

Lost in Translation:

Using Poetry to Find Cultural Representation

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

Artistic, cultural, societal and personal connections...

Participants were able to grasp Anzaldua's use of code-meshing and the value/effect that is lost without her use of Spanish; however, participants did not have as strong a grasp on hybrid poetics. When I recognized this, I passed around my personal copy of Anzaldua's book *The Borderlands: La Frontera* which has been praised for its hybrid poetic style. This additional visual aid was the crux of our conversation that honed in on the nature of hybrid poetics. Anzaldua's book, in conversation with her poem, also served as an effective bridge to transition from a lesson on code-meshing to a lesson on hybrid poetics. Our lesson on hybrid poetics discussed the basic components of poetry, such as rhythm, imagery, line-breaks, and more, as tools participants could use when approaching their own poem. During this portion of the workshop, I quoted Picasso: "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." This is how participants came to understand the workshop's "hybridity" because hybrid poetics is an art form that encourages us to "break the rules" and use creativity and innovation. I wanted participants to think outside the confines of a structured sonnet and embrace all the space "outside of the box."

With this framework, I handed out twelve-page packets defining a variety of foreign-language words/phrases from different ethnic groups around the globe. Using the foreign-language words for inspiration, participants began their hybrid poems understanding that they had free range. The significance of all this is explore when we look at the workshop and its context holistically. For example, when we think about the artistic "form" of hybrid poetics or the use of code-meshing, and we think about the globalized and cultural "content" of the workshop, participants began to recognize how this form and content effortlessly complement each other in order to reveal the beauty and benefits of embracing our globalized world.

Additionally, they began to realize the power structures in place that try to censor¹ this form of expression. Participants' unfamiliarity with hybrid poetics or code-meshing, ironically, is a result of a dominant discourse limiting expressive art forms and other languages from the cannon. Participants from the Conversations on Race Capstone were already aware of policy in Arizona that censored an ethnic studies program. Although the MAS program had proven to be largely beneficial, the superintendent in power felt that embracing the Chicano culture in school was "unAmerican." My participants were given this information in a prior lesson plan, but they were able to apply the hands-on experiential elements of my workshop to heighten their overall understanding of that lesson.

Likewise, participants were able to reflect on their own lives and use this workshop to benefit themselves. Nia Little, a participant from the Conversations on Race Capstone, wrote a poem titled "Schadenfreude," which translates from German

¹ Censorship of cultural identity was introduced in the Anzaldua poem and further explored in the group discussion.

to mean the pleasure received from another's misfortune. She embodied this notion by inserting herself into her poem within the context of America's legacy of oppression. It is a tragically beautiful piece that beckons readers to consider what they know of the United States' "post-race" reality. This exercise allowed her to reflect on her own positionality as a woman of color by also providing support for those who can empathize. This is a revolutionary form of artistic expression that expands the conversation that power structures have historically tried to silence.