

Katie Cary  
Teaching Statement

As a researcher and instructor of English 101: Introduction to College Writing I seek to spread awareness of contemporary issues regarding not only language but racism as well. In the future I hope to teach American Indian literature and other AIS courses. In my previous work with teachers from the Eau Claire Area School District, I created a Thanksgiving lesson plan and website that provided teachers with sources that were positive and beneficial for teaching children and young students about American Indians. Since the story of the first Thanksgiving between the Puritans and American Indians is most often told incorrectly, I also provided educators with essential information so they can recognize and avoid sources that are harmful and inaccurate in their representations of American Indians and their relations with the Puritans. My goal is to educate students about incorrect and stereotypical representations of American Indians in literature and the contemporary issues American Indian communities face because of these portrayals, replacing negative images with positive literature written by American Indian authors. Misrepresentations of American Indians and their stories are still prevalent in American society, perpetuating a continuation of these misrepresentations and a repetition of the past; American Indian voices and stories continue to be ignored and unheard. In my work as an instructor and researcher I aim to teach about these issues, providing my students and colleagues with beneficial alternatives and giving them the skills required to think critically about texts to encourage better pedagogical practices.

As an instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, my teaching philosophy is focused on helping students develop skills with rhetorical concepts, conversation, and critical thinking. My current course theme is “Righting Language,” which explores the ways that language works socially, politically, and culturally. We analyze a variety of texts (written, oral, and visual texts) dealing with issues surrounding multilingualism, or the natural variation in American dialects, which we then connect to discussions about race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion, and disability. The goal of this theme is to help students think critically about language and answer questions about issues of power, racism, classism, sexism, and ableism. In this composition course there are certain assignments where I encourage my students to write in their language or dialect, emphasizing the importance of their own voice. In their introduction to writing academic summaries, I give them an activity where they are asked to write one formal academic summary about a given text and a second summary about the same text for a more popular or informal audience. Many of my students will choose to summarize the text for family members who often speak a language other than English. I encourage these students to find their own voice and include certain key words or phrases from the text in their home language, understanding the needs of their audience and the purpose of the two distinct summaries.

My teaching philosophy takes a decolonial approach, engaging with indigenous perspectives and righting the wrongs of Thanksgiving misinformation and misrepresentations. Decolonial methodologies and pedagogies work to replace the harmful perceptions of colonial influence and support “the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and spaces,” encouraging a “respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them” (Haas 297). Language, community, and alliances are major components in the framework of a decolonial philosophy that can be used in composition, literature, and American Indian Studies courses. As a Native ally, my decolonial teaching philosophy engages with these ideas, and the way I teach language (English 101) is informed by my allegiance to Native Americans.