learners with students in the classroom. These moments help to show students the dissonance even experts in the field may feel when entering cross-cultural conversations. Both the described stages and the understanding of teachers as co-learners helps early-career graduate students and writing professionals support multiracial classrooms that use both home and academic cultures to create academic writing.

The use of home and academic cultures is especially prevalent when Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar discuss the binary that exists for teachers of SAE in first-year classrooms. Though Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar describe SAE as the “de facto language of white power” (154), they argue that the home-academic culture binary still affects everyday life in American society; students are expected to speak and write in a certain way to be considered professional, no matter their background (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar 11). While both Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar want students to be able to choose what works best for them, they disagree about whether code switching, the ability to switch between home and academic languages, or code meshing, the blending of home and academic languages, is best suited to empower students. Espinosa-Aguilar argues that code switching empowers BIPOC students to feel comfortable in new spaces, rather than find themselves being the “victims of white-power language prejudice” (11). Conversely, Eddy advocates for code meshing as a mode of resistance towards white power—with the caveat that what is written must be “intelligible, purposeful, and effective” (11). This conversation empowers students to be mindful of what they are saying and how their words may affect the views of others.

By humanizing and empowering learners through their writing, as well as equipping students with the language tools needed to question and challenge dominant white supremacist beliefs and practices of American society, Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar position *Writing Across Cultures* within critical pedagogy and conversations of power. Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar state, “As we move rhetorically and politically/economically from structures of a largely uncontested as well as unearned white privilege to a complex and doubtless messy shared fate in which white privilege must be completely dismantled” (xii). They assert that, as teachers, we must “affirm and challenge student writing and students as whole people” (xii). The authors discuss language and compositions as inherently political, asserting that “one’s personal power and one’s ability to use language are effectively interchangeable” (12). By teaching students how to intentionally use

language to their advantage, FYC instructors are uniquely situated to help students begin the journey of empowerment.

Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar help early-career graduate students and writing professionals take up this work by providing student samples and writing activities throughout each chapter. The student samples in this book show student work ranging from the prewriting stage to the final draft, giving instructors an idea of what skills students learn along the way as well as some misconceptions that students may express within this model. The writing exercises throughout this text are meant to be used in conjunction with the Eddy Model but are adaptable to other first year writing courses. Several of these writing activities ask students to think about how they code mesh and code switch in their own lives, and students are asked to think critically about the power politics attached to language. The sections titled “Context Building Writing Activity” are described by the authors as “built-in teaching manual[s]” and are intended to give readers an idea of a whole semester’s use of the Eddy Model (12). I have adapted several of these writing activities to fit my own departmentally structured FYC course as well as to another course I am currently designing called *Frameworks for Social Justice*. The latter course introduces students to issues in social justice and gives them tools for how to deal with them in their everyday lives. Even if FYC teachers were to only pick up this book for the writing activities, it would be worth it.

The preparation that instructors receive to begin their teaching careers is one aspect of the book that is underdeveloped. Graduate students, especially those who have typically not gone to school to teach, often feel out of place. Even as an MFA student with an undergraduate degree in teaching, there are times when I still feel unprepared to teach an FYC course. This book is aimed at and puts the onus on early-career graduate students and writing professionals teaching FYC courses to create these multicultural classrooms. I wonder, however, why there is little mention of the established professionals who are teaching these early-career instructors? It is often difficult for instructors lower on the pyramid of academia to advocate for socially just learning styles in the hierarchy of higher education. However, that may be outside of the scope of a book that wants to focus “just on the stages necessary for a student to experience becoming a fully functional member of academia and user of its resources” (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar 8). With this thought in mind, it might be worthwhile for administrators in the field to take a look at this text as well. Applying these concepts to instructor education curriculum could be beneficial for early writing professionals as they learn to think about culture more in their classroom. Given the current political climate of the United States, we as teachers must “collectively labor to reinvent our discipline as a multiracial interdisciplinary project of survival and productivity for all” or otherwise become dismantled (Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar xx).

“Review of Eddy and Espinosa-Aguilar, WRITING ACROSS CULTURES” from *Composition Forum* 47 (Fall 2021)

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