

# PACIFIC VIEW

"Ruby Beach" by Billy Savanh CC BY 2.0

Two Year College Association Pacific Northwest Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2019

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## From the Chair

Julie Swedin, Yakima Valley College

Greetings from your newly-elected chair! My name is Julie Swedin, and I am an English instructor and the Department Chair at Yakima Valley College. I now have been teaching for over twenty years. My first decade in the classroom was spent with high school students. Currently, this is my 11th year teaching English composition full-time at Yakima Valley College. Alongside teaching English, I began a doctorate program in Education six years ago, with a focus on Teacher Leadership, at Washington State University. Last month my journey as a student came to end with my successful defense of my dissertation: "A Postmodern Examination of a College Writing Curriculum." Needless to say, the combination of teaching and being taught left me little free time to enjoy my family: my wonderful husband, Christopher Swedin—with whom I have been married for close to 23 years, and our two beautiful children, Anna 17, and Eric 14—but somehow, we do manage to find moments for relaxation and fun!

I am so excited and honored to continue to be a part TYCA-PNW, an organization that highlights and celebrates the engagement and commitment of all of you, who so tirelessly dedicate yourselves to doing such inspiring work. In and out of our college classrooms, you support the academic success of our diverse students. Over the past decade, I have served on the Regional Executive Committee (REC) in a couple of different capacities: first, as the Publications Co-Editor and second, more recently, as the Secretary. As your current chair, I am looking forward to

taking on the various responsibilities that come with this leadership position.

Recently, this spring, Yakima Valley College was privileged to host our regional TYCA-PNW &

PNWCA Conference 2019, and it was a huge success! The theme of this year's conference was *Community: Nurturing Deep Connections on our Campuses, in our Classrooms, and in our Writing Centers*, and this theme became a reality for all of the attendees who were able to experience a plethora of engaging sessions that kicked off with a panel that emphasized equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classrooms. Specifically, the panel included the compelling portraits and voices of two-year college students who shared their sociocultural identities as learners and whether practices in our learning environments make them feel welcomed or alienated. We were urged to consider how we, as educators, can make our students' learning spaces more inclusive. Next, just as we considered how we connect to our students in our classes, our Keynote Speaker, Krista Ratcliffe, a professor and chair of English at Arizona State University, whose research focuses on intersections of rhetoric, feminist theory, and critical race studies, walked us through how we can teach rhetorical listening as a strategy to unpack and discuss cultural



assumptions about race in our classrooms. Thus, this tactic serves as another bridge to understand race and develop rapport with our students.

Additionally, there were a bounty of generative sessions to choose from that ranged from how to get students talking using creative icebreakers to closing the distance that may be perceived between the instructor and students during peer review activities. What type of embodied learning can occur when the instructor sits down at the table as a fellow peer reviewer to intentionally create an equal learning space? Lastly, this year's conference featured an evening reception that showcased art, wine, and music, all created by Yakima Valley College students, which made for a delightful evening. The conference luncheon was a buffet of authentic Mexican cuisine that supported a local business of the Yakima Valley.

Another cause for celebration was the first TYCA National Conference that was held this year in Pittsburgh. The conference was a tremendous hit and exceeded our attendance goals. The next TYCA National Conference will be held in Milwaukee, and I encourage you to attend. The Conference Proposal will be distributed this summer, so please be on the lookout for further details and accompanying submission deadlines.

Finally, I would like to end my column with some personal reflections about this academic year. Graduation has been an encompassing theme for me, as well as in my home, since my daughter also graduated high school this year. When I was writing and revising each chapter of my dissertation, I had one famous quotation written on a yellow sticky note that I kept returning to for my own inspiration. As stated by the remarkable Eleanor Roosevelt, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." These words resonated within me as I persevered, believed in the beauty of my dreams, and finally completed my dissertation. For some of our students though, graduation may seem like a somewhat unattainable goal if they feel somehow like they may not belong in this academic setting as they traverse our campuses and classrooms. I leave you with a couple of questions: How can we help our own socially- and culturally-diverse college students, often first-generation, remember and hold on tight to the beauty of their individual dreams? How can we help them discover words of their own to guide them through their individual educational journeys that may entail both academic obstacles, as well victories, to eventually make their dreams for their own futures a reality? I hope you will join me in grappling with these questions as we work alongside our amazing students.

Have a restful and enjoyable summer!

## TYCA-PNW Regional Executive Committee

Chair	Julie Swedin, Yakima Valley College	jswedin@yvcc.edu
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# Meet the TYCA-PNW Regional Executive Committee Members!

*Editors' note: Elections for TYCA-PNW Regional Executive Committee (REC) positions were held at our conference this past April. Congratulations to those who are joining the REC or moving into new positions, and deepest thanks to our outgoing REC members: Andrea Ascuena (College of Western Idaho), Anna Erwert (Portland Community College), Jen Heckler (Highline College), Joy Palmer (College of Western Idaho), and Teresa Thonney (Columbia Basin College).*

*In this segment, we'd like to introduce some of the new and continuing members of the REC. Elections will be held at TYCA-PNW's next conference. If you're interested in learning more about TYCA-PNW or want to get involved, visit our website: [tyca-pnw.org](http://tyca-pnw.org), or email Julie Swedin, REC Chair: [jswedin@yvcc.edu](mailto:jswedin@yvcc.edu).*

## Jamie Jones, Assistant Chair

I am currently an instructor in the Humanities Division at Grays Harbor College #ghclife. I earned my PhD in Rhetoric from Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. #gopioneers #teamrhetoric. Currently, I'm teaching primarily writing, but I have designed queer literature and queer studies courses, literature courses focusing on graphic novels and other such texts, and a series of rhetoric courses focusing on activism, food, and queerness.



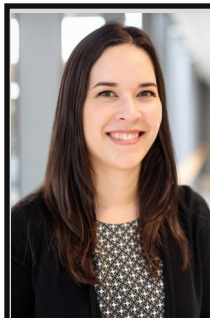
Some of my academic interests: Public Rhetorics, Queer Rhetorics, Rhetorical Genre Studies, Teaching for Transfer, Communication Studies, Writing Program Administration, Writing Pedagogy, History of Rhetoric, Visual Rhetoric, Feminist Rhetorics, Critical Theory, Rhetoric of Prisons (and the Criminal Justice System), Women & Gender Studies, Conscious Consumerism, and Veganism.

Some of my non-academic interests: reading, writing, music, hiking, snowshoeing, geocaching, disc golfing, kayaking, biking, and just about anything else that involves the outdoors. #getoutside

Pronouns: she/her/hers, they/them/theirs

## Justina Rompogren, Secretary

Hello! My name is Justina Rompogren, and I've been a faculty member in the English Department at North Seattle since 2017. That same year, I completed my Ph.D. in English Composition & Rhetoric from the University of Washington, and my areas of



specialization included multilingual writing and second language studies. I am passionate about academic administration and teaching, and I especially love working in the community college setting, an environment which fosters diversity, innovation, and progress in education. At North, I mainly teach composition classes and technical writing, and I like to incorporate topics related to science fiction, technology, and social relationships whenever possible! Before coming to North, I taught at the University of Washington, Tacoma Community College, Pacific Lutheran University, and King Mongkut's University in Bangkok, Thailand. As well, I served for two years as a liaison for the UW in the High Schools' English program, facilitating the teaching of UW's first-year writing course in high school across Washington state. While I am from Tacoma, WA, I now live in Seattle with my husband and two kitties, Bug and Sophie.

## Joy Clark, Membership Chair

I teach developmental and college-level composition classes, both at Yakima Valley College. Truly, I have the best job in the world! I can't decide what I love most: interacting with eager, dedicated, and open minds or reading what they write. I enjoy using popular culture as a consistent theme in FYC, and it keeps me on my toes as I attempt to work with students to make sense of the values promoted in a consumer-oriented, entertainment-focused culture. It makes for great writing!



As incoming Membership Chair, I plan to make the growth of TYCA-PNW a focus. I will be making lots of noise about how we should and can be drawing in new voices, expanding our reach, and letting our colleagues know what good things can happen when we draw our energies and resources together. So, be ready to hear from me soon-ish about that! I look forward to hearing your ideas about how we can together make an even more vibrant TYCA regional association!

## Patty Wilde, Co-Treasurer

Patty Wilde (she/her/hers) is an assistant professor of English and writing program administrator at Washington State University Tri-Cities. Prior to this position, she taught as adjunct faculty for over ten





years at community colleges in the Portland-metro area. She researches feminist rhetorics, rhetorics of the American Civil War, and composition theory and pedagogy. In collaboration with her colleague from the University of Montana, she is currently concluding a two-year study of dual/concurrent enrollment programs.



Kiera Squires, Member-at-Large

I am excited to serve as a member-at-large of our Regional Executive Committee for TYCA-PNW! I earned my Master's in English from Western Washington University in 2014 and was an adjunct instructor at Columbia Basin College for four years until I was hired to be tenure-track faculty last year. I have also taught in Coyote Ridge Corrections Center's AA program, which is through Walla Walla Community College. I teach mostly English 101 and 102, and any literature course I can get my hands on. So far, those have included American Literature, Introduction to Fiction, Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, British Literature, and LGBTQ Studies. I have a tattoo of an "unpretentious bouquet of very early-blooming parentheses" (from Salinger's short story "Seymour: An Introduction") and two cats, Guinevere and Merlin. I like to collect signed and first-editions; my most treasured is a first-edition *Franny and Zooey* by Salinger, which was an undergrad graduation present from my mom. I look forward to meeting you fellow English teachers through my service with TYCA!

The above is a picture of me on a lake in the Lake District, England.

Amy Minervini, Publication Co-Editor

Hello from the Idaho panhandle! I'm excited to join the editing team for TYCA-PNW's *Pacific View*. Doing so will combine my love for editing, writing, and supporting faculty and their exceptional ideas.



I come to TYCA by way of Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho. This small four-year college meets the needs of many types of students: those seeking associate's degrees, vocational degrees, certificate programs, bachelor's degrees, and a launching point for graduate school. I feel privileged to work with dedicated, resourceful, and compassionate colleagues at this

teaching institution, where students and their learning take center stage.

I have been teaching composition for over 20 years. I earned my bachelor of arts and master of arts in English from the University of Idaho (go Vandals!), where I minored in journalism and Spanish. I'm excited to be a more active member of TYCA-PNW and a liaison for colleagues in the region who share a passion for helping our students to become more empowered and successful writers.

When I'm not teaching, I enjoy spending time with my two children, Robbie (12) and Lillie (9), my parents Rob and Lynne, and my two mischievous lap dogs. I also love hitting the golf course and spending lazy days along the Snake River.

Ryan Witt, Publication Co-Editor



Hi, everyone. I'm Ryan, an assistant professor in the English Department at the College of Western Idaho, and I've been a co-editor of *Pacific View* since January 2017. I teach first-year writing, poetry writing, and rhetoric classes at CWI, where I work with an incredible group of colleagues. After growing up in the Boise area, I went on to earn BA and MFA degrees at the University of Idaho and a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric from Temple University. My research interests include trauma-aware pedagogy and community literacy, and I love to write and read poetry. When I'm not trying to work, I enjoy fly fishing; spending time with my wife, three daughters, and two dogs; and brewing award-winning beer. If you're in the area, let me know, and I'll hook you up with a pint or two.



"Captivity" by Emery Way CC BY 2.0

## Pacific View

### Call for Submissions

Submissions for the following sections will be considered for the next issue:

- **Practical Matters**, which gives specific classroom activities
- **Student Talk**, providing a student's perspective on learning
- **Professional Development**, ideas on developing self and/or others
- **Intersections**, addressing thoughts on theory and/or philosophy of teaching
- **Creative Outlet**, a spot where colleagues can exhibit their creative side
- **Interactions**, addressing articles in the previous issue

Submissions can be short or long (but not dissertation long) and sent electronically to [ryanwitt@cw.edu](mailto:ryanwitt@cw.edu) as an attached document (preferably Word). Be sure to include your school affiliation along with your name, address, phone, and email.

Because of the variety of genres, we will accept an abstract or full piece for review. Abstracts are not required, particularly for smaller pieces.

Abstract deadline for fall/winter 2019: Oct. 1st; Full piece deadline: November 15th; We will notify abstract submissions of their status no later than Oct. 30th. We respond quickly.

*Pacific View* is published twice a year, fall/winter and spring/summer, by TYCA-PNW Association, an affiliate of NCTE. *Pacific View* is an online only publication. All rights and title reserved, but feel free to share contents with colleagues.

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## TYCA-PNW Membership Information

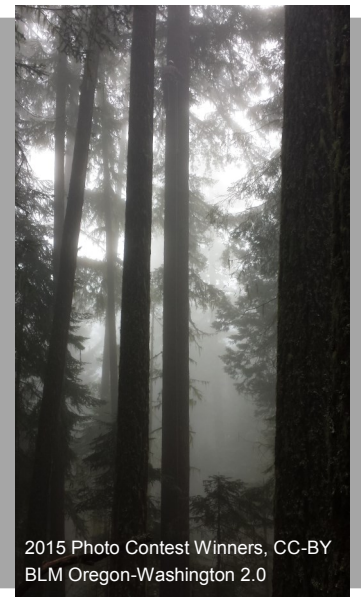
Membership is usually paid for via conference registration, but people who want to join or renew their membership and do not plan to attend the conference may do so by mail or electronically. An electronic form and payment option will be available soon at <http://tyca-pnw.org/>.

Mail membership should include Name, Home Address, College affiliation, Telephone, Email, Website (if applicable), and membership status to NCTE. Checks can be made payable to TYCA-PNW. One-year membership is \$20 for full-time faculty, \$10 for students, part-time & retired faculty.

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# Here You Speak for Which One?

Meridith Leo  
Suffolk County Community College



2015 Photo Contest Winners, CC-BY  
BLM Oregon-Washington 2.0

*It's all blurry. Too blurry to know for sure.*

"There it is!" my husband said. One week after arriving in the city of Palermo, we took the hour-long trek to a small mountainside village just outside of the province's city center. Partinico was nothing I had imagined it would be. The town was bustling with cars and people walking in every direction without a care in the world. Streets were lined with cafés, wedding dress shops, and cathedral churches, some of which had been there for hundreds of years. From the moment we stepped onto the uneven and broken-down cobblestone walkway, it was clear that we were the outsiders.

It was a brisk November afternoon, and with my camera in hand, I wandered down the streets trying to find some kind of connection to the town my grandmother had escaped in her youth. I slowly crept up to each storefront gazing at the contents each store held while trying to figure out what may have been there before. Perhaps it was a bakery or a linen store; it was not easy to surmise its past. "There it is!" my husband said again. "That's the church." We stood in front of a dilapidated churchlike relic and glanced at the limited paperwork my parents found before we left for the trip. *This was it*, I thought: *the place where my grandmother was baptized into God's family and the place where she attended church every Sunday with her parents*. Something was pulling me inside. I had to see what her eyes had once viewed. As I entered Parrocchia Maria Santissima, I felt uneasy; I felt like a stranger and an unwanted visitor. I sat in the back pew. The moment my body felt the cold wooden bench underneath me, I realized I hadn't genuflected. *You see that? You're not even a real Catholic*, I thought. Then something caught my eyes. There was a shimmering light

that was half blinding me, but it wasn't from a fancy 17th century light fixture or even the glaring sun hitting a glass-paned window. There was a mirror in the corner of the room that gathered energy from somewhere and decided to grab my attention.

After the last prayers were completed, I slowly walked around the vestibule of the cathedral. The church was beautiful but also typical. It was adorned with gold and crystal features. The floor and statues were made of marble. Taking in every architectural creation was overwhelming, but the mirror was still on my mind. I tried to pretend as if I didn't see it, but it knew that I had. As I made my way to the mirror, I heard voices calling to me. Before I knew it, I was staring into the mirror but not at myself. I was overcome by the elegance of the design of the piece with its glossy finish and its unique engravings. For a moment I thought I hadn't ever seen such a beautiful piece of wall-wear. I was overcome by its magnificence.

That was when I started to remember it all. That was when the muffled accented voices from my past echoed in my ears: "You live here. Work hard. Be a good smart girl."

\* \* \*

Tucked so comfortably in my bed with two goose down comforters plus the multi-colored crochet blanket my Nonna made me, there was no way I was going to move an inch from my covers. I was fast asleep when suddenly I woke to my mother's screams, "It's those damn mirrors again!" I slowly opened my crust-filled eyes and tried to wipe away any signs of a sleepless night. I dismounted from bed, got dressed, and brushed my teeth. As I made my way downstairs and to the breakfast table, I was awakened by the stressful tense air that had taken over the kitchen. I caught a

quick glimpse of my mother whose beautiful long golden locks had turned a coppery gray overnight. It was during breakfast that I learned Nonna's state had worsened. My mother demanded my attention: "Nonna is overwhelmed with grief. Her brain is deteriorating," I was told. *Huh? Brain deterioration?* It reminded me of that commercial where they crack an egg into a hot pan and say, "This is your brain. Now this is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" Was her brain becoming fried mush? I didn't get it. "Are you listening to me?" my mother said. I quickly nodded my head. "Good. Get dressed. We're going to see her today to make things right." *To make things right?* I thought.

\* \* \*

My father purchased the house for my grandparents, but Nonna was adamant about maintaining her privacy. That was before she started losing her mind. The outside of the house was welcoming; we had planted impatiens around the border of the driveway that complemented the cornflower blue shutters. Inside the house, the foyer opened up into a great room with ten-foot ceilings held by wooden beams that resembled the tangled vines of the strawberry patches in Nonna's backyard. It is in this room that a majority of exchanges took place; the television set, living room furniture, and dining room table enhanced the space that eventually would seem so vast between my Nonna and me. The furniture that adorned the house was passed down from generation to generation. Most of it was in really great condition; the wood had been carved into different shapes that you could only really see if you took your hand and dragged it along the edge. Each piece of furniture held a special memory; sometimes when we came over, Nonna would speak in Italian to the furniture. She would sing lullabies to it as she wiped each corner to maintain its youthful luster. Each room had at least one mirror that was left to the family. Every time someone would pass in our home country, they would send the departed's mirror to the next living relative, Nonna. I was skeptical from the beginning about these mirrors. It seemed like if you looked into them, your soul would be held for ransom.

The great room extended to two forks in the road; one hallway led to the two bedrooms where each of my grandparents slept. The other opening was much darker, and it led to the kitchen where not much cooking took place anymore. I used to hear stories how my Nonna made meals from scratch and used the freshest vegetables that she grew in her garden. She could've been an inspiration to the famous culinary genius Wolfgang Puck. As I made my way further into the house, I smelled a strong odor of melted rubber mixed with a metallic alloy.

She came from down the hallway wearing a nude slip, no underwear, a white t-shirt, and socks with house slippers that looked like they were from the dollar store. She was about one foot taller than me with white hair that resembled a short haired mink, she was balding in some spots, and it looked like she hadn't showered since last weekend. She was unbelievably beautiful once. My sister and I would thumb through her photo album listening to her cries that became white noise in the background. We'd admire her skin and

*I was skeptical from the beginning about these mirrors. It seemed like if you looked into them, your soul would be held for ransom.*

smile. The way she seemed to be saying so much without saying anything at all. Nowadays nothing Nonna did or said made sense. I was a bit embarrassed by her appearance, but the stench in the air took priority for the time being. "What's that smell?" I heard my mother say. "I don't know, Ma." I looked around the kitchen, which was well lit but had dishes that hadn't been washed in several days. I opened the refrigerator, and there was nothing in it except an empty egg carton. "What is that smell?" I said. I looked towards the stove and saw the flame on. I walked over slowly, and Nonna touched my shoulder and took my hand as we neared the stove together. I stared at the pot, which was now a brownish-black color that reminded me of the fertilizer we would put in the garden. The Teflon pot was burnt to a crisp. I reached down to turn off the flame, and Nonna gave me this scowling look that I didn't understand. Of course, I had to turn it off. I was surprised the whole house hadn't burnt down! I wasn't sure what her intentions with the pot were and maybe she wasn't either, but what was for sure is that I had become increasingly scared that Nonna was becoming more and more disconnected from all of us.

\* \* \*



Two days later, SLAM! I heard the phone bang down, and my parents were talking...loudly. "We need to do something about this. I can't live like this. She's screaming, crying, something about the mirrors."

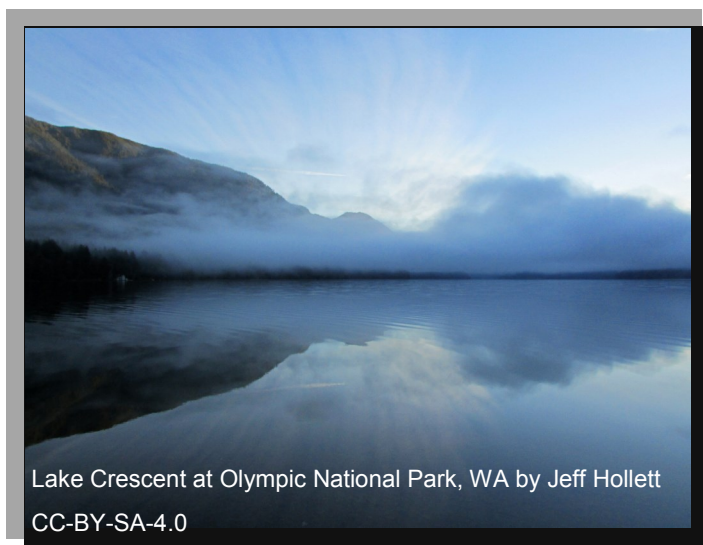
Less than an hour later, I assembled myself at Nonna's front door. This time I was a bit more apprehensive to go into the house. We turned the key and pushed open the front door; as I took my first step into the house, there was this overwhelming smell of Pine-Sol. It must have been lemon-scented, but it just seemed to mix with the continual smell of burning metal. With each step I took, I heard a murmur that was half in Italian, half in English; it was kind of like static, but as I kept walking closer, it seemed to become clearer. Nonna was peering into each mirror, standing in front of it and saying: "My Mother, My Mother, My Mother, My Mother, My Mother, My Mother, My Mother." She was on constant repeat mode.

She must have said it a dozen times while taking short breaks to catch her breath as tears ran from her face. I followed her as she walked into her bedroom. Nonna sat down on the floor and put her back to the door, throwing her face in her hands. I sat down beside her and said, "Calm down. We're here now. You're okay. Your mother loved you, and we love you." While the stanzas of verbal regurgitation halted, I knew something was very wrong. All of a sudden, Nonna got up and sat perched in an antique chair that probably belonged to her mother once. In her erect pose, she stared at me and said, "Who are you?" For a moment I had a painful prickly feeling throughout my entire body. I took a deep breath and swallowed hard. I got up from the cold, hard floor and guided Nonna's frail body from the lifeless chair to her bed. As I tucked her underneath the covers of her favorite goose down duvet, I rubbed her hair, trying to help her attain some sort of serenity or maybe I was trying to help myself attain some sort of peace. Either way the terrible exchange made me feel like I was losing someone in the most awful way.

The next day we were at the house again to check on her. Things were becoming more concerning, and we had to do what we could, to be there for the family, which meant spending more time at Nonna's. We walked into the house, and it was a complete replay of the day before; my grandmother was going from mirror to mirror trying to invoke the haunting images of her Italian ancestors. That was when it hit me. "Ma, let's turn the mirrors around. If she doesn't look into them, maybe she won't get upset." I became excited by my own resourcefulness in that moment. I guess I was on my way to becoming a good smart girl. "Okay. Let's try it," she said. We started working in each room from the back of the house to the front. When we got to the last mirror, I said I would do it myself; it was my favorite mirror in the house. That mirror in particular looked like it had seen some stuff; it was just hanging there on the wall soaking up everything going on around but never reflecting images unless someone was ready to see who they really were. The mirror was made of an aged rustic maplewood that was designed in a baroque form, interweaving shapes and figures that must have taken countless hours to hand carve. I climbed the step ladder and detached the cord that connected the mirror to the screw in the wall. Slowly, I began to turn the mirror when I felt a tug at my arm; it was so hard I almost fell from the three-foot ladder onto the ground. I turned my head, and it was Nonna. She gave me this grimacing look with her mouth as if I had discovered a problem with the mirrors she didn't want me to find.

\* \* \*

I always had a way of finding things from Nonna's past that she had hidden away. As a child, I once found my way into the abandoned attic. I found her vestito da sposa in an old dirty black bag. I was looking for something to dress up in and keep me occupied. It was shoved into a corner, and it



Lake Crescent at Olympic National Park, WA by Jeff Hollett  
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seemed the bag melted into the termite-eaten sheetrock. I cautiously stuck my hand in, not really knowing what to expect. It was too heavy, too much stuff to pull out, so I stuck my head in. It smelled of rotten moth balls. At first it felt awkward to pull this thing out of the bag. Hand-over-hand I pulled the vintage, golden spun gown until my entire being was covered in its satin silhouette. Nonna caught me up there, but she didn't yell at me. Instead, she glared at me and it felt like my whole being caught on fire. She didn't need to tell me what to do. I knew in that moment.

\* \* \*

She let go of my arm, and I continued to turn the mirror. I was very careful not to chip or bang the timber masterpiece; I didn't want to unknowingly take something away that had existed in its place. As the mirror made its complete turn, I saw vintage indentations engraved into the backside of the wood. They were initials of some kind and perhaps some words. I ran my fingers over the splintered letters and mouthed them quietly. I didn't know what they were. They seemed so foreign to me... something I knew I really wouldn't understand. I closed my eyes and imagined it was a list of long-lost relatives' names or maybe even a love's name that sentimentally found a home. Perhaps it was important dates that would only be meaningful to her. At last they might be her sisters' names and the brothers that were lost at birth. Maybe enough to take her back there. Whatever it said, I really didn't need to know anyway. She would only speak the language of our ancestors in this moment, and I didn't know what she was saying and what was once said to her. I tried to read it in her face and firm embrace. I imagined when she spoke to me that we were playing a game of charades. It became something intriguing for me to discover and explore about her and myself. I thought it was her way of pointing out what I was lacking. As I stepped off the ladder, I kept my eyes on the back of the mirror trying to make sense of everything. That was when I felt Nonna reach around me squeezing her arms tightly pulling both our bodies together while hugging me and looking at the back of the mirror with me. She said, "Ecco parli para quale?" I turned around and looked at her. My forehead reached just above her chin. We didn't say anything else to each other, not a single word; she merely winked at me and walked away.

I started spending more time with Nonna, but mostly in silence. The funny thing is I remember Nonna as a very talkative woman; she was fluent in English and various

*Nonna would say strange things to me, such as "When they pulled you from your mother, you didn't cry." Or, "Your eyes reflect things I could never say." And, "E morta, sono morti."*

Italian dialects, but as she became worse, communication was chopped down to simple phrases in either language. Nonna would say strange things to me, such as "When they pulled you from your mother, you didn't cry." Or, "Your eyes reflect things I could never say." And, "E morta, sono morti." I'm not sure why she chose these phrases to say. Maybe they were just random things that came to her; maybe she was trying to say something without really saying much. Either way after a while she stopped speaking any English altogether, and that was when the space between us became noise. The noise and the silence were polluted with a language that was spoken and muttered in ways I couldn't understand. It felt like the house embodied silence and misunderstanding that somehow couldn't be helped. The happiness that once existed a long time ago in that house, in the garden, in the furnishings, all came to betray what we all wanted to say to each other. The house became a way station holding my Nonna like a puppet between life and death.

After a while it all got to be too much. It was time for Nonna to leave the house and go where people could help her. She was going to a nursing home, but I knew that she would never make it there too long. The day I had been dreading came fast. It was the day that I would try to forget and somehow remember. I looked around in each room, gliding my hand on the wall trying to leave an imprint of the memories I had made in the house. They weren't memories of laughter or sorrow, but silence, silence at not knowing what to say or how to say it to show that in some way we understood one another. Staring into each room, I was trying to undo what had been done here, trying to make things right by saying nothing at all. Each room had been

packed up perfectly. Clothes and furniture were given away, and the house was sold to the highest bidder. The night before the move, my father took all the mirrors in the backyard and smashed them into small pieces. I'm not sure whose benefit it was for, his or my Nonna's, but I sat out there listening and watching right by the dried-up strawberry patches Nonna and I once weeded together. I watched her firstborn, her first American born, pick up the pieces and throw them into the garbage. I realized that those mirrors had seen more than I could've ever imagined. More than I will ever know.

As we finished the final walk-through, I watched Nonna strolling up and down the hall. Her image was ghostly, and she sobbed uncontrollably. As she passed by me, she grabbed me and knelt down to the ground taking me with her. She put her eyes directly in front of mine placing her right and left hands on my shoulders, shaking me until I would look into her eyes. She smiled this crookedly warm smile I had not seen since the day we turned the mirrors. She whispered in my ear with her warm sweet breath: "Ecco parli para quale?" Nonna kissed me and stood up. The last bit of noise I shared with her were her cries.

\* \* \*

My trance was broken by the smell of incense and the loud creaking of the church doors opening up so that parishioners could leave. My own reflection in the mirror slowly started to come into view, and for the first time I saw a visual and physical resemblance to Nonna. I thought about what she said to me in Italian, and at the time I didn't know what it meant. I wasn't even sure it was Italian, but being in that church and having the time to sift through my memories, I realized I knew exactly what she was trying to get me to understand. She was instilling in me strength and sustainability. She was emphasizing that even in our quietest or darkest hour, we will see the pieces of who we really are that only few may hear or know. Essentially, words are just noise we give meaning to. Her way of showing me this wasn't necessarily a question I needed to answer, but questions I had to ask myself. Ecco parli para quale?—Here you speak for which one?—was her way of bridging the gap of noise and stillness that existed between our worlds.



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# The Art of Performing “This is Fine”: Addressing the Impact of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Students, Teachers, and Programs

Ryan Witt, College of Western Idaho; Andrew Anastasia, Harper College ; Jan Reiman, UNC Charlotte; and Susan Naomi Bernstein, Baruch and Queens College, CUNY



*Editors' note: This piece is a version of a half-day, pre-convention workshop held at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March 2019.*

Trauma seems to be everywhere we look in the two-year college classroom. From helping students learn while coping with major local and national trauma—the mass shooting at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, for instance, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks—to providing resources and assistance to students who are dealing with histories of personal trauma, college faculty find themselves working with student circumstances and behaviors they feel unprepared to handle. In our conversations with colleagues and during our presentations on the topic of trauma-informed pedagogy, we hear more and more that college faculty struggle to meet the needs of traumatized students. Perhaps this isn't surprising. Many studies estimate that between 66 and 89% of college students have been exposed to potentially traumatic experiences or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008; Read, Ouimette, White, Colder, & Farrow, 2011). And research tells us that these exposures can have lasting impacts on an individual's ability to learn, process information, and be in full control of one's physical presence in a space.

What follows is intended to provide some context, processes, and tips for college-level writing teachers to help support learners who are dealing with the after-effects of trauma. It should be noted that these approaches and practices may be considered adaptable; that is, we hope they provide ideas and starting points that can be adjusted to support specific students in particular situations. In addition, we view these approaches as elements of Universal Design—intended to make the classroom welcoming and functional for all, regardless of ability or disability.

## ACEs and the After-effects of Trauma: What the Research Tells Us

In ground-breaking research conducted between 1995 and 1997, Vincent Felitti and colleagues surveyed over 17,000 individuals about their experiences during childhood as well as their current

health behaviors and conditions. They asked participants about their experiences in three categories: abuse, household challenges, and neglect (CDC, 2019). A more detailed list can be found below:

### Abuse:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

### Household Challenges:

- Mother treated violently
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

### Neglect:

- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect

[Source: CDC, 2019; Note: One version of the ACEs survey questions may be retrieved at <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>.]

In analyzing their data, the researchers found that respondents who reported having experienced four or more ACEs were at a significantly greater risk for a number of poor health outcomes; for instance, this group was twelve times more likely than those with zero ACEs to have attempted suicide, seven times more likely to consider themselves an alcohol abuser, and ten times more likely to have used injectable drugs (Felitti et al., 1998).

The life-long health impacts of exposure to ACEs are staggering, but what is perhaps more striking is the prevalence of these experiences. In the original ACEs study, 52.1% of respondents reported having at least one ACE, and over one-fourth experienced two or more ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998).



In addition to negative health outcomes, researchers have identified poor educational and social outcomes tied to ACEs. Marilyn Metzler and colleagues (2017) found that individuals with at least three ACEs were one-and-a-half times more likely to not finish high school and were over two-and-one-third times more likely to deal with unemployment. Recent research in neuroscience has helped to clarify the mechanism by which these impacts occur. According to neuroscientist Bruce Perry (2006), feelings of fear and threat—feelings that arise from ACEs and other potentially-traumatic experiences—create a stress response in the human body. During this stress response, commonly known as the “fight or flight” reaction, the body focuses on immediate threats in the environment and is less capable of using higher-order thinking skills, such as reasoning, planning, or committing experiences to long-term memory. Constant or chronic threats in one’s environment, including ACEs such as ongoing physical abuse or food insecurity, create what Perry calls hyperarousal. Over time, the body adapts to this chronic hyperaroused state. In so doing, the survival-focused parts of the brain, such as the amygdala, become enlarged, whereas parts of the brain that handle emotional regulation and decision making (the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex, specifically) reduce in functioning and volume (Herzog and Schmal, 2018).

While this adaptation might be helpful in helping secure an individual’s survival, it can be very detrimental for learning. Perry writes, “The key to understanding the long-term impact of trauma on an adult learner is to remember that, [due to the chronic stress of this trauma], he or she is often, at baseline, in a low-level state of fear” (25). This constant state of alert inhibits the creation of new memories, the retrieval of stored information, and the reading of the emotional states of others (Herzog and Schmal, 2018; Perry, 2006). The learner who is struggling with ACEs and the after-effects of trauma, then, may feel highly anxious or fearful—emotions that, according to Perry, “destroy...the capacity to learn” (23).

Although it should not be a goal of non-clinicians to diagnose anyone, it may be helpful to identify some of the ways that the after-effects of trauma might manifest themselves in an individual’s behavior. Some signs that a person is struggling with the effects of trauma can include the following:

- Depression<sup>1</sup>.
- Inability to focus, recall, or retain information<sup>2</sup>.
- Difficulty following instructions, beginning tasks, or seeing an alternate viewpoint<sup>3</sup>.
- Struggles to regulate emotions<sup>2</sup>.
- Seeming “out of it” or “not there,” especially when stressed<sup>3</sup>.
- Fear and anxiety about risk-taking, deadlines, exams, public speaking and/or group work<sup>2</sup>.
- Missing multiple class sessions and/or appointments<sup>2</sup>.

The learner who is struggling with ACEs and the after-effects of trauma, then, may feel highly anxious or fearful—emotions that, according to Perry, “destroy...the capacity to learn” (23).

- Easily overwhelmed or helpless in stressful situations<sup>2</sup>.
- Easily startled or jumpy (hyperarousal)<sup>3</sup>.
- “Involvement in unhealthy relationships.”<sup>2</sup>
- Falling asleep in class<sup>4</sup>.
- Difficulty making individual choices or plans<sup>4</sup>.

[Sources: <sup>1</sup>Herzog and Schmahl, 2018; <sup>2</sup>Davidson, 2017; <sup>3</sup>Perry, 2006; <sup>4</sup>Wolpaw, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009.]

Again, it is not necessary to identify these behaviors in an individual before using trauma-informed practices with them. On the contrary, it is the argument of this piece that trauma-informed practices should be fully integrated into the broader concept of Universal Design, and thus implemented broadly for all populations. Our hope in including the above list of “warning signs,” then, is not for diagnostic purposes but rather to foster an awareness of the above behaviors as potential signs of past trauma rather than “laziness” or lack of academic aptitude.

#### Towards a Trauma-Informed Writing Classroom Toolkit

The goal of trauma-informed or trauma-aware educational practices broadly is to, as Perry puts it, “create safety by making the learning environment more familiar, structured, and predictable” (27). Safe learning environments promote learning most effectively. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) defines a trauma-informed approach as having four key assumptions:

- Program staff and/or administrators realize that trauma is prevalent and has broad and long-lasting impacts;
- They are able to recognize the potential signs of trauma, both past and present;
- The organization or system is able to respond to clients or those served in a way that accounts for the after-effects of trauma on their life situation or circumstance; and

- In working with individuals, the program or system resists retraumatization of those they serve (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 9-10).

*The goal of trauma-informed or trauma-aware educational practices broadly is to, as Perry puts it, “create safety by making the learning environment more familiar, structured, and predictable” (27). Safe learning environments promote learning most effectively.*

Based on everything discussed to this point and on the current state of scholarship in composition-rhetoric, one of the writers of this piece (Witt) draws some conclusions about students and trauma in the first-year writing classroom:

- We should assume that all classrooms will have some traumatized students, including a percentage who have an official PTSD diagnosis and would (or do) qualify for ADA accommodations.
- Regardless of a student’s health status or behaviors, we know that it is not our job as writing teachers and administrators to diagnose or treat the mental health needs of our students.
- We further recognize that even students without formal diagnoses for mental health issues or formal institutional accommodations can still act in ways consistent with those who are dealing with toxic stress and/or the after-effects of trauma. Adhering to our desire to not diagnose students and taking a Universal Design approach—presuming that the strategies useful for the most vulnerable students are useful for all students—we seek to make trauma-aware affordances the norm in classrooms and available to all students regardless of history, ACEs score, mental health status, or

official documentation through the ADA.

- We should assume that most students (and people in general) are dealing with more than they might outwardly share...or even be aware of themselves.
- We recognize that most people aren’t aware of the precarious nature of their own mental health until it becomes poor.
- We recognize that writing and literacy education have a unique relationship with experiences of trauma. Writing has been used as a form of psychological therapy since the 1700s, and contemporary writers such as James Pennebaker and Joshua Smyth (authors of *Opening Up by Writing it Down*) and Susan Borkin (the author of 2014’s *The Healing Power of Writing: A Therapist’s Guide to Journaling with Clients*) advocate using writing as a means of helping others cope with the after-effects of trauma. Indeed, the concept of bibliotherapy—the notion, according to Pehrsson and McMillen (2007), that books and reading can be used beneficially in the therapeutic context—goes back to at least Sigmund and Anna Freud and remains common today. However, regardless of the healing potential available in this work, we recognize our roles as *educators*, not therapists, in our students’ lives.

Below, we’ve compiled some approaches and strategies to help you see what a trauma-aware or trauma-informed learning environment in the college writing classroom might look like. There are a couple of critical points here at the outset. First, we advocate a contextualized, process-centered approach. Specifically, while we do provide some example policies, practices, and approaches that may help students feel at ease, we believe practitioners must rigorously audit their practices for congruence to a trauma-aware rubric. We have included the one we prefer below, which has been developed by Andrew Anastasia based upon the work of Fallot and Harris (2009). Those seeking to

create trauma-aware learning spaces should test any tactic, strategy, goal, or outcome in a course or program with these guidelines, also bearing in mind institutional needs and instructor capacities. If something doesn’t meet these criteria, educators must think carefully about its necessity or ways to alter it so that it might fit more easily into this trauma-informed rubric.



Glacier Basin at Mt. Rainier National Park in Washington, CC-BY Jeff Hollett SA-4.0

## Core values of trauma-informed practice<sup>5</sup>

Trauma-informed (TI) core value	Questions to guide the development of trauma-informed practices
Safety (physical and emotional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the institution talked with a diverse group of community members about what safety means to them (for example, have we talked with LGBTQI people of color about what 'safety' does and does not mean?)</li> <li>• How safe is the building or environment? Are sidewalks and parking accessible?</li> <li>• Are directions clear and readily available?</li> <li>• Are security personnel present?</li> <li>• If so, has the institution done work around how the presence of law enforcement may compromise feelings of safety?</li> <li>• Are restrooms easily accessible (e.g. well-marked and gender neutral)?</li> <li>• Are first contacts and points of entry welcoming, respectful, and engaging?</li> <li>• Does the institution offer options for GNC/queer/trans* students to communicate their chosen name(s) on rosters or other public spaces (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas)?</li> </ul>
Choice and control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is each student informed about available choices and options? If you're in the classroom, think about how this question might challenge your own values and practices.</li> <li>• Do students get a clear and appropriate message about their rights and responsibilities? Are there negative consequences for making a particular choice? Are these necessary or arbitrary consequences? For teachers, consider your attendance policies as an example. For administrators, consider your school-wide attendance policies.</li> <li>• Do students have choices about attending various meetings? Teachers: think about field trips or mandatory out-of-classroom activities. Club advisors: think about your meeting modalities. Is it time to integrate a digital attendance option, like broadcasting meetings live via Facebook?</li> <li>• Do students choose how contact is made (e.g. by phone or mail to their home or other address)? Example: your institution automatically mails information to student's home address. Student has changed their name on Blackboard, but does not realize mailings are going home and they have not come out to parents. What are possible consequences?</li> </ul>
Trustworthiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do students receive clear explanations and information about tasks and procedures?</li> <li>• Are specific goals and objectives made clear? Teachers: what happens when this clashes with your pedagogy? For example, I (Anastasia) was trained to decenter myself as part of a critical pedagogical approach to having students take ownership of their own experiences. In some ways this is a radically just approach to teaching and in others, this approach may clash with TI-practices.</li> <li>• How does the institution handle challenges between role clarity and personal/professional boundaries?</li> </ul>



Trauma-informed (TI) core value	Questions to guide the development of trauma-informed practices
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a student advisory board, and does it have a significant role in planning and evaluation of services? Are there members who identify as trauma survivors or are from a particular group (i.e. veterans, LGBTQ, foster youth?)</li> <li>• Is student input and preference given substantial weight in service planning, goal setting, and the development of priorities?</li> <li>• Do educators identify tasks on which they and students can work simultaneously (e.g. information gathering and committees; assessment; student organizations; campus initiatives)?</li> </ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are each student's strengths and skills recognized?</li> <li>• Do educators communicate a sense of realistic optimism about how students can achieve their goals?</li> <li>• How can each class, contact, or service be focused on skill development or enhancement?</li> <li>• Does your institution have a consistent land acknowledgment practice?</li> <li>• Are classes designed to foster student agency or are they "banking model" oriented?</li> <li>• If your institution has a Writing Center, what is the guiding pedagogy? Is it designed to "fix" student's writing or empower students to understand their own rhetorical decisions?</li> <li>• How is your classroom organized? Rows? A circle? Is your circle accessible, especially for students who need more physical space to feel comfortable?</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup>Source: Falloot & Harris, 2009 cf. Davidson, 2017. Notes: (1) We have added questions and examples from the authors' experiences. (2) Many of these questions fall under multiple categories and are not mutually exclusive. (3) Questions listed are not intended to be exhaustive.

Using this rubric as guideline of values, here is a short selection of practices that, depending on your own context, may help create a trauma-aware environment.

#### Steps for Preparing Ahead of Time:

- Know the Educational and Privacy Policy of the Institution.
- Have a resource list, including a community crisis intervention hotline, available to you.
- If your school has a counseling center, meet with someone there before the semester starts—be able to refer students to someone you actually know and feel comfortable with. Encourage other staff to do the same.
- Determine and codify appropriate boundaries.
- Have someone from the counseling center or a community resource center come to your class and do a brief presentation of services.
- If your school does not have a counseling center, identify low-cost options in the community.

- If you can't have an in-class presentation, try to arrange one during a FYWP meeting or professional development session.

- Think ahead and try to be prepared for the emotional reactions and needs of your students, even rare or less predictable ones.
- Have a plan for self-care: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/developing-your-self-care-plan.html>

#### Course Design Considerations

- Approach course design with an accommodation mindset (Womack, 2017).
- Find ways to anticipate the unique circumstances of individual students.
- Thoughtfully include elements of Universal Design.
- Critically examine why you have certain processes and deadlines as they are.

- Offer choice to students in appropriate ways: writing topics, reading materials, etc.
- If you offer a student a choice, be sure the student isn't punished for making a particular choice.
- Plan to include students in course decision making and problem solving, particularly when things don't go according to plan (the student's plan or yours).
- Consider adding language to your syllabus about the emotional work of literacy learning.
- Think carefully about assigning personal writing and what/how much your assignment may be asking writers to disclose about themselves (Gere, 2001).
- Add language to your syllabus encouraging students to have or develop their own self-care plan, or include self-care planning as a course activity. Both the University of Buffalo and the University of Calgary have useful toolkits. Find them here: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/developing-your-self-care-plan.html>; <https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellbeing/files/wellbeing/self-care-starter-kit.pdf>
- Consider incorporating calming and mindful practices in the classroom, like coloring or breathing. One facilitator (Susan Naomi Bernstein) discussed using coloring pages from a book of anxieties and affirmations to remind herself and students that it is OK to acknowledge fears in the classroom and to use some available tools (mindfulness and affirmations) to adjust one's emotional state.
- Show humility and admit when you don't know something or are wrong.
- Take student writing and writers seriously, and focus comments on your understanding of what writers seek to communicate rather than only grammar, punctuation, and other surface-level concerns.
- Give student writers the benefit of the doubt; in your feedback, work to articulate the point you think each \*might\* be making...and ways that their point could be made more clearly.

*Add language to your syllabus encouraging students to have or develop their own self-care plan, or include self-care planning as a course activity.*

- Find ways to communicate your personality (and warmth) via technology: audio recorded comments on papers (with transcriptions), video announcements on your LMS; or kind emails and a welcoming syllabus.
- Realize students might need time away from online courses. Try to accommodate this.
- Practice and model empathy for others and yourself.
- Be strengths-based: Look for what students are doing well and build upon that.

#### Day-to-Day Classroom Strategies

- Establish a positive and approachable demeanor early in the semester and encourage and model this behavior for your colleagues.
- Be sure all students are empowered to take care of themselves during class sessions.
- Develop a group agreement that includes considerations for all learners and display it prominently during class meetings.
- Be honest with students about your time commitments and response times, and don't make promises you can't keep.
- Communicate the day-to-day class schedule to students and provide an agenda for each class meeting.
- From time-to-time, have an emotional check-in activity to help see, as Bruce Perry might say, what the internal state of your learners might be. Ask students to write one word on a piece of paper or note card that describes how they are feeling at that moment. Be sure to leave these anonymous! Collect these and share with the group as appropriate. One facilitator (Jan Reiman) uses this activity multiple times a semester—or even once each at the beginning and end of class—to assess development and changes in student emotions particularly as they relate to the work of the class.
- Be sure to ask survivors of trauma about their positive traits and experiences to help remind them they are more than their traumatic pasts (Leitch, 2017).
- “Express unconditional positive regard” (Davidson, 2017).
- In face-to-face classes, recognize that some students might feel more comfortable in specific locations around the room (e.g., next to the door). Take note of these preferences and, if necessary, ensure that students have access to comfortable seating.
- Make time to check in with students about how they are feeling and what's going on in their lives outside of class; give time for them to ask questions—about the assignments, about class, or about school and its personal demands.
- Solve issues with students collaboratively; pose problems and work together on solutions.

#### When Things Don't Go Well: Crisis Situations

- Know the contact information for campus safety, important support staff (campus crisis counselor, etc.), and other community resources.

- Follow established policies and practices for your campus or institution.
- Remember: You are not a counselor!
- Acknowledge the student's distress. Let them know you care and are concerned. Clearly state that you will get them help. Stay with the student until qualified help arrives or is connected with the student.
- Don't hesitate to end class to support a student's safety.
- Ask the student what's going on with them and if this has happened before.
- Try to identify if a student has a counselor.
- Have a few tricks for managing crises: Ask the student to blow bubbles with bubble solution and a wand, show them cute pictures, give them snacks, have tissue boxes, ask students how to spell their names, lead them through breathing exercises, give them business cards of those who can help, etc.
- "Ask students what will help them feel more comfortable and how you can best work with them" (Davidson, 2017).
- In an emergency, call 911.

## Conclusion

The above-listed practices are intended as a starting point—some concrete suggestions to get you and your colleagues started on a journey toward more trauma-informed spaces, courses, and programs. Again, these approaches are intended as potentially useful and may not be appropriate for all contexts. Ultimately, forming work groups or communities of practice within your context or institution may help you sort the useful (and doable) suggestions from the others. Further, if a specific approach, policy, or activity works, we encourage you to periodically re-evaluate the impacts of this work at the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels within a class, a program or department, and the college or university as a whole. While this re-assessment is beyond the scope of this document, we would start by asking ourselves and colleagues, "What has happened as a result of this change?" or, if a specific policy or concept seems to be little-used, "Are we comfortable with the implications and impacts of this choice and change, particularly if a student takes this policy/idea to its logical conclusion?"

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Krista Ratcliffe is a professor and chair of English at Arizona State University. She earned her doctorate from The Ohio State University (1988) and has been a professor and chair of English at Marquette University and Purdue University. Her research focuses on intersections of rhetoric, feminist theory, and critical race studies. Her books include *Angels American: Challenge to the*

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