

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

“My Name Holds My Identity”: Honoring Student Names in the Classroom

SARAH LOSCO  
SPRING 2021

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in Secondary Education and English  
with honors in Secondary Education

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Michelle Knotts  
Assistant Teaching Professor of Education  
Thesis Honors Advisor and Thesis Supervisor

Charlotte Land  
Assistant Professor of Education  
Faculty Reader

\* Electronic approvals are on file.

## **ABSTRACT**

Everyone bears at least one name, and that name is tied tightly to our sense of personhood and identity. Though perhaps a seldom studied subject, names are intimate and important. Through the process of teacher inquiry, observations in my practice led me to ask questions about the way that we as teachers honor student names in our classrooms and how students feel about their names as a part of their identity. In this inquiry, I implemented curricular interventions that blended the topic of names into the existing curriculum in English Language Learner and Creative Writing contexts, and I also interviewed two teachers to receive insight into their opinions and practices regarding learning and using student names.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	4
Language, Names, and Identity .....	5
Names and Power Dynamics .....	6
Ramifications for Students.....	8
Student Agency.....	10
Frameworks for Change.....	11
Professional Organizations and Practice.....	14
Chapter Three: Methods .....	17
Context.....	18
Data Collection .....	19
Data Analysis.....	22
Chapter Four: Discussion.....	25
Student Identification with Names.....	25
<i>Positive Identification with Name</i> .....	26
<i>Negative or No Identification with Name</i> .....	28
<i>Ambivalent Identification with Name</i> .....	30
Curricular Value.....	31
Feelings About Teacher Mispronunciation.....	34
<i>Empathetic Towards Teacher Mispronunciation</i> .....	35
<i>Mixed or Negative Feelings Towards Mispronunciation</i> .....	36
Teacher Interviews.....	37
Chapter Five: Conclusion .....	41
COVID-19 and the Importance of Connectedness .....	41
Reflection and Implications .....	42
Looking Inward and Branching Out .....	45
Appendix A: ELL 4 Journal Entry.....	47
Appendix B: Creative Writing Writer’s Notebook Warm Up.....	48
Appendix C: Teacher Interview Questions .....	50
REFERENCES .....	51

**LIST OF TABLES**

<i>Table 1. Student Pseudonyms in Analysis</i> .....	22
<i>Table 2. Initial Thematic Analysis of Student Responses</i> .....	23
<i>Table 3. Student Percentages in Each Name Identification Category</i> .....	26

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my eternal and loving gratitude to my parents, Kris and Tom Losco. It is only through their sacrifices, boundless love, and unwavering support, that I have been able to chase my passions wherever they may take me. Thank you for your trust and encouragement and unconditional acceptance – and of course for giving me my name.

Thank you to Dr. Michelle Knotts for mentoring me throughout this entire inquiry process, even when I felt intimidated or nervous. Your patience and steadiness were integral to every step along the way. Though at first (I'll admit) I was unsure, your advice to wait until the right topic found me transformed this entire thesis journey into something that has been far more fulfilling and enjoyable than it would have been otherwise. I could not imagine a more understanding and supportive advisor/supervisor, and I am so grateful to you for all of the meetings and feedback. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Charlotte Land for her incredibly useful insight, feedback, and encouragement as my faculty reader.

I would also like to thank my two wonderful mentor teachers, Lisa Harpster and Sarah Rito. In a year when it would have been easy to forgo having an intern, I cannot thank you both enough for being not only willing to mentor me, but fully welcoming me with enthusiasm, trust, and positivity. I have learned so much from the both of you, and will hold my memories at State High closely as I take all that I have learned into my own classroom.

Thank you to the “Corona Cohort” of PDS interns – my peers and my friends. I couldn't have gotten through this year of constant change and surprises without your solidarity, vulnerability, and friendship.

And last, by certainly not least, I send my love and appreciation out in multitudes to every one of my clever, thoughtful, kind, resilient students. Their perseverance, creativity, and optimism inspire me every day to be a better teacher and a better person. This has been a difficult year for us all, but with this generation as our future – our hope – I know for sure that we have a lot to look forward to.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction

I have always mildly disliked my name. The name Sarah holds a common weight to me, a well-worn and unassuming type of weight. Meek and soft and *average*. My parents chose it for the sweet, sibilant curve of the S and the breathy rounded ending. There is rarely a time I am the only Sarah in the room — my name is inescapable and ubiquitous. This was not the ideal name for a young dreamer who desired so desperately to be bold, to be unique, to be exceptional.

It is, however, integral to my identity. My name reflects my parents' hopes and expectations for me and my familial background. It is the name I always imagined on the spine of the first book I published. As any Sarah can tell you, there are a lot of strong feelings attached to the inclusion or exclusion of the "h." And, before I could form any personal opinion on the matter of my name, "Sarah" was the sound that I heard whispered to me lovingly in the fuzzy void that came before my consciousness formed. Names are intimate and important.

So why are names so often afterthoughts in our classrooms?

The subject of names and their import has continually surfaced throughout my student teaching experience: in everything from the English Language Learner (ELL) classes that I teach to the novels that I have been reading for my university classes. As I began my student teaching experience through Penn State's Professional Development School (PDS) internship, the scramble to master names at the beginning of the year was both simpler and less clear. State College Area High School was operating on a hybrid online/in-person model through the video conferencing platform Google Meet. Student names were automatically displayed below their

video feed based on what name was registered in the district-wide system. This should have made learning names quite simple, but a decent number of my students in ELL went by a nickname or by the second name displayed on screen. As a monolingual English speaker, pronunciation was also something that was not always intuitive for me.

It was about a month into the school year when our understanding of three students' names changed. I had been largely observing the English Language Learner classroom as a student teacher for those first few weeks before it was my turn to lead some activities, and my mentor and I began co-teaching. I started that first class with a question that I wanted all students to answer, so I called each students' name to make the process move more quickly as our Google Meet methods were not yet speedy or refined. This was the first time I had personally pronounced every student's name. By the end of this process, we had two name changes and a change in pronunciation. It felt impossible — after all the efforts we had taken to learn and ask about names, how could we still not know our students' names a month into the school year?

Upon trying to remedy these misunderstandings, I realized that in Google Meet (unlike in, say, Zoom) there is no function that allows you to change your displayed name. Perhaps this can seem like a mere inconvenience, but it leads to accidental misnaming by classmates and, possibly, psychological and emotional harm to those misnamed. Though I do not have any students who identify as transgender or nonbinary in my classroom, this feature could subject students that identify by a different name from that in the system to continual exposure to their “deadname,” which could be particularly damaging. And — even in the case of the ELLs in my virtual classroom now — no one deserves to feel misplaced, misrepresented, or misnamed when they attend school.



With this question of names whirring continually in the back of my mind, I continued on with my student teaching experience and methods courses. And, with my mind primed in this way, I picked up on the theme of names and their importance in much of the literature that I was reading for my university classes — *The House on Mango Street*, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, *The 57 Bus*. These books all focus on young protagonists that are in some way marginalized by society, and each one of them reflected on their names as both a locus of their marginalization when disrespected by others and a locus of pride in their heritage and identity when they came into their own.

All of these experiences coalesced into the research questions that have guided my inquiry on the topic of honoring student names in the classroom:

- How do students feel about their names, and what is the impact of improperly naming students in the classroom?
- What are ways that names can be incorporated into ELA or ELL classroom curriculum through projects, literature, etc. to support and affirm students' backgrounds and identity formation?
- What other measures can teachers take to ensure that they are properly identifying, pronouncing, and honoring any changes to the names of their students?

If there is something that each of our students come to school already bearing, it is a name. We as educators, especially those coming from privileged groups, need to invest more than just good intentions into learning and addressing our students by name. Students deserve to come to school with the sense that they are wanted, that they are seen, that they are important. Though many factors need to be addressed for this to be a reality, we can start on the very first day (and throughout the year) by valuing and honoring our students by name.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Literature Review**

In comparison to the great volume of literary works that grapple with the meaning and consequences of the names we are given and the names that we choose, the subject of names has received relatively little direct study in the realm of education. Perhaps because it is viewed as a niche topic, the subject of names is often embedded within the context of wider dialogues having to do with language, identity, culture, etc.

Because of this, in the review of literature below, I will begin by defining and exploring the concepts of identity and language, illuminating the way they interconnect and providing a point of intersection within which the topic of names resides. Next, I will explore how, within the classroom and without, power dynamics surrounding the namer and the named can result in microaggressions based upon factors like race or gender identity. From there, I will lay out the possible ramifications of these microaggressions on our students, especially English Language Learners and transgender and/or nonbinary students. After discussing the harm that recklessness surrounding names can cause students, I acknowledge the ways that students can use (re)naming as a way to empower themselves and discuss how student agency should be the main priority in conversations surrounding naming. Next, I present two pedagogical stances – Queer Literacy and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy – that can provide frameworks through which teachers can create a better class/school climate for honoring student names and identities. And, lastly, I conclude with an overview of the ways that professional organizations, campaigns, and experts

in the field are currently addressing the subject of names in our schools through concrete strategies and everyday practices.

### **Language, Names, and Identity**

Quite often, the topic of names in the classroom appears as a footnote in a larger conversation about language and identity. A concept as complex as “identity” can be difficult to define and can be applied to a wide variety of domains – social, national, ethnic, personal, etc. I was drawn to Bonny Norton’s definition of identity as “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 1997, p. 410). I appreciate the way this definition captures the social influences that affect identity without removing personal agency from the equation and emphasizes the way that identities remain in flux and invariably shift both over time and within different contexts. This construction and constant renegotiation of identity is pivotal to adolescence and the development of every student, but language learners especially “are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton, 1997, p. 410). I would argue that this is also true of other groups that are seen as embodying non-normative identities or are, in some way, trying to reconcile their own backgrounds with a school context that conflicts with some part of who they are (Miller, 2015).

Language – categorized languages, dialects, pronouns, labels – is one of the major ways through which our students explore who they are, how others perceive them, and who they aspire to be. The dynamic relationship between language and identity has been recognized and written about extensively by such seminal figures as Gloria Anzaldúa in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,”

wherein she claims that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 39). She equates “attacks on [her] native tongue” to attacks on her very “sense of self” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 39). Stemming from the work of Anzaldúa and many figures like her, discourse surrounding language and identity has evolved into theories of teaching language that encourage students to embrace and utilize their full linguistic repertoires and diverse background knowledges in the classroom (Garcia, 2009; Canagarajah, 2013; National Council of Teachers of English, 2020). The first opportunity that teachers have to engage with their students’ language and background occurs on the first day of classes when teachers learn their students’ names. This figures prominently in Anzaldúa’s memory when she recalls being punished for talking back “when all [she] was trying to do was tell her [teacher] how to pronounce [her] name” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 34). Names are deeply intertwined with language and identity, and our treatment of them as teachers is far more impactful and lasting in the memories of our students than we might initially recognize.

### **Names and Power Dynamics**

An inescapable power dynamic is present in the student-teacher relationship, and that dynamic significantly affects how we address names in our classrooms (Minor, 2019). Even beyond the classroom, the interaction of power relations and language provides an elevated position to “the namer” as they have the ability to “isolate the named, explain them, contain them, and control them” (Ndebele, 1995, p. 1). This “linguistic domination” can be an undercurrent in uneven relations of power, where the person or group in the position of namer cannot “see themselves as a problem” (Ndebele, 1995, p. 2). In a classroom setting, teachers who

are ignorant of their position as namer are perpetuating a harmful learning environment, likely full of microaggressions.

Racial microaggressions, as defined in brief by Kohli and Solórzano, are “covert or everyday forms of systemic racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place” (Kholi & Solórzano, 2012, p. 7), and this definition of “microaggression” can be generalized to include other systemically oppressed groups and all of the daily slights they might face that reinforce their marginalization. Transgender students, for example, also face microaggressions that stem from the unfair structural oversights of their school environments as well as the “disjunctures” between school policy and their actual realities and interactions (Brauer, 2017). Names are a significant area where microaggressions are often committed against many minoritized groups. According to Kohli & Solórzano (2012), these name-related microaggressions are often perpetuated by teachers who are unaware of their position of power as namer:

Teachers played an especially significant role in this type of racism. Whether being culturally disrespectful, unaware of their actions, or even just stumbling over a name they had never seen before, the tone set by a teacher about a student's name was something significant that participants have remembered for many years. (p. 11)

Microaggressions that manifest in the way a teacher addresses student names, though usually unintentional, represent an unacceptable lack of teacher awareness regarding power dynamics in the classroom, and this ignorance can lead to lasting consequences for our students.

## Ramifications for Students

The potential negative impact of taking improper care in learning and honoring students' names and the pronunciation of those names, ranges from self-esteem and mental health concerns to possible disengagement from learning and compromised academic outcomes. In Kohli and Solórzano's study of 41 former Students of Color in K-12 schools, "Many participants shared that the issues they experienced with their names in school caused them a great deal of anxiety, shame or feelings of 'othering'" (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 15). The casual racism embedded in these interactions can also "have a lasting impact on the self-perceptions and worldviews of a child" (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 1). Trans and nonbinary students are also statistically likely to suffer when teachers handle their names or pronouns recklessly, as misnaming and misgendering can cause "significant distress and possible threat of physical harm" (Beemyn, 2005; Brauer, 2017). Though our students *can* overcome these stressors through their own strength and with support from family or friends, no student should have to endure any treatment that could leave them feeling unwanted or unseen.

Putting aside statistical concerns about the mass number of students who are affected by improper naming practices in the classroom, narrative examples of this harm can be a powerful tool for learning about the importance of names in our students' lives. Musbah Shaheen writes from the perspective of a PhD candidate looking back at his undergraduate experience as an international student studying at a U.S. university. In an article urging universities to do more to normalize "biculturalism" and support international students, he also details how the culture of the school "attempt[ed] to erase [his] connection with [his] Syrian heritage, a process that started with [his] name" (Shaheen, 2019, p. 15). An experience Musbah had that proved to be common among subjects throughout many studies was the feeling that his name was a burden to others in

his school, and he considered changing it (Cotterill, 2005; Edwards, 2006). Retrospectively, Musbah writes that he is happy he retained his name “because it is a central part of who [he is] and where [he] comes from” and that changing that name, to him, would be “the antithesis to cultural authenticity” (Shaheen, 2012, pp. 17-19). Students with non-Anglo names either choosing new, more Anglo-sounding names, or even being forcibly renamed or nicknamed by their teachers is a common theme throughout research on this topic (Cotterill, 2005; Edwards, 2006).

On the other hand, for students who have purposely adopted a new name that better represents who they are, the online environment necessitated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated some of these issues regarding legal names and student-chosen names. Ty Marshal writes about the concerning implications of Google Classroom lacking a feature that allows students to rename themselves. Marshal is a teacher, but he writes that picturing the situation from a student perspective, “[He] would not participate in a room where every time [he] spoke [he] was interrupted with [his] legal name, emblazoned in 12-point bold font on [his] forehead” (Marshal, 2020). He also received an email from one of his trans students apologizing that they “have a hard time participating in class on Google because only [their] legal name shows up” (Marshal, 2020). Constantly being deadnamed and possibly even involuntarily outed to every class that you attend puts a huge amount of stress on trans students, and the fact that a renaming feature is still nonexistent proves that often “to our student information systems, trans students do not exist” (Marshal, 2020; Brauer, 2017). Learning and respecting our students’ names connects directly with learning about and respecting our students’ identities, and though students have shown amazing resilience and strength in the face of such microaggressions and

erasure, schools and teachers need to take more responsibility for these structural and interpersonal failings.

### **Student Agency**

Though teachers and school culture have a big impact on students, I also want to highlight that the conversation surrounding identity and naming also involves student choices and agency. The interplay between the phenomenon of English names, teacher discomfort with non-Anglo names, and neo-colonialism is extremely complex, and just because institutional or systemic oppressions exist does not mean that resistance to these structures is nonexistent or impotent. Rachel Edwards reminds us that “points of resistance are always present within networks of power” (p. 98) and that students utilize multiple “strategies of compliance and resistance” (p. 90) with regard to their name choices in school (Edwards, 2006). Our students are often extremely aware of the social pressures and influences that exist in their spheres at school, and they will make the decision that they believe is best or easiest for them, whether that involves adopting a different name or using their given or legal name. As teachers, we want to create an environment where they feel confident in their ability to choose for themselves – that they will be accepted and supported whatever their choice may entail.

For example, some students might relish the option to “forge a new identity” for themselves when presented with the opportunity to indicate their preferred name, and the experience does sometimes have the potential to be “exciting, fun and empowering” (Edwards, 2006, p. 95). If a student actively makes the choice to go by a nickname or new name in the classroom, the change could represent something the student feels wholly positive about.



Alternatively, a student might choose an Anglicized version of their given name or an English name for many more nuanced or neutral reasons. They might want to avoid their teacher accidentally calling them by their personal name, which is a cultural taboo in some naming traditions (Cotterill, 2009). They might also rather have the teacher call them something that the teacher can pronounce more easily because they dislike hearing their given name improperly pronounced (Edwards, 2006). Student opinions and choices on these matters vary widely in stance and degree and should be respected, no matter the teacher's views on English names more broadly. It is also worth noting, though, that Simon Cotterill found in his 2009 survey of Chinese-speaking students studying English in the UK that "many would stop using English names if they felt their teachers were comfortable using Chinese names" (Cotterill, 2009, p. 14). This seems to indicate that students sometimes modify their preferred name to accommodate the *discomfort* that they perceive in their teachers, and that is not an appropriate reason for them to feel as though they have to adopt a different name. If students elect to choose a new preferred name, it should not be to defuse the tension caused by their teacher's behavior or attitude. Students should be nurtured in an environment in which they feel comfortable, safe, and confident in choosing how they would like to be addressed – no matter how that might be – and also have opportunities to change or modify their wishes throughout the school year.

### **Frameworks for Change**

Having established an overall understanding of the scope, potential consequences, and nuances of the topic of names as it relates to students and their identity formation within schools, I next sought out a pedagogical stance that could aid conscious educators in their efforts to

become changemakers for their students regarding this issue both in the classroom, district, and wider contexts. I settled upon sj Miller's Queer Literacy Framework working in combination with Django Paris's concept of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as the perfect theoretical positioning from which teachers can tackle the topic of names in schools – designing both their curricula and classroom cultures to promote student self-determination with meaningful and continual opportunities for cultural pluralism and identity exploration.

The Queer Literacy Framework's central tenet is self-determination, saving space for both students and teachers to partake in "redefinition and renegotiation" in regards to their understanding of their own identities and their relationships with others (Miller, 2015). sj Miller defines self-determination as "the right to make choices to self-identify in a way that authenticates one's self-expression, and which has potential for the embodiment of self-acceptance" (Miller, 2015, p. 38). The right to self-determination, in this framework utilized by Miller specifically to counteract heteronormativity and the gender-constricting nature of most school contexts, is also critical to the conversation surrounding names and student agency in general. To foster this self-determination, Miller calls for "activities that foster independence, agency, integrity, an adequate range of options, and that authenticate cultural identity" (Miller, 2015, p. 40). When this sort of validating and empowering content is embedded regularly within a classroom or curriculum, students will feel a sense of "internal safety" to "galvanize [them] to take risks and to be their authentic selves" (Miller, 2015, p. 40). Students should not only have an inherent right to self-identify and select their preferred name, but they should also be provided with sufficient opportunity and a feeling of safety to do so. This should be promoted at the start of the school year as well as throughout, leaving students room to change those preferences in an ongoing capacity.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), following in the legacy of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, has a similar commitment to empowering and supporting the identities and backgrounds of students in “both traditional and evolving ways” with an emphasis on intentional and integrated cultural pluralism in schools and curricula (Paris, 2012, pg. 95). The goal of CSP is defined by Django Paris as “seek[ing] to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). The focus on an egalitarian, democratic classroom connects with Miller’s focus on student self-determination. Paris makes the argument that authentic opportunities for identity and cultural exploration and validation need to be an integral aspect of what we teach in schools (Paris, 2012). Not properly representing or involving the backgrounds and languages of minoritized students in our everyday practices sends the message that “students would [need to] lose their heritage and community cultural and linguistic practices if they were to succeed in American schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 94). How can students feel enough of a sense of internal safety when they are being implicitly pressured to assimilate and Americanize themselves to accommodate the comfort levels of their teachers and peers?

Through CSP, we prove to our students that we value their cultural backgrounds, identities, and choices – and not as just a footnote in a lesson, but as a philosophy and lifelong stance (Paris, 2012). This is also why we need to be explicitly open about our willingness for evolution and changes in identification on more than just the first day of school. Through our everyday classroom practices and a curriculum that reflects and validates our students’ identities and diversities, we earn the trust of our students that they might not have initially felt comfortable giving to us. Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, we show our students our

commitment to them as learners and people, and, drawing from the Queer Literacy Framework, we respect their right to self-determination.

### **Professional Organizations and Practice**

Theory and philosophical stances are only as useful as we make them by bringing them consciously into our thought processes when we plan, reflect, and adapt our everyday teaching practices and work towards further positive systemic changes in our schools. Though the topic of names is not one that gets a lot of specific attention online and in teacher trainings, there are some really wonderful and thoughtful resources that teachers can use to educate themselves and reflect on the ways that names are handled in their classrooms and wider school contexts.

The National Education Association published a piece entitled “The Lasting Impact of Mispronouncing Students’ Names” that supports the idea that, for students, “their name can be a powerful link to their identity” and that “overlooking or downplaying the significance of getting a name right...is one of those 'microaggressions' that can emerge in a classroom and seriously undermine learning” (McLaughlin, 2016). The article links a multitude of resources that can help teachers further educate themselves about the issue and find activities and strategies that can be applied immediately in their classrooms. One resource that they highlight is called the My Name, My Identity Campaign.

Sponsored by the Santa Clara County Office of Education, My Name, My Identity is an organization that asks educators to pledge to pronounce students’ names correctly, their statement of purpose being that “by pronouncing students’ names correctly, you can foster a sense of belonging and build positive relationships in the classroom, which are crucial for

healthy social, psychological, and educational outcomes” (My Name My Identity, 2014). The campaign website provides resources and goals you can use to structure your lessons, videos of students and teachers talking about their experiences with their names in school, and a tab where you can take their pledge. For educators looking to learn more about names, find useful resources to discuss the topic with students, and generally build a welcoming classroom community for all students, this is a great place to start.

Cult of Pedagogy, an online magazine (and podcast) focused on providing information about evolving and applicable teaching practices, also has an article that can provide teachers with immediate habits and exercises they can do to validate and honor their students’ names in the classroom. Taking the stance that “mutilating someone’s name is a tiny act of bigotry” and that “whatever it is your student prefers to be called it’s worth the effort to get it right,” the piece encourages teachers to reflect on what kind of namer they are in the classroom (Gonzalez, 2014).

The author of the article, Jennifer Gonzalez, urges people to move towards being “calibrators” who put in the effort to ask about pronunciation, continue to fine-tune it, and then check back later to make sure that they are saying it correctly (Gonzalez, 2014). She frames this process as a way that teachers can allow themselves to be vulnerable and make mistakes, letting students “see that you’re human” (Gonzalez, 2014). This turns the process of name-learning from something that projects discomfort and stress onto the students to positive modeling of “what it looks like to be a lifelong learner, a flexible, confident person who is not afraid to admit a mistake” (Gonzalez, 2014). On the more practical side, Gonzalez suggests getting systematic if teachers have a multitude of names they need to learn at once. Something as simple as taking the time to write down a phonetic pronunciation so that the teacher can remember how to say a name can be helpful. She also recommends that teachers use online pronunciation videos and guides to

hear the correct pronunciations of unfamiliar names. Having an easily accessible and current practitioner blog taking on the topic of names marks a good stride towards visibility for the issue in general, and more content like this would be very positive for raising teachers' awareness concerning the importance of names in the classroom.

Through the frameworks of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Queer Literacy, alongside the other teacher resources and anecdotes from my research, I decided to develop interventions in two of my courses that would incorporate the topic of names into the curricula. According to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, the interventions will ideally be integrated into a larger curriculum that draws on student background knowledges and experiences. Pulling from the Queer Literacy Framework, they should also provide space for students to explore and embrace their multiple and intersecting identities, defining themselves however they see fit. I kept these two frameworks and other research in mind as I moved on to planning my name interventions and collecting data.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Methods**

The methods employed in this thesis align with a teacher inquiry stance that necessitates action research. Teacher inquiry, as both a continuous process and a philosophical stance, is practiced by teachers that “collect data through observations, interviews, and a myriad of sources for the purposes of exploring a question or questions about learning” (Buckelew & Ewing, 2019, pp. 12-13). These questions and data are then utilized by the teacher to plan an intervention – action research – aimed at addressing their line of inquiry in order “to enhance classroom practice or the community to better meet the needs of learners” (Buckelew & Ewing, 2019, p. 13) and to be “better able to make decisions regarding classroom practices, programs, and standards” (p. 8). My questioning, research, and subsequent classroom interventions were all conducted through a systematic approach to teacher inquiry (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

The inquiry questions that guided this research are:

- How do students feel about their names, and what is the impact of improperly naming students in the classroom?
- What are ways that names can be incorporated into ELA or ELL classroom curriculum through projects, literature, etc. to support and affirm students’ backgrounds and identity formation?
- What other measures can teachers take to ensure that they are properly identifying, pronouncing, and honoring any changes to the names of their students?

My first steps involved reviewing existing literature and practices that applied to my line of inquiry and observing my students and their learning with intention so that I was able to determine what type of experimental intervention would be best for my particular context.

## **Context**

This inquiry was conducted during the 2020-2021 school year in both an English Language Learner classroom and a senior-level Creative Writing classroom at State College Area High School. State High is a mid-sized, suburban/rural high school situated in close proximity to Pennsylvania State University. The district is majority white, accounting for about 81% of the student population, and English Language Learners account for about 3.5% (State College Area School District, 2020). The ELL students attending State High come from an incredibly wide variety of backgrounds, varying in language(s), cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, reasons for immigration to the U.S., previous educational experiences, and much more. The ELL program at State High follows an “ESL class period” model, in which the students are enrolled in a special ELL course for both English and Social Studies instruction. They are arranged into three proficiency level groupings – labeled 3, 4, and 5 – with 3 being considered the beginner proficiency level and 5 the highest proficiency level. The Creative Writing course at State High is an elective taken by seniors for one half-semester marking period, though younger students can request to opt-in if they so desire.

As a young teacher-researcher in both of these spaces, I was in the positions of co-teacher and student teacher in relation to my mentors and my students. I regularly taught and designed full lessons in both contexts. Students were accustomed to my presence as a secondary teacher



figure, and they were aware that I held some level of authority over classroom activities and grading. I had been teaching in the ELL classes since August of that year (the interventions took place in early February). In Creative Writing, the course had begun in January. I identify as a white woman, and, through self-examination and reflection, I try to always keep that positionality in mind in all classes that I teach.

During the time of my interventions, there were certain pieces of the curriculum that were already present in both courses. ELL 4 reads *Romeo and Juliet* every year during the spring semester, and that text served as the entry point for integrating my name-focused journal intervention into the ELL 4 curriculum. My intervention in the Creative Writing class was bridged through a class reading of Sandra Cisneros's vignette "My Name" from her novel *The House on Mango Street* as a fiction writing mentor text for a writing warm up. Both interventions are detailed thoroughly below.

### **Data Collection**

Two components of my data collection that called my attention to the topic of names in the first place and served as an aid in thoughtfully planning and implementing meaningful classroom interventions were my field notes and reflective journal. Through taking field notes, I attempted to record base-level observations during class time that seemed to be areas of interest, concern, or questioning in the moment. Those observations then became fodder for reflective journaling, which took place after school, allowing me to interpret and extract understanding from the data – such as classroom events, interactions, and student feedback – that are constantly

present in a classroom. These processes led to the generation of my inquiry questions and targeted interventions.

To address the first two inquiry questions about student attitudes towards names and integrating the topic of names into curricula, I developed the ELL 4 “What’s in a Name?” Journal Entry and the Creative Writing “My Name” Writing Warm-Up. Both of these learning activities asked students to explore the importance or non-importance of their names to their identities, though in different ways, and both directly address question one. The assignments were also seamlessly integrated into the typical pre-planned curricula of both courses in formats that were familiar and somewhat casual for the students to complete and consider. This approach ensured that students did not feel any unique weight or pressure was placed upon their answers to the assignments. My research into the topic was also informed by the design of these lessons; as such they address question two.

Each week, ELL 4 students complete a journal entry that touches upon a theme that is current and personal, but also ties into the text that we are reading in class in some way. Students read a short article or piece of writing and then respond to the piece through 3-4 guiding questions. Utilizing Juliet’s famous speech “What’s in a name?” from *Romeo and Juliet* as a jumping off point, the name-themed journal was the 16th weekly journal of the sort that the students completed. The prompt given asked them to read the speech, and then briefly respond to four questions ranging from their reactions to Juliet’s speech to slightly more personal questions about their relationships to their own name(s) and how their names have been handled in school settings (see Appendix A). These journals are low-stakes assignments that are graded for completion and depth of thought and not any sort of grammar or mechanical components. This

allowed students to focus on expressing their opinions and ideas rather than concerning themselves over minutiae.

The Creative Writing name assignment was embedded within the daily writing warm-ups that the students complete at the start of each class. A mentor text – Sandra Cisneros’s vignette “My Name” from *The House on Mango Street* – was read to the students before the warm-up to spark creativity and possibilities and bridge to the topic of names. Students then had eight minutes to free write a response to the “My Name” Warm-Up prompt which asked them to characterize their relationship to their own name through metaphor and figurative language (see Appendix B). In a similar way to the ELL 4 assignment, the routine nature of the writing warm-up provided a casual space for students to reflect on their feelings about their names without added concerns like grading and mechanics.

To address my final question about other measures that teachers could take to honor student names, I collected data through interviews with two experienced teachers. Sarah Rito has 19 years of teaching experience, and Lisa Harpster has 13 years. They have both taught at State College Area High School for all of their teaching years, and they both identify as white women who are monolingual. Sarah and Lisa both consented to the use of their real names in this thesis. Lisa has taught only English Language Learners for all of her years of teaching, and Sarah has taught various ELA courses. To tap into their knowledge and experience in order to build my repertoire of practices and advice about the subject of student names, I conducted an interview with each of them individually. The interview consisted of five questions (see Appendix C). The interviews were audio recorded, and I also took shorthand notes of the most salient parts of their responses.

## Data Analysis

All student work that was collected for this inquiry and excerpted was done so with the permission of students and parents/guardians via an opt-out letter. All student work included will be void of identifying information, and the students will be referred to as Student A, B, C, etc. as displayed in the chart below.

*Table 1. Student Pseudonyms in Analysis*

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Class: English Language Learner (ELL) or Creative Writing (CW)</b>
Student A	ELL (pp. 24 + 34)
Student B	ELL (pp. 25 + 28)
Student C	CW (p. 25)
Student D	CW (p. 25)
Student E	ELL (pp. 26 + 33)
Student F	CW (p. 27)
Student G	CW (p. 27)
Student H	ELL (p. 28)
Student I	CW (p. 29)
Student J	ELL (p. 33)
Student K	ELL (p. 34)
Student L	ELL (p. 34)

Students are marked as either a student from the English Language Learner class or the Creative Writing class. Page numbers indicate where you may find a quotation from a student's response. The A, B, C identification method was chosen over assigning pseudonyms to the students because replacing true student names with a stand-in name could obscure reader understanding of the topic itself and the students' personal thoughts could be lost in the conjecture of what the original name might be. Additionally, it would have been extremely difficult to capture the essence of student names with pseudonyms because of the large diversity of participants in this study. I believe that using pseudonyms would have done a disservice to their reflections.

Once all relevant student work had been completed, I compiled the individual student artifacts into two documents, one for each assignment. I standardized fonts and sizes so that the document was easy to follow and consider as a whole. Then, I did an initial read through of all the student work, highlighting for information that aligned with my research questions. After obtaining a holistic view of the data, I begin to more systematically comb through student responses, looking for similar themes, through lines, and connections. I made a preliminary list of the themes that I discovered and began to add color-coded highlights to student responses in correspondence with the themes.

*Table 2. Initial Thematic Analysis of Student Responses*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>“What’s in a Name?” Journal Entry Instances</b>	<b>“My Name” Warm Up Instances</b>
Identifies strongly with name	5	8
Pride or positive association to family	2	2
Maps personality traits onto perceived traits of name or vice versa	3	8
Does not identify with name	4	6
Name feels unoriginal or not special	0	4
Feels names are not important	3	1
Teachers make mistakes and it’s ok	7	0
Annoyed or dislike when name is mispronounced by teachers	4	1
Empowered by having choice in their name	2	1

With this step finished, I met with my thesis supervisor to consider which themes aligned most closely with my research questions and were ripe for more in-depth analysis. Finally, I wrote a research memo to narrow down my analytic process to the most important and relevant themes and students’ excerpts to include.

Once my scope of analysis of the student data was mapped out, I approached data collected from my teacher interviews in a similar manner. I began by looking for suggestions, advice, or anecdotes that seemed to particularly clash or align with student thoughts on the

matter of names in schools. Utilizing a similar process of highlighting themes, I was able to determine which interview content was most relevant to my research questions and my analysis overall.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Discussion**

This inquiry is an exploration of student feelings about their names and the treatment of their names in school through “name assignment” interventions integrated into the curricula of two courses. Through consideration of the data collected, this inquiry also seeks to generate suggestions and possibilities for practices that teachers can take up to support and honor student names in the classroom. As noted in the methods section, I approached data holistically and conducted an inductive analysis through multiple systematic examinations of student work to arrive at the relevant themes, which are reported in this chapter. Content from teacher interviews was analyzed in a similar manner, and discussion and findings from that data are also included in this chapter.

#### **Student Identification with Names**

Viewing all of the student work that I collected in my inquiry as a whole, I was amazed by the wide variety and the nuance that I found represented in student responses across both assignments. Whether their feelings towards their names skewed positive, negative, or somewhere in the middle, student responses tended to be longer than was usual for many students, and a lot of them included strong, impassioned language and statements. The work also presented a large range of reasons and justifications for each student’s individual orientation towards their name. Some students focused on one aspect of their feelings or thoughts while others described a multitude of different factors in their reflections. There were also cases in

which students expressed sentiments that were seemingly contradictory or, at least, much more complicated than a strictly binary orientation of positive or negative identification with their name. To streamline this variety, I divided student responses into three subsections: “Positive Identification with Name,” “Negative or No Identification with Name,” and “Ambivalent Identification with Name.”

*Table 3. Student Percentages in Each Name Identification Category*

<b>Class/Assignment</b>	<b>Positive Identification</b>	<b>Negative/No Identification</b>	<b>Ambivalent Identification</b>
ELL 4 / “What’s in a Name?” Journal Entry	56%	22%	22%
Creative Writing / “My Name” Warm Up	47%	33%	20%

Table 2 shows the overall breakdown via percentages of how student work was categorized for each class/assignment. Representative excerpts will stand in for thematic through lines in the data in subsequent analysis. All student quotations are reproduced here without any editing or correction. I made this choice to preserve student voice, which is vital to my analysis and the purpose of this inquiry.

### ***Positive Identification with Name***

Most student responses fell under the category of positive identification with their names. However, this positive orientation took many forms. Some students, such as Student A in ELL 4, very explicitly stated that their name was important to them: “I view my name to be so important I wouldn’t want to change it because my name holds my identity...I have created an identity with this name.” These explicitly strong and positive responses were very organic, as we had not spoken about the topic of names at all in either class before the assignments. In fact, it is



interesting that the jumping off point for the ELL 4 journal entry consisted solely of the “What’s in a Name?” speech from *Romeo and Juliet*. Considering that, in the speech itself, Juliet expresses the idea that names are *not* important to the inherent personhood of an individual, I see these strong declarations of identification with their names as especially noteworthy. In the face of Shakespeare, the majority of students in ELL 4 still proudly proclaimed the significance of their names. Meanwhile, the Sandra Cisneros vignette in Creative Writing’s “My Name” Warm Up provided a mix of negative and positive reflection by the main character on the topic of her name, so I am unsure of what impact this mentor text could have had thematically on student responses.

Besides or in concert with explicit remarks about the importance of their names, two other prominent themes of positive identification among student work involved positive or proud familial associations with names and/or perceived coinciding traits between names and personalities. Student B in ELL 4 writes that “[A name] is also important because it bears the name of his family or the tribe of his homeland,” suggesting that pride, status, and nationality can be contained in a family name. Meanwhile, Student C in Creative Writing feels connected to her family through the spellings of their names writing, “My mom, sister, and I all have double ee’s in our name, and I love that.” Names were also seen as representative of personality traits by many students, like Student D in Creative Writing, who compared the traits of her given first name and her middle name, which she prefers and goes by: “[My first name] is shy and doesn’t stand for herself. But [my middle name] gives me confidence and a feeling of my authentic self.” Other more niche positive reasonings included the sound of the name, the visual look of the name, or a story attached to the name.

As a teacher, I learned so much about my students – how they view themselves and their personalities, their families and backgrounds, their tastes/hobbies/likes – through reading these name assignments. It allowed me to connect with my students on a deeper level, which, in turn, helped me to better understand them as their teacher. It also gave them the space to consider and explore their own identities in creative or thought-provoking ways. Furthermore, the fact that most of my students felt a positive or close association between their identities and their names reinforces the idea that teachers should ensure that they take measures to respect and honor student names, as names are tightly intertwined with identity.

### *Negative or No Identification with Name*

Quite a few students either expressed a dislike or feeling of disassociation in regard to their names or felt that their names had no bearing upon who they are as a person at all. For those who had negative orientations toward their names, their language tended to be written with the same level of conviction and emotion as those with positive associations, just on the opposite side of the spectrum. Conversely, the relatively small number of students who explicitly explained that they believed names held no importance at all tended to write in a more logical, objective manner. Just as I speculated about the connection between the mentor texts and the students' work for the responses categorized as positive identification, I did wonder if Juliet's speech specifically might have inspired any of these students that were in ELL 4 to adopt her proto-postmodern stance on names.

The students that felt that their names were not important at all took the stance that someone's personhood and their name are separate entities. For example, Student E in ELL 4

wrote, “No, for me not is important. For does not matter my name i can call for any name my person doesn't go change.” Interestingly, this student actually has two first names and goes by one or the other depending on setting. Perhaps this contributed to their opinion about names? This type of response was also exhibited in Creative Writing, which did not read *Romeo and Juliet* (at least in our class). Student F in Creative Writing wrote that “[My name] is just my name, what people call me. Like the ocean and sea, no matter what you call it it means the same thing.” To me, this sounded a lot like the “a rose by any other name” sentiment à la Juliet. No matter where this idea came from, it fit so well with everything else that I had read from this student. The student often tends towards the philosophical in his writing, and it was no surprise to me that he decided to write about his name in this way.

Meanwhile, a whole other group of students practically lambasted their names in Creative Writing (this stance was not present in ELL 4). The most common reason why students expressed a dislike of their names was that they felt they were too common or unoriginal. Student G wrote that her very common U.S. name was “the name parents give to little girls who they want to be perfect, in an ordinary sort of way” calling it “uninteresting” and “a mold.” Other reasons for disliking a name included the perceived femininity or masculinity of a name that students felt mismatched with their personality, the sound of the name, and having a name that others cannot easily spell.

Though student responses that were categorized into negative/no identification might not feel as though their name says much about who they are, I was able to learn just as much about these students from their reflections on their names as I was the students categorized in positive identification. In contrasting themselves to their perception of their name, I learned about their values, personalities, and thought processes. Those who were unsatisfied with the commonness

of their name desired to be or felt unique. Those who disliked the soft or sweet quality of their name wanted to be bold. I could infer that those who saw no importance in names tended towards the philosophical in their argumentation. Students on both sides of the spectrum of identification both participated thoughtfully in the exercise of self-evaluation and reflection through the topic of their names.

### *Ambivalent Identification with Name*

During the categorization process, a small percentage of students did not neatly fit into the categories of positive or negative/no identification with their names. The term “ambivalent,” in the context of this category, is defined as “having contradictory or mixed feelings or attitudes about someone or something” (Oxford English Dictionary). Contradiction is not necessarily a bad thing, and I believe that it is possible and useful to hold two seemingly clashing ideas together and allow them both to be true. This complicated, multi-view stance is what unified all of the student examples categorized as ambivalent. Ambivalent responses either explicitly held together two conflicting ideas about their names or included parts in their reflections that seemingly contradicted each other.

One student in ELL 4, Student H, crafted a very complex response in which he first stated that “Names can be an indication of its identity, of its origin, and even a future career.” Yet, he goes on to write, “I personally don’t view my name as a significant feature to who I am.” Later in his response, however, he does comment “Due to the fact that my first name is very unique, I find myself special” which, to me, indicated some level of identification with his name, though, maybe not “significant,” as he wrote. Another ELL 4 student, Student B, at first declared

“I don’t really care about my name because it is not important than who really I am.” She later employed strong language, though, when writing about her preferred nickname: “I prefer [this name] because this is the name I choose and I love it.” Both exhibit complicated relationships with their names or conditional opinions about quite how important their names are to them. Yet another student, Student I in Creative Writing, narrates stories about both positive and negative associations with her name, her final conclusion being that “I’ve come to accept my name and realize that a name doesn’t have to fit into what everyone else thinks it is. Really, a person’s name is up to their own interpretation.” Other examples of ambivalent stances closely aligned with the provided excerpts.

Similar to both other categories of responses, reading the complicated musings and thoughts of these students allowed me to understand them and their personalities better as well as allowed them to exhibit the way that they can grapple with difficult and complex subject matter through their writing. No matter which way students tackled the prompt, they were invited to engage in identity development, self-reflection, and serious consideration of the relevance and importance of the semi-abstract and philosophical concept of naming and how our names do or do not affect our lives.

### **Curricular Value**

One of the main questions that this inquiry sought to explore was in what ways the topic of names can be successfully incorporated into curricula “to support and affirm students’ backgrounds and identity formation.” Having implemented and examined the results of two distinct name-themed assignments in two different classes of students, I can confidently say that

I consider these integrated reflective writing opportunities very successful. On the count of providing students with room to develop or refine their conceptions of their own identities and backgrounds, each assignment sparked enough interest for students to produce often long, complex, and impassioned reflections on themes of identity/background and more. The prompts were just general enough that students could explore whatever feelings or thoughts they had associated with the topic of names, giving them a field of choice to work with reminiscent of Miller's Queer Literacy term of "self-determination." Furthermore, it was not difficult to seamlessly include each assignment as an additional piece of the curriculum for both classes. The Creative Writing Warm Up involved a 2-minute reading of "My Name" and an 8-minute free write period. The "What's in a Name?" Journal Entry only had to be, at minimum, 150 words, though almost every student far exceeded the minimum on this particular journal.

By giving the students the space to bring their own opinions, knowledges, backgrounds, and personalities to these writing tasks, name-themed assignments can serve as an example of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. These assignments, when integrated within a teacher's broader stance of CSP, communicate to students that their identities, cultures, and experiences are valuable and welcomed in a classroom. In the case of ELL 4 and *Romeo and Juliet*, I also believe that the "What's in a Name?" assignment and other similar opportunities to connect what they already know to the text helped students to relate more to the story and characters, increasing motivation and interest. Some students in ELL 4 included their name in the characters of their home languages alongside the Anglicization, and students in both classes traced the origins of their names and the cultural relevance/meaning behind it. I would strongly suggest the use of similar name-themed assignments to teachers who teach through the lens of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

The products that came out of both interventions also represented some of the best-written and most complex pieces of writing that my students have created so far. Research indicates that authentic and student-centered writing tasks tend to increase the amount of effort and thought that students put into their work (Whitney, 2011). This certainly seemed to be true for both of these writing assignments taking into account length, complexity and variety of thought, emotionality and intensity, and (in Creative Writing) the inventiveness and strength of the imagery. High school students are all in the throes of defining their sense of self and how their personhood relates to all of the other people in their lives – friends, parents, teachers. By tapping into this natural and ongoing work that students are already thinking about and developing, they come to a writing task with feelings and thoughts that they *want* to express, contextualize, investigate. This pushes their writing skills and development as well, generally resulting in more considerate and committed work than more traditionally scholastic prompts might inspire.

Though not something that I went into this inquiry process considering, adding name-themed assignments to a curriculum can also be a wonderful way to build a strong and interconnected classroom community. After the “My Name” Warm Up in Creative Writing, we asked the students to do a quick share (or “whip around”) of either a story about their name or an image/metaphor from their warm up for community-building purposes. It was one of the liveliest and most entertaining starts to a class that we have had, and, at the end, one student requested that we ask the question again the next day to the singular absent student because they wanted to learn about his name too. As I have written in earlier parts of this inquiry, names are intimate. There is an instant connection and a power in knowing, using, and learning about another’s name that brings people together. There is often talk of having a “good classroom culture,” but less talk

of practices that can cultivate such a space in which student-to-student interaction flourishes and peers feel vulnerable enough to share their stories and writing. Name assignments can be an effective way to foster a classroom community in which students know each other by name, interact as equals, and feel comfortable enough to share their diversity of experiences and personalities freely.

### **Feelings About Teacher Mispronunciation**

Another aspect of students' feelings about their names that I was invested in exploring in this inquiry was teacher mispronunciation or the ways that teachers learn and respect (or do not learn and respect) student names. Most of the data relevant to this topic came from the ELL 4 Journal Entry, because the question of teacher mispronunciation was built into the prompt. However, the vignette "My Name" also contains a paragraph in which Esperanza relates how teachers mispronounce her name in school, so there was an opening or precedent for Creative Writing students to touch on this point as well. The text reads, "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth" (Cisneros, 2004, pp. 10-11). Yet, I am aware that, as a teacher asking these questions, there might be some limitations or reservations that the students felt about sharing their opinions about teachers with me. Still, it is worth noting that the large majority of students generally expressed a sense of understanding and of being "Empathetic Towards Teacher Mispronunciation." However, some students presented a more nuanced opinion on the issue or expressed negative emotions related to mispronunciation in school, and I categorized these student responses as "Mixed or Negative Feelings Towards Mispronunciation."



### *Empathetic Towards Teacher Mispronunciation*

A large number of students in ELL 4 presented humanizing views of teacher failings in the realm of mispronunciation or mistakes regarding names. For example, Student J writes “Of course, the teacher or my friends got it wrong when they called my name. I’m not particularly offended because we’re human, and we can make mistakes if we’re human. I’m never offended by that.” There are no caveats in his answer, just a blanket forgiveness for mistakes along with an interesting assumption of the fact that “of course” they are going to “get it wrong.” This student also has adopted an English name that is used in school, so perhaps he does not quite as often experience mispronunciation. A rather cheeky comment from Student E reads: “It is fine if a person says my name wrong. Why is anyone perfect, nothing it’s good now.” This sentiment about mistakes being “ok” was very common among student responses. The students exhibit a lot of empathy and understanding towards those that might have trouble with a name because it is new or unfamiliar. I wonder if this derives from their own experiences having to learn new and unfamiliar things when they moved to the U.S., and, for a lot of them, perhaps these struggles make it easier to extend grace and empathy to others going through the same thing. All of my students grew up in other countries and then immigrated to the U.S. either as refugees or voluntary immigrants. An interesting extension of this inquiry would be to explore the feelings of ELLs or minoritized students growing up in the U.S. and their opinions about teacher mispronunciation of their names.

### *Mixed or Negative Feelings Towards Mispronunciation*

Despite the near-universal empathy towards teacher mispronunciation in school, a good number of students also expressed certain conditions that would need to be met for them to feel ok about the mistakes. Student K in ELL 4 writes, “I feel nothing if they read my name wrong because it’s okay not everyone can read all the names right especially that my name is not American, but if they say my name wrong after I tell them the right way I feel a little annoyed.” Similarly, Student A expresses empathy towards mispronunciation if “they learn my name just to say it right and I don't feel bad.” So, this group of students seems willing to extend understanding and empathy towards teachers as long as those teachers seem to be making a concerted effort to learn and remember student names and pronunciations. This brings to mind Gonzalez’s idea of the name “calibrator” who checks and re-checks pronunciations to be sure that they are correct and is willing to show vulnerability and humanity when they make a mistake (Gonzalez, 2014). To this group of students, a teacher’s attitude and willingness to learn seem to be what is expected, certainly not perfection.

One last student, Student L in ELL 4, responded to the question of teacher mispronunciation in a more unique way. She writes, “I pronounce my name in the same way that they pronounce them to make it easier for them because my name is difficult to pronounce and I hope after the passage of days that they pronounce it correctly, but I have no problem with this that it is not important just the difference of accents.” I have been unsure how to contextualize or approach this response. On one hand, there are some changes that the student is making here to accommodate for her teachers, though there is a desire expressed for a true pronunciation of her name. That is not ideal, to me. However, the student described it as “not important” and “just a difference of accents.” There will always be names that someone who did not grow up speaking

the language might just never be able to pronounce. This creates an odd space in which the student desires to hear her name pronounced correctly – and the teacher might want to pronounce it correctly as well – but that goal might be unreachable. If we can learn from the other responses, the best possible answer to this dilemma might just be teacher effort, care, and a vulnerable, humanizing presence in the classroom. In a way, it might be powerful for students to understand that teachers do not know everything and cannot do everything – that some things might be far beyond their reach even with practice. Yet, they still try and put forth effort even if they might just fail again and again. As many of the students wrote, “no one is perfect.” Having examined the student perspective on this topic, the next perspective that I explored was the teacher point-of-view.

### **Teacher Interviews**

To address my final inquiry question about other strategies that teachers could use to better honor student names, I sought out information from teachers themselves. The two interviews that I conducted were extremely useful in collecting various strategies about learning and remembering student names, gaining perspective on the topic of names from the teacher side to compare to what the students said, and even in raising further questions about a teacher’s role in student name choice that I had not considered.

Some of the teachers’ strategies that they mentioned in the interviews map onto the best practices that I discovered in my literature review, included in the section “Professional Organizations and Best Practices,” and some were new to me. Both teachers identified that they will often check in with students within the first couple weeks of learning their names to ensure

that they continue to say it correctly – again, what Gonzalez would term a “calibrator” stance. Each teacher also had a different strategy for remembering pronunciations: Sarah writes nicknames and difficult pronunciations down phonetically on her roster, and Lisa creates mental mnemonic devices to remember name pronunciations. While Lisa, because of her ELL role, has the chance to meet students and ask about their names before they come to class on the first day, Sarah told me that she recently started sending out quick introductory emails before the course starts, asking students to let her know if they would like to confirm a pronunciation, inform her of a name change, or if they have some other concern. A new, and I think very promising, strategy that Sarah suggested was to avoid doing a traditional roll call on the first day at all. She prefers to make the first day more engaging and casual, learning names in a more organic way than just reading down a list.

What stuck out to me even more from the interviews than the useful strategies was their ideas about effort, attitude, and vulnerability. Sarah, who sends out course emails, said that “Even if you don’t get many responses, at least it shows you care.” Both teachers also threw out some phrases that they will often say when attempting the pronunciation of an unfamiliar name: “I know I’m not going to say this right, but please correct me,” “Am I saying that correctly, or not?” “Can you help me to say this right?” In all of these phrases, there is at least some small show of vulnerability. *I am the teacher, and I don’t know how to say this but I will try. Then, I will learn from you.* Lisa’s all-around advice was explicitly about being vulnerable: “Remain without any defenses. We never know what they know and think and want unless they tell us. Teachers feel like they have to know everything. If they can admit they are having a hard time and be honest while they are trying to learn, that’s good.” Much of this talk of effort and vulnerability reminded me of the student responses – no one is perfect, people make mistakes, if

they are trying to learn then it's ok. Honoring student names is less about using strategies to avoid making any mistakes, and more about putting forth the good-faith, informed effort, keeping a positive and supportive attitude, and being willing to be vulnerable with your students.

The interviews also ignited new lines of inquiry for me that I am not sure have any definitive answer. Lisa recalled two experiences with student names from her early teaching career that she and her colleagues were not sure how to handle. The first experience involved a student who adopted the English name "Betty" that is typically used by women from a much older generation. Lisa remembers being unsure whether it was her place to inform that student of the cultural/generational association that the name had or not. She eventually ended up deciding to show the student a picture of Betty White. This prompted the student to ask "Oh, are all Bettys old?" Lisa confirmed this, and later on the student opted to change her name to one associated with a younger generation. In recounting the story, Lisa was unsure what the "right" response was to the situation. In another scenario Lisa experienced, the Anglicized pronunciation of one of her student's names sounded like an incredibly offensive phrase in English. Apparently, this was handled by a guidance counselor who talked with the student (Lisa is unsure what was said), and the student ended up taking on a nickname. Both of these scenarios raise wholly new questions about the topic of names and students learning in a new country or culture – What is a teacher's role in making students aware of the social implications of the names they either were given or choose? This is a complex question that I have no answers for, but it does illustrate the way that the subject of names contains much more depth than it is usually given consideration for containing.

Between both name assignments and the teacher interviews, the data that I collected for this inquiry helped me to learn more about my students, how to build classroom community, and

the ways that teachers in general can honor student names in their classrooms through practices, curriculum measures, and the willingness to put forth effort and be vulnerable. As much as I was able to learn about my context and students through this inquiry process, further wonderings and questions arose that would be fruitful topics for future study, and it would be beneficial to explore this line of inquiry again in a different school context.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Conclusion**

#### **COVID-19 and the Importance of Connectedness**

One enormous factor that is unavoidable in my concluding thoughts about this inquiry process is the COVID-19 Pandemic. All of my teaching experiences, interactions with my students, and lesson delivery was conducted through video conferencing software – at the time of writing this, I have not met a single one of my students in person. At the worst of times, I felt isolated and unable to connect with the students on the other side of the screen. At the best of times, I laughed or cried or joked with them as though I could barely remember that these human beings and I had never truly met. COVID has done much to isolate and alienate students from their school lives even further. Remote learning has proven an inconvenience for some, a near insurmountable obstacle for others. But, though much is said of the little black boxes that students proffer their teacher in lieu of their authentic selves or attention, undeniable bonds and connections have been formed in my classes.

With my mentor teachers leading as tremendous examples of how to encourage and cultivate welcoming and affirming classroom communities, the students have responded with an equal desire for connection and expression during a pandemic that has forced us all into confinement. Now more than ever, a humanizing approach to teaching that allows students to feel, to create, to connect with others in an authentic way is incredibly vital not only in sustaining the identity development and cultures of our students, but in sustaining their very minds and hearts. Honoring student names in this time of crisis might mean more than ever before. When

the repeating pattern of black squares on your computer screen could easily register as darkened pixels floating adrift in cyberspace, you need to look at that 12-point-font name scrolled across the bottom edge. Take in each letter. Imagine the thought and care put in by those who chose that name, the stories that name has gathered like knickknacks and scars and playing cards over the years. Imagine that name whispered tenderly by a loved one, yelled playfully by a friend. Imagine that name scrawled by the clumsy fist of a child with a mangled crayon for the first time at the top of their paper. Imagine that name stamped on a trophy from when they won first prize. Imagine that name on their diploma that they receive through the mail instead of beaming and proud, surrounded by loved ones as they climb down from the stage at their graduation, like they have imagined their whole lives.

Then use that name. Let them know you see them in all their humanity and struggles and desires for connection and purpose. Names matter now more than ever.

### **Reflection and Implications**

Through my inquiry process, I discovered and evaluated a great amount of information, suggested practices, student attitudes, and further wonderings about the topic of names in my particular context. When I began my action research, I worried that the topic of names was too niche, too specific. I was unsure if students would prove to be as interested or stimulated by the topic as I had been when I pinned it down as an area of interest. Now, writing the concluding chapter of my project, I can confidently assert that the topic of names is certainly not banal or inconsequential in the eyes of myself, most of my students, or, I would argue, to a wider audience.



The student interest in both of the writing tasks that I assigned stands out to me as one of the most exciting outcomes of the inquiry process. Rather than dissecting some removed, classical text or analyzing a historical speech, the students were provided with an opportunity to write about themselves and their identities, how their personhood relates to the world and people around them, what they value and what they hold dear. And their work was anything but trivial or simple. It was enthused, passionate, confident, visionary, complicated, philosophical, personal, thoughtful, moving, witty, reflective, impressive. This outcome carries implications that stretch beyond the topic of names and towards the way we design curricula, create writing tasks, and decide what skills and topics we make room for and prioritize in schools at large. With English education widely relying on standardized testing, rote writing formats, and analysis of canon literary works as the mainstays of the subject, where in our students' school lives do we uplift and support identity development, cultural and background exploration, and creative expression? Cultivating space for more authentic, student-centered writing tasks is important for all students (Whitney, 2011). From my experience thus far, when students feel connected to, knowledgeable about, and interested in a writing task, they enjoy it more, and the products themselves serve as stronger representation of their skills, complex thoughts, and true effort. These writing tasks do not have to be about the topic of names to be authentic and culturally sustaining, but the subject of names can serve as an ideal lens through which to begin or continue integrating such kinds of writing tasks into curricula.

To expound upon the wider possible consequences of test-prep and standard-centric mentalities in the English classroom and schools in general, there is a real danger of students feeling more and more alienated from their schooling. Though policymakers and educators might think that constructs such as universal standards prepare students for whatever life tasks (career,

college, etc.) they envision for them, many high school students can struggle to see the point in the work they do in school. They certainly dream of the future, but many high schoolers are much more preoccupied with the now. They are attempting to contextualize their lives, decide what they believe, what they like, where they fit in the world – they are much more committed to their daily interactions, their friends, topics and issues that affect them immediately, not 10 years from now. If all they talk about in school seems either focused on the past through the canon or the future which seems so distant, why are we as educators surprised that school can sometimes feel impersonal and, at worst, repressive to them?

Schooling is often alienating and impersonal, and teachers can take a step to remedy that through something that is inherently personal: names. Names and the associations and meanings we create within them can build classroom community and make learning more personal, more focused on critical questions our students are already asking. Though perhaps not all of our curricular content should be geared towards individual identity or topics of familiarity, even making a point of *using* student names often could work to counteract some of the feelings of isolation or estrangement students might feel towards their education. What would be the impact of fostering an environment in which students are encouraged to use each other's names? Would this increase student-student interaction? Would students report feeling more welcome in a classroom where their names were regularly used?

I leave my inquiry process with more questions than when I began. There are whole, complex social systems behind our cultural and collective naming practices and etiquette that deserve further study in many other educational contexts. What of the impact of names in other regions of the United States? With other student populations? In other nations? There is a far wider basin of inquiry that is still to be explored, yet I am satisfied for now with what I have

learned from this experience and how it has impacted my commitments as an educator. I will strive to apply the techniques, carry on the assignments, and, especially, adopt the attitude of a teacher that honors student names into all of my future endeavors.

### **Looking Inward and Branching Out**

One last insight, one last gem of inspiration that my students and their responses gifted to me is a new perspective on my own name. I hope that in the course of crafting this record of my inquiry process, the creativity and ingenuity of both classes' responses has shone through and not gotten lost in the analysis. To ensure that doesn't happen, I end here with some of the many words they wrote that taught me something about names in general – and my own name – that has felt liberatory and exciting.

When I read one student's idea that "The values of individuals are not constant like names. They can be developed," I considered that the name Sarah has lived far longer than me. It has been inherited and chosen and preserved over an incredible number of years. My parents chose my name before myself, as a person, existed. And, in the years that I have been alive and have born this name, I have changed and renegotiated my own identity hundreds of times over. Another student of mine wrote that "A person's name is up to their own interpretation," and though Sarah has an external power, meaning, and ubiquity that has existed outside of myself for so long, my journey with it is unique.

Reading the "My Name" metaphors that students created encouraged me to craft some new, redefining metaphors of my own. Some of my favorite descriptions that my students wrote included: "[My name is] the answer to a crossword clue that my parents got correct with an

educated guess,” “[My name] sounds a little clandestine. Like I should be hiding in a bush somewhere,” “[My name is] the small drift of wind that flows from a bird’s wings and the morning dew on grass.” These are just a few of many wonderful and personal examples, emblematic of personalities and writing styles I am now so familiar with as their teacher. Their brilliance inspired these redefining metaphors that I crafted for myself:

Sarah is the smooth warmth of coffee on a slow, chilly morning.

Sarah sounds in the furious clack of a keyboard and the flick of a turning page.

Sarah holds tight to her roots while branching out towards the future.

It is my honor as a teacher to not only design learning experiences *for* my students, but to learn *from* them as well. I carry this year’s connections, memories, insights, and experiences into all of my future classrooms, and I will remember each and every name.

## Appendix A:

### ELL 4 Journal Entry

Re-read Juliet's speech about names [here](#) or in the digital text on pages 80-81. Then, in your journal, answer the following questions:

1. Juliet says in the speech that she wishes that names were not important at all. Do you agree or disagree with her ideas in the speech?
2. Do you view your own name as important to who you are as a person? Why or why not?
3. Do you have more than one name (maybe a different name at home and at school, a nickname, or an English name)? Why or why not?
4. Have teachers (or even us!) ever said your name really wrong? If they have, how did you feel? What do you wish teachers would do differently to make sure they know your name and can say it correctly?

Hyperlinked photo:

Act 2, Scene 2

## What's in a Name?

<p>Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name. Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet. 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy. Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part <u>belonging to a man</u>. O, be some other name! <u>What's in a name?</u> That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet. So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, Retain that dear perfection which he owes Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name, And for that name, which is no part of thee take all myself.</p>	<p>Oh, Romeo, Romeo, why do you have to be Romeo? Forget about your father and change your name. Or else, if you won't change your name, just swear you love me and I'll stop being a Capulet. It's only your name that's my enemy. You'd still be yourself even if you stopped being a Montague. What's a Montague anyway? It isn't a hand, a foot, an arm, a face, or <u>any other part of a man</u>. Oh, be some other name! <u>What does a name mean?</u> The thing we call a rose would smell just as sweet if we called it by any other name. Romeo would be just as perfect even if he wasn't called Romeo. Romeo, lose your name. Trade in your name- which really has nothing to do with you- and take all of me in exchange.</p>
--	--

Shakespeare, W. (2005). No fear Romeo and Juliet. Edited by SparkNotes editors. Spark Publishing LLC.

**Appendix B:****Creative Writing Writer's Notebook Warm Up****2/11/21: My Name**

After having considered Sandra Cisneros "My Name" as a mentor text, write about your name.

You can touch on meaning, nicknames, how you *feel* about your name, how others perceive your name, or something else -- just make sure you include strong imagery and figurative language.

What would your name be if it were a color? A musical instrument? A plant? An animal? How does your name feel, smell, look, taste, sound?

**"My Name" by Sandra Cisneros  
excerpted from *The House on Mango Street***

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse -- which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female -- but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild, horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as my sister's name Magdalena -- which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least -- can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

Cisneros, S. (2004). *The house on mango street*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

**Appendix C:****Teacher Interview Questions**

1. Are there any strategies you have or things that you do before students come to the first day of class to learn about their names (preferences, pronunciations, etc.)?
2. What do you do or how do you conduct yourself when you encounter a name that is unfamiliar to you on your roster?
3. When a student tells you how to pronounce their name, is there anything that you do to remember the pronunciation later?
4. Can you recall any experiences with names that have stuck out to you in the years you have been teaching? For example, a student underwent a name change in the middle of the school year, you were unsure of a pronunciation, a student received a nickname?
5. Can you think of any other advice or things you have learned from your years of teaching about how to be respectful to and honor students' names, given or chosen?



**REFERENCES**

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. (1987). How to tame a wild tongue. *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza*. (pp. 357-365). Aunt Lute Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjnj.57>
- Beemyn, B., Curtis, B., Davis, M., & Tubbs, N.J. (2005). Transgender issues on college campuses. *New directions for student services: Gender identity and sexual orientation*, 2005(111), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.173>
- Brauer, Dot. (2017). Complexities of supporting transgender students' use of self-identified first names and pronouns. *College and University*, 92(3), 2-13.  
<http://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/scholarly-journals/complexities-supporting-transgender-students-use/docview/1935357594/se-2?accountid=13158>
- Buckelew, M., & Ewing, J. (2019). Action research for English language arts teachers: Invitation to inquiry. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, Suresh A. (2013). Negotiating translingual literacy: An enactment. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 48(1), 40–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24398646>
- Cisneros, S. (2004). *The house on mango street*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Cotterill, Simon. (2009). Call me Fei: Chinese-speaking students' decision whether or not to use English names in classroom interaction. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 33(3), 228-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2019.1614598>
- Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2014). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Company.

- Edwards, Rachel. (2006). What's in a name? Chinese learners and the practice of adopting 'English' names. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 19(1), 90-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668756>
- García, Ofelia. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In A. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson, & T. Skutnabb-Kangas (Eds.), *Multilingual education for social justice: Globalising the local*. (pp. 140-158). Orient Blackswan. <https://ofeliagarciadotorg.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/education-multilingualism-translanguaging-21st-century.pdf>
- Gonzalez, Jennifer. (2014, April 14). *How we pronounce student names, and why it matters*. Cult of Pedagogy. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/gift-of-pronunciation/>
- Kohli, R., & Solórzano, D.G. (2012). Teachers, please learn our names!: Racial microaggressions and the K-12 classroom. *Metropolitan Universities*, 28(3), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.674026>
- Marshall, Ty. (2020). How Google Classroom erases trans students. *Rethinking schools: Teaching and learning in the pandemic*, 34(4). <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/how-google-classroom-erases-trans-students/>
- McLaughlin, Clare. (2016, September 1). *The lasting impact of mispronouncing students' names*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/lasting-impact-mispronouncing-students-names>
- Miller, sj. (2015). A queer literacy framework promoting (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination and justice. *The English Journal*, 104(5), 37-44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24484578>

- Minor, Cornelius. (2019). Show kids that you hear them. *We got this: Equity, access, and the quest to be who our students need us to be*. (pp. 77-100). Heinemann.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2020, March 6). *Position paper on the role of English teachers in educating English language learners (ELLs)*. National Council of Teachers of English. <https://ncte.org/statement/teaching-english-ells/>
- Ndebele, Njabulo S. (1995). Maintaining domination through language. *Academic Development*, 1 (1), 3-5. [http://www.njabulondebele.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Maintaining\\_Domination\\_through\\_Language-1.pdf](http://www.njabulondebele.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Maintaining_Domination_through_Language-1.pdf)
- Norton, Bonny. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 409-429. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587831>
- Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Ambivalent. In *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://www-oed-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/view/Entry/6177?redirectedFrom=ambivalent#eid>
- Paris, Django. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93-97. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>
- My Name My Identity. (2014, April 14). *My name, my identity: A declaration of self*. Santa Clara County Office of Education. <https://www.mynamemyidentity.org/>
- Shaheen, Musbah. (2019). Call me by my name: It's Musbah. *About campus: Enriching the student learning experience*, 24(4), 15-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086482219875733>
- Shakespeare, W. (2005). No fear Romeo and Juliet. Edited by SparkNotes editors. Spark Publishing LLC.

Whitney, A. (2011). In search of the authentic English classroom: Facing the schoolishness of school. *English Education*, 44(1), 51-62. Retrieved March 24, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23238722>

## ACADEMIC VITA

# Sarah Losco

---

### EDUCATION

**The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA** Graduation: May 2021  
Schreyer Honors Scholar (completed Honors Thesis in Education)  
Bachelor of Science in Secondary English Education (grades 7-12)  
Bachelor of Science in English  
Minor in World Literature  
TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Certificate  
Academic Honors: President's Freshman Award, Sparks Award, and Evan Pugh Scholar Award

### TEACHING AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

#### **Penn State Professional Development School Internship**

- Co-taught and planned three full-year English Language Learner classes and two quarterly creatives writing classes State College, PA August 2020 – Present
- Designed and taught a full literature unit for ELLs
- Engaged in extensive professional development experiences

#### **Penn State Learning Writing Center Tutor/Coordinator**

- Mentored and trained five newly hired tutors University Park, PA January 2019 – Present
- Tutor students from a variety of backgrounds/majors in writing
- Create and lead various writing workshops (i.e. style, peer review)

#### **Teaching English as a Second Language Immersion Experience**

- Co-taught a 5-week course in English at the University of Cuenca Cuenca, Ecuador Summer 2019
- Employed methodology of sheltered instruction, teaching language skills and refugee-themed content simultaneously
- Completed 15-credit certification program for TESOL

#### **Philadelphia Urban Teaching Seminar**

- Completed a course focused specifically on diversity in education Philadelphia, PA Summer 2018 (focused on racism, ableism, sexism, etc.)
- Participated in early field experience in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade literature classroom

### LEADERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT

**Editor**, Penn State Circle K Fall 2018 – Spring 2020  
**Outreach Chair**, Penn State College of Education Student Council Fall 2018 – Spring 2020  
**Peer Educator**, PSU Gender Equity Center's peer education group. Fall 2019 – Spring 2020  
**Scholar's Day Speaker**, Schreyer Honors College Fall 2019

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Presenter**, Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association Conference Spring 2019  
**Presenter**, NCPTW-IWCA National Writing Center Conference Fall 2019  
**Co-Organizer**, Black Lives Matter at School Artivism Event Spring 2021  
**Attendee**, PSU College of Ed Diversity in Education Conference 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021  
**Attendee**, PSU College of Ed Student Symposium 2020, 2021  
**Attendee**, Jana Marie Student Mental Health Workshop Spring 2021