Love, Community, and Quakertown: Guidance from bell hooks on Teaching Counterstories

Jackie Hoermann-Elliott

> *Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks.*
>
> —bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21

As a course assistant to a professor of color at Texas Christian University (TCU), the predominantly white institution where I earned my doctorate, I first encountered bell hooks's theory of engaged pedagogy as a path toward education as a practice of freedom. Several years later, I found myself reconnecting with hooks's scholarship in an inverse scenario: as a white faculty member teaching students at a minority-serving institution (MSI) about the historical displacement of people of color in our local community. Intent on teaching this class as justly as possible, I found myself returning to the pages of *Teaching to Transgress*, *Teaching Community*, and *Bone Black*. And after a long semester filled with laughter, playfulness, and much humbling dialogue, I learned of hooks's passing on December 15, 2021. Although I never met hooks in person, her influence on my antiracist pedagogical development and the discipline at large feels significant as well as unfinished.

hooks's impact on the field of English studies is one to reflect on as we move further and more meaningfully in the direction of antiracist writing pedagogy and assessment (Baker-Bell, Inoue). Rhetoric and composition scholars are demanding greater centering of Black voices in all our teaching, research, and service (*This Ain't Another Statement!*), and in revisiting hooks's most important theoretical texts on liberatory pedagogy, we heed this call. In rereading hooks, we realize the many strides toward equity she made possible for our disciplinary community, and that the power of love and community she so deeply believed in can be felt and seen in our classrooms and local communities if teachers are willing to take risks. The epigraph to this article is one I have carried with me as my identity and institutional contexts have

shifted; it is one reminding me that my work as an antiracist pedagogue is ongoing, that I am growing, and that growing requires me to be vulnerable in the classroom.

My purpose in this article is to explain how hooksian pedagogy helped me understand my positionality as a white, tenure-track faculty member teaching a course on the displacement of people of color by former leaders of my now majority-minority institution. I center the teachings from hooks that helped me navigate pedagogical risk-taking in and out of traditional classroom spaces, and I argue that transrhetorical connections can be made across seemingly disparate past and present-day educational sites, ones where hooks's lessons on love, community, excitement, and even renewal reignite disciplinary commitment to education as a practice of freedom.

After offering a brief overview of transrhetoricity as my chosen methodological approach for researching and teaching a course focused on local counterstories, I describe the geographically related educational sites buried beneath institutionalized, majoritarian narratives in North Texas to contextualize my retelling of the history of Quakertown, a community of free Black citizens who were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated farther away from my campus, Texas Woman's University (TWU), at a point in the twentieth century when Ku Klux Klan activity was on the rise. The history of this community is one of many compelling counterstories, to use Aja Y. Martinez's term, and one running counter to the dominant narratives formerly espoused by my institution. By sharing vulnerable moments from my teaching of Quakertown, I hope to demonstrate how the antiracist pedagogical development of other white academics is well steered by hooks.

Figure 1. Quakertown school children seated outside the second Frederick Douglass High School. In 1913, the first school burned down the night before opening. Image courtesy of the TWU Libraries Woman's Collection.

Transrhetoricity and Counterstory

To the best of my knowledge, bell hooks never penned the word transrhetoricity, but her work was markedly transrhetorical, drawing on counterstories from sites that shaped her philosophy of education. Similar to Rachel C. Jackson's analysis of Oklahoma's first state flag in "Red Flags of Dissent," I adopt transrhetoricity as a way of understanding "the dynamic movements and unfolding meanings occurring across the scope and depth of complex rhetorical networks" (79). Unlike Jackson's case study, my analysis is less neatly confined to a singular case or object. Instead, I look at a complex network of historical and contemporary educational sites to better understand how we can research—and in turn teach—to parse counterstories from institutionalized majoritarian narratives. I analyze sites where forced movement has occurred in order to piece together how these sites collectively constitute a larger historical-educational network buried by "dominator culture" (hooks, *Teaching Community* 197). Because histories of racism are often "buried alive" or "embedded into material landscapes" (Goldberg, Hawthorne), transrhetorical analysis is well suited to the work of "dismantling coloniality within and across local historical and cultural spaces" (Jackson 83).

Transrhetoricity is also highly adaptable in that it can double as both research and teaching method when uncovering local histories of racism with students. In summer 2021, I joined a group of faculty fellows committed to bringing the history of Quakertown to our campus community. After completing a five-week, immersive summer training supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Grant, I found myself collecting archival information on Quakertown and other local freedom colonies with assistance from my cohort as well as regional scholars who were willing to share their personal research or lived experiences. Thereafter, the history of this community would continue unveiling itself to me once our training had ended and the semester began. Well into the course, my students would discover artifacts in local archives that I had not previously encountered. In much the same way that the research for this project required a transrhetorical approach to collecting and connecting archival information across a network of sites, our class required a transrhetorical approach to piecing together these counterstories that had been scattered across multiple locations. In other words, I researched to teach course content effectively, but I also taught as a means of deepening my research.

Complementary to hooksian theory and transrhetoricity is Aja Y. Martinez's method/ology of counterstory, which has helped me to remain cognizant

of my role in retelling the history of Quakertown. Counterstories, as Martinez explains, move us away from accepting dominant or majoritarian narratives, serving as both "method and methodology" (26) to "empower the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies" (3). Ideally, counterstories are retold by minoritized people who have lived or who can relate to the stories of other minoritized people facing adversity. Although counterstory is best represented by minoritized people, this does not preclude white teachers and scholars from telling counterstories. Martinez states that "Whites (when critically self-reflective of their whiteness) can and do tell counterstories, and people of color, in contrast, can and do tell majoritarian stories" (29). My goal in sharing these stories is not to appropriate them for my own scholarly benefit—although I candidly acknowledge that a publication credit for this article will professionally benefit me—but to ensure that the intellectual and emotional labor of telling counterstories doesn't fall squarely on the shoulders of scholars of color alone. I hope that by exposing some vulnerable moments in my own teaching, I will encourage white faculty to try teaching counterstories and to reflect in order to improve their antiracist pedagogical development.

Fruitful overlap exists between hooks's retelling of her own educational counterstories in *Bone Black* and Martinez's method/ology of counterstory. In *Ain't I a Woman?*, hooks chronicles the innumerable ways white feminists have excluded Black women from liberation efforts and calls on white women to do the work of confronting white racism so as to not perpetuate nor do further harm to biracial, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC). hooks notes that there are opportunities for narrative refocus, saying, "But there are also white folks who are simply asking for direction and wanting to talk over the details of the journey" (*Teaching Community* 78). Both hooks and Martinez teach us that white allies can remain critically self-reflexive while educating students about counterstories of racial injustice. Given my positionality as a white female academic, I returned to hooks's teachings to try to establish a classroom community that invites all students to think self-reflexively about my role in telling, their role in learning, and our community's role in recovering Quakertown counterstories.

Transrhetorical Networks of Education in the South

Thinking transrhetorically about local histories of racism in North Texas and hooks's experiences with integration in Kentucky reveals interconnected movements of meaning across educational sites in the southern United States.

Much like early twentieth-century Oklahoma, Texas in the Reconstruction Era presented former slaves and their families with limited financial autonomy in the form of land—and often at the cost of grave danger, discrimination, or financial ruin (Teague). Some of the atrocities of this era have been brought to light in recent scholarship as well as in North Texas community activism and journalism. In Fort Worth, a new center for arts and community healing is being developed in the same brick building that once housed the Klan's state headquarters (Transform 1012). An hour away in Dallas, a local magazine writer shines a light on "The Fair Park Lie," an extensive exposé of Dallas officials forcing out approximately 300 Black families to build a massive new parking lot for the state fairgrounds—the site of the largest recorded Klan initiation (Crain, Payne). And at the top of the metroplex in Denton, faculty and leadership at TWU are actively working to recover and honor the history of Quakertown through several campus initiatives.

The early history shared between Quakertown and my campus texturizes hooks's discussion of white female racism. In the mid-1870s, Quakertown was established as a community of free Black citizens, also known as a freedom colony (Roberts and Biazar). The 27 families who made this trip up north from the now affluent area of White Rock in Dallas were in search of a better future, so they settled as close as possible to the Denton Downtown Square in order to have access to running water and electricity sooner than if they had settled farther out of town ("Remembering Quakertown"). The community thrived in this space for over four decades, eventually growing in size to 60 families and achieving significant economic independence as they established their own school, grocery store, medical office, morgue, confectionery, and several churches and restaurants ("Remembering Quakertown").

Meanwhile, at the northern edge of Quakertown, an organization of women's clubs and temperance movement advocates were formalizing plans to create a small college for the practical education of "rural and small-town girls" (Thompson). In 1901, a long-debated bill was passed, establishing TWU by its original name, the "Texas Industrial Institute and College for the Education of the White Girls of the State of Texas in Arts and Sciences" (Sahlin 110). In 1903, TWU's first campus building was erected on a hill overlooking Quakertown—with one well-manicured lawn standing between the two communities (Sahlin 111). Just two decades later in 1921, former TWU president F. M. Bralley rallied local officials and women's clubs for assistance relocating "the menace of the negro quarters" farther away from campus (Teague 159). With tremendous campaigning and support from the local Shakespeare Club, the local newspaper, TWU faculty, and faculty wives—many of whom

were connected to the Denton chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy (Luther Rummel 92)—a bond proposing that the Quakertown community be disbanded to build a park in its place passed by a wide margin (Stallings 8).

Quakertown residents resisted in what ways they could. One resident, Will "Dollar Bill" Hill, sued the city for financial relief; another locally infamous resident, Mary Ellen Taylor, refused to leave her parlor rocking chair even as her home was being lifted and transported to Southeast Denton (Teague 168). Today, the geographical terrain that was once home to Quakertown now exists as a large green space for festivals and events. The memory of the people of Quakertown survives in a few dozen archival photographs, letters, and memories passed down by its descendants.

By the 1960s, hooks became part of the next generation forced to move. Due to educational desegregation in Kentucky, hooks and other Black students were catapulted into a complex transrhetorical network of educational inequity that redefined American educational interests for decades to come. In *Bone Black*, she offers the counterstory of her transition from an all-Black school to an integrated one:

> We no longer like attending school. We are tired of the long hours spent discussing what can be done to make integration work. We discuss with them knowing all the while that they want us to do something, to change, to make ourselves into carbon copies of them so that they can forget we are here, so that they can forget the injustice of their past. They are not prepared to change. (hooks 52)

White educators and administrators facilitating forced educational integration did not preemptively account for the loss of community Black students might feel in a predominantly white school system. Similar to the people of Quakertown, hooks found herself in an exceedingly difficult to navigate transrhetorical network of movement spread across distinct educational sites. Her memoir is one of myriad other counterstories of Black resistance to integration subsumed beneath majoritarian narratives, reading almost like an epilogue to the Quakertown story. Limited archival history remains to help us piece together what Quakertown residents' educational experiences were like after disbandment. Nevertheless, it behooves us to consider hooks's counterstory as one following on the generational heels of Quakertown, another southern community marred by racism and educational inequity. Thinking critically about these counterstories keeps writing pedagogues focused on dismantling modern-day structures of educational oppression with strategies many of us have lost sight of after over two years of pandemic-disrupted teaching, strategies such as love.

Finding Love and Community

The role of love in teaching sounded like a woo-woo concept before I met Dr. M. Francyne Huckaby—or Fran, as she preferred us to call her—a faculty member of color teaching a Foundations of Educational Philosophy course to junior and senior education majors enrolled at TCU.[1] First as her student, then her teaching assistant, and later her research assistant, I observed the many ways Fran espoused the kind of love hooks describes in *Teaching Community*, that which "is the foundation on which every learning community can be created . . . [and which] will always move us away from domination in all its forms" (137). Fran showed love in so many ways: bringing us trinkets from her travels abroad, laughing with us in feverish fits at midterm, inviting us into her home for class celebrations, and sharing with us the powerful stories of the women who raised her and educated her. In all these ways, she poured into us as individuals, and she sparked our love of pedagogical inquiry in and outside the classroom.

I remember one pre-semester meeting in Fran's office, which was always stocked with granola bars and clementines for food-insecure students, when she was outlining our course reading schedule, and she said, "Of course, we're going to read bell hooks." I sensed then what is still true now: hooksian pedagogy would change my pedagogical identity. Prior to meeting Fran and reading hooks, I had only thought of my teaching as a service to tuition-paying students. To the contrary, in her *Teaching to Transgress* chapter on "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process," hooks writes,

> To the extent that professors bring this passion, which has to be fundamentally rooted in a love for ideas we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears. (196)

Fran's passion was educational activism, which she spoke of often by sharing updates on her documentary filmmaking and research into protests against standardized testing. When she was not teaching hooks's words, she was acting on them, traveling around the country to record and photograph teachers, parents, and students creatively protesting the dominant educational paradigm's prioritization of standardized testing and neoliberal values. And once, when Fran took me with her to Washington D.C. as a film crew assistant, I was able to see how engaging in community activism is yet another way to love our communities and our students. She cared for us and shared with us what she was passionate about, which enamored all of her undergraduate students and graduate assistants to the idea of a better educational tomorrow.

A few years later and a few more miles down the road, I found myself rereading hooks's theories of love and learning while preparing to teach a course investigating the counterstories of Quakertown at TWU. History being nothing short of ironic, TWU's student demographics, mission, and core values have changed drastically within the last century. *U.S. News and World Report*'s 2021 "Best Colleges" rankings reported that TWU was the most diverse campus in Texas and the fifth most diverse institution "nationally out of more than 1,500 regionally accredited schools evaluated" (Flores). TWU faculty and leadership have taken an interest in righting the wrongs of the University's past. Our Chancellor has formed a committee to erect a campus memorial to honor the people of Quakertown, former president Bralley's name has been removed from a building on campus (Reid), and in 2021, I along with a cohort of other faculty contributed to the *Quakertown Stories Project*.

As part of my work for the project, I chose to teach a place-based, themed section of first-year composition uncovering the history of Quakertown. The class, which was taught in a hybrid format with one required weekly meeting, consisted of 23 mostly first-year students. The sequencing of major projects began with a learning narrative, for which students were asked to think critically about their past experiences in academic and non-academic learning environments, and it was in this first unit that I began to share initial information with students about the history of Quakertown. By the second unit, the Profile of a Place essay, students were given more detailed information on the history of Quakertown, and as a class we visited the physical location where Quakertown once stood. For the third unit, we returned to Quakertown once more as well as made a visit to a local archive in preparation for them to write an analysis paper of one archival artifact connected to Quakertown's history. For the final unit, students were invited to remix any of the first three projects into a multimodal piece of their choosing. Students created an array of final projects, including acrylic paintings, collages, slide-based presentations, and infographics, and they were invited to present their work at a public town hall event hosted by the project the following spring.

On paper, this description of the Quakertown-themed course read simply enough, but in our weekly class discussions, I endeavored to bring my love for this displaced community to my students in a way that would transform social relations among them, myself, and our campus. To do this, I leaned into my training for the *Quakertown Stories Project* and my reading of *Teaching Community*, which assured me that cultivating a sense of community would be crucial if love for Quakertown's history was to be actualized.

Where We Connect

Prior to teaching the Quakertown course, hooks had already solidified in my mind that finding connection within and across difference is one of the most powerful ways to unite a classroom community. During an early meeting with the *Quakertown Stories Project*, one guest speaker discussed her practice of establishing community agreements, an activity that struck me as notably hooksian. Toward the end of *Teaching Community*, hooks reflects on the fear we feel when we decide to move from "talk to action," adding that the hope we find within our communities can help us overcome any feeling of fear. In a final, touching statement, hooks writes,

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (*Teaching Community* 197)

Facilitating the creation of a set of community agreements felt like a vital first step toward building some sense of security and an appreciation of difference within our classroom community. Although establishing community agreements is not a foolproof way to ensure that every voice is heard, it was a step in the direction of aligning our shared values at our first and most familiar educational site: our classroom. On day one, I asked students to handwrite answers to the following questions:

> As a writer, what do I need to feel safe, supported, and respected?
> As a speaker, what do I need to feel safe, supported, and respected?
> As a student, what do I need to feel safe, supported, and respected?

Accompanying these questions was a short conversation with my students about how they might find themselves with different needs in different roles. They submitted their responses at the end of class, and they were invited to remain anonymous if they wished. For the following week, I created a slide for each question, listing de-identified responses on each slide and placing tally marks next to those that were repeated more than once. After explaining how I read through and identified common themes among responses, I presented a list of thirteen community agreements for students to review and approve. Each agreement began with "We will . . ." to promote collective accountability and was followed by an active verb to inspire action. Our community agreements helped us to see that many of us, despite our differences, commonly value the same forms of support, such as open-mindedness, encouragement, respect, humility, and patience.

What's more, our community agreements were not a one-time exercise. Every week, I built into our lesson plan an opportunity to review our thirteen agreements prior to a discussion or an activity requiring heightened vulnerability or sensitivity to others' feelings. Pointing back to these agreements week-after-week instilled a sense of responsibility in my students that some may not have felt had we not been continually reminded to work toward building the community we needed. This weekly exercise also became a weekly statement of love for our classroom community, reminding us all how to set boundaries, take intellectual risks in a respectful way, revel in differences, and identify our shared values. My weekly oral review of our community agreements was one way I fostered love through modeling accountability to my students, but it is worth acknowledging that love can come with limits.

Where We Excite

About a month into the course, I sensed that some students could be feeling racial battle fatigue, and it was at this time that hooks's theory of engaged pedagogy prompted me to think about bringing more love and excitement to students. At the start of week four, we took a walk to our second educational site, Quakertown Park, an excursion that started off feeling light and lively. Some students relaxed on benches and others swung on adjacent swings as they listened to the history of Quakertown unfold. The accounts of residents being forced out or unfairly compensated for the property they lost (Luther Rummel 119) had a profound, noticeably sobering effect on most students. I anticipated that some would lean in more to listen while others would lean back or look away in discomfort, so I planned an arts-based inquiry exercise to follow this discussion (Coemans and Hannes 41). Students were invited to draw with chalk any images that represented what they were generally feeling or curious about while processing these counterstories of racism. Students headed toward the large pail of colorful chalk quite easily, and some sketched out interpretive images of the park or the people who might have lived there. Students who wanted to explore the shape and color of what they were feeling were more abstract in their renderings.

At the end of this activity, I noticed one of my students sitting quietly at the edge of the playground, far away from the others; they were uninterested in heading back to campus with the rest of the group. I signaled to the class to walk back without me so that I might have a moment to check on this student privately. When I did, they assured me they were fine, and they said they wanted a little more time to sit in the park alone. Yet as I walked away, I worried that the retelling of these counterstories might have felt too heavy

for this student on this day. I also worried about how this student felt hearing me, a white teacher, share this history I come to through personal interest rather than lived experience or cultural connection. It is worth acknowledging that all of these considerations contributed to their decision to sit in silence in Quakertown after our lesson had ended.

This second site represents part of the larger transrhetorical network of our class's inquiry into Quakertown as well as a moment when I learned that love—no matter how it is formed—comes with limits. I began to understand that my continual unveiling of Quakertown might trigger feelings of racial battle fatigue for my students. I will never truly know what went through the student's mind on that day, but this unsettling moment helped me re-align my approach to teaching Black counterstories with engaged pedagogy. From this point on, I began talking to my students more about my identity and role in retelling Quakertown counterstories than I had before. I problematized the fact that a BIPOC faculty member was not standing in my shoes, telling the same stories. We talked about systemic racial issues within society, such as the underrepresentation of BIPOC teachers in secondary and higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, "Number and Percentage"; National Center for Education Statistics, "Race/ethnicity"). And after some time spent rereading *Teaching to Transgress*, it occurred to me that the solemnity with which I presented Black counterstories may have been too heavy-hearted for my students. If my students were to understand the love I feel for the counterstories of Quakertown—in the same way I appreciated Fran's love of educational activism—I needed to bring more love and excitement to the retelling of this history. Too much seriousness, hooks warns us, is grounds for student disengagement. We must bring a little zeal, which hooks describes as follows:

> Excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. (*Teaching to Transgress* 7)

Akin to love, excitement should never be written off as a frivolous feeling. Much to the contrary, excitement holds the power to disrupt majoritarian narratives. Oftentimes, encouraging excitement means identifying opportunities to go "off script" or break from the agenda laid out in the day's lesson plan when students need greater energy from teachers. Within a few weeks, the

change I felt in my classroom was palpable and would become increasingly salient when facing new challenges going forward.

To be clear, such a shift in excitement is not one to be made haphazardly, especially in a course investigating histories of local racism and counterstory. For excitement to feel authentic and well intentioned, it has to come from a place of love. I showed my students my love for Quakertown by taking them back to the park for additional lessons, at their request, and gleefully exclaiming when they shared powerful insights. I also worked to normalize discussions of race in the classroom so that no student was made to feel their lived experiences or interest in race was a forbidden topic. I asked them questions about their lives, brought food to our class sessions, and attended their athletic and residential life events to show how deeply I cared for each of them as people with lives outside of class. When I set aside my own doubts about my ability to teach Quakertown counterstories well enough, class began to feel more exciting. I refocused on my love for the community in my own classroom, and I readied myself to learn from these students in one high-stakes moment to follow.

Where We Learn

In the last full month of the semester, I found myself in silence again, albeit this time kneeling beside a student outside of a local archive, where the pangs of modern-day racism had been inflicted in not-so-subtle terms. When I tried to speak, my voice shook and my hands trembled. Eventually, I was able to say to my student that creating a safe and positive learning experience for them was my top priority, that I would like their input on how to address the incident, and that they were empowered to choose what they did next. They decided to leave. We walked back into the archive together. They grabbed their backpacks and notebooks, and I would not see them again for two weeks.

Moments before, I, the student, and the rest of the class had been spread across two sets of gray tables, looking at a couple of Quakertown artifacts, including the photograph of Frederick Douglass High School featured at the start of this article. The guest speaker, a white archivist, had been introducing us to the archive's collections. Although she did not use the term counterstories, her oft-repeated phrase "History is in the cracks" meshed well with our course theme. But during one segment of her presentation, when she was instructing the class on how to search old yearbook indexes, she asked a question no one was prepared to answer: "What other words might people [in early twentieth-century America] have used instead of 'Black' or 'African American?'" Silence fell across the room. After a few seconds, I broke

the silence by saying, "A word I choose not to say." My tone was firm—firm enough, I thought, to prevent what would happen next. In a fiery response, she replied, "Oh, come on now. There's no sin in the word!" before saying the n-word loudly and clearly. Not long after, my student walked out; I followed. The rest of the class sat stunned while the speaker continued, I am told, as if nothing had happened.

Unpacking this microcosmic moment can help us begin to dismantle complex transrhetorical dynamics of past racial trauma in relation to the white female racism hooks describes. At the front of the class, a white female archivist had just spoken aloud a racial slur to a class of mostly students of color, taught by a white female professor seated among them, as part of a course taught at an MSI. This site presents a grossly inequitable power dynamic that would make many people, regardless of their race, feel simultaneously shocked and uncomfortable. In advance of teaching this course, I had thought many times about how I would handle a student using a racial slur, but I had not anticipated how I might respond to a colleague using a slur. As I would later write in an email to my department chair, who helped me identify options for legal and administrative recourse, my desire to care for and comfort my student in the moments that followed was approached carefully; I did not want to inflict any sort of pedagogic violence on them by insisting they talk to me (Matusov and Sullivan). In a follow-up email to the student presenting them with options, I acknowledged openly that they might not feel comfortable talking to me about this incident, but that did not mean I could not empower them to teach me how they thought best to handle this racist incident. I also identified BIPOC staff members in our counseling and student life offices, in case they might feel more comfortable exploring this incident with other campus professionals. And while concerning myself with the immediate needs of this student, I frantically processed how to best care for all my other students. I felt as though the delicate bond of community I had spent the last eight weeks working to fortify had cracked like an egg thrown against a brick wall.

What I learned at this third site is that if we are truly committed to furthering hooks's visions of a more just society, then all faculty, especially white faculty, need to know when to teach and when to be taught. To quote hooks, "The process of ending racism in thought and action is always a mutual enterprise. All our power lies in understanding when we should teach and when we should learn" (*Teaching Community* 78). hooks's words resonate with my reflection on this site for several reasons. First, the idea that ending racism is a "mutual enterprise" reminds us of the responsibility educators hold, particularly when teaching counterstories. Second, although there is

much I wish I had said or done differently in the moment, going to my most visibly upset student and kneeling beside her was a simple, embodied action to demonstrate my willingness to learn. It was vulnerable and transgressive. Had I stood above or sat next to them, I do not think I would have been able to embody how deeply I wanted to learn from them in that moment, how I wanted to put them in control of the next lesson our community would learn.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that in making ourselves open to learning we are to become passive or to expect students to take on the extra burden of teaching white faculty or students how to respond to racism, but I am suggesting that with great humility and vulnerability we should open ourselves up to these opportunities to learn. hooks distinguishes between taking advantage of others' knowledge and actively learning from them:

> White people who want people of color to do the work for them, who want us to draw the map and then carry them on our back down the road that ends racism are still playing out the servant/served paradigm. But there are also white folks who are simply asking for direction and wanting to talk over the details of the journey. They are doing what any of us do when we work for social change and move from a place of ignorance toward one of greater knowledge. They are our allies in the struggle. (*Teaching Community* 78)

This metaphor of the journey has informed my own antiracist development over the years, allowing me to critically reflect on to whom, what, or where I should turn for questions when I lack answers, because I am not trying to create extra labor or burden for BIPOC students or colleagues. This is why I have turned to hooks's written word for guidance so many times. From hooks, I have learned that I can be an ally on this journey toward racial justice by acting when I see racist microaggressions happening in my classrooms, professional meetings, writing groups, or community. Working for social change means one day I am texting a close friend and faculty of color to acknowledge that another faculty member calling her "exotic" was a microaggression and to ask how I can support her. Other days, it means filing a complaint with my local elections office when I hear a white poll worker mutter that an incoming Black voter "must be a democrat," even though he has no identifying political information on his person.

As for my own classroom that day, I realized that the love I have for my students—which I had attempted to show them each week through our upholding of our community agreements and by reaching out when they felt pain discussing the history of racism in our county—would boomerang back in full force in this crisis moment. I returned to the rest of my class, noticed the guest speaker had finished her presentation, and saw my students waiting on pins and needles for the cue to pack up and leave. The guest presenter

wanted to talk to me about the student who had left, and I let her know that we would follow up later because I needed to prioritize the student's preferences for addressing the incident. As soon as I reunited with my class outside the archive, one student blurted out a vague statement condemning racism. Although I can no longer remember the exact words spoken, this was the student's way of addressing the class's collective concern for the classmate who left. The students wanted to talk about what had happened, and to me, this moment presented another unanticipated way of loving my students through listening and learning instead of talking and teaching. At the beginning of our semester, the students would not have been comfortable jumping into such a conversation, but now they were. Now we were doing our journey work together.

My purpose in sharing this final difficult story is not to suggest that I handled this incident perfectly or even as well as I would have liked in the moment. Rather, I am attempting to normalize white faculty members acknowledging the limits of their ability to identify with students of color while also insisting that white faculty remain vigilant in their efforts to uplift counterstories. As a discipline, we need to have real and raw conversations about when our antiracist teaching work fails to live up to our own expectations. If we hold ourselves to an unattainable standard of perfection in antiracist pedagogy, we do a disservice to all faculty, especially faculty of color who do not need the added pressure of being the only teachers of counterstory. Or as one reviewer of this article described it, we need to proceed with a sense of "scholarly humility" that supports counterstories in the classroom. My retelling of my own counterstory in teaching Quakertown is less than perfect, and it leaves me vulnerable to disciplinary and institutional criticism, but in sharing, I am attempting to normalize white faculty reflecting on the highs and the lows of our antiracist pedagogical work.

Where We Renew

On a steamy afternoon in April, I watched as Denton's incumbent, Republican-backed Black mayor spoke in friendly opposition to his Democrat-backed white opponent. The TWU Chancellor and part of her cabinet were seated on the other side of the room, and one row ahead of me were two Black sisters disagreeing about whether or not reparations should be made to Quakertown descendants. Unfolding before me was hooks's vision of education as a practice of freedom. The event, a town hall hosted by the *Quakertown Stories Project*, brought together local policymakers, TWU leadership, Denton residents, and faculty and students who participated in a *Quakertown Stories*-sponsored

course over the last year to revel in those differences that "bring us closer," that unite us in understanding how community is meaningful (hooks, *Teaching Community* 197). In that large multipurpose room within the Denton Senior Center, a building located in the southeast corner of Quakertown Park, I also saw images of my students' chalk art and at least one multimodal remix project hung on an adjacent wall—a painting of a Black community member with a white hand covering his mouth and a reminder to me to do more listening than talking, more learning than teaching.

What I felt was love, the same love for ideas that Fran showed me and that hooks asked us to bring to our students. We were called on to show students the world outside the academy, and it is for this reason the *Quakertown Stories* leaders hosted the town hall off campus. We needed to think with the community rather than separately from the community. Being off campus disrupted the expectation that the classroom is the only site where we learn. Being in community with people not enrolled at our academic institution is perhaps one of the most profound ways to see that the love for ideas we want to instill in our students has an afterlife. Love for learning can and will continue after degrees are conferred. In this room, I saw people gathered together because they loved and desired to learn from the community: past and present.

Much like the inverse teaching scenario at the beginning of this article, I remained critically self-reflexive of the contrasts in diversity represented at this town hall, which resonated with a piece of advice hooks gives in *Teaching to Transgress*. At the end of her second chapter on the "Revolution of Values," hooks leaves us with a parting thought: "All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom" (*Teaching to Transgress* 34). This last event concluded my formal involvement with the grant-funded *Quakertown Stories Project*, but it was not the final site for learning. For my own antiracist pedagogical development and the development of the field at large, we must keep looking for local counterstories of racism hidden within contemporary educational networks, and we must keep reading hooks if we are to continually renew our commitment to our antiracist pedagogical journeys.

Note

1. TCU's origin story comes with a checkered past, having been founded by two brothers who served in varying capacities in the Confederate Army (Goodwyn).

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Jackie Hoermann-Elliott (she/her) is assistant professor of English and director of the first-year composition program at Texas Woman's University. Her research has appeared in *Composition Forum* and several edited collections, and her book—*Running, Thinking, Writing: Embodied Cognition in Composition*—was published by Parlor Press in 2021. She is currently working on an edited collection of narratives focused on the challenges of parenting in graduate school.