

Observation Report for Rachel McCabe:
Multilingual Composition (W131)

Rachel's multilingual composition class is small: only 12 of 15 students attended this Friday morning (9am) class. The room is in a peculiar basement of an old building, but it is surprisingly wired with terrific technology, which Rachel leveraged adeptly for the day's digital composition activities. Before class, she played Motown music and answered student questions with humor.

In the previous class, the students were organized into four groups and asked to create their own short films, each representative of a different film genre. Each group used their smart phones to capture the film of the "gingerbread man cardboard action figures" that Rachel provided. Their task was to think about and replicate the specific cinematic choices (lighting, camera-work, and so on) that are representative of their specific film genre. Since the students would be analyzing a film in their next written essay, Rachel wanted them to learn to "think like a director," and—rather than only considering the plot—to contemplate how various cinematic tools contribute to a specific representation of identities on the silver screen. Most of the class was dedicated to screening and analyzing these short student films.

The students *loved* this activity (as indicated by the unanimous applause and conversation after each viewing); and most took great pride in their work when they were questioned about the directorial choices they made. Three of the four groups went above-and-beyond and did post-production of their mini-films in simple video-editing software, such as iMovie. It's worth noting here that this was an *ungraded* homework assignment that the students accomplished with great gusto.

Rachel led a brief discussion after each of the four viewings and asked the other students to identify the generic cinematic conventions that they saw in each short clip. She wrote each cinematic tool on the whiteboard as they discussed them. By the end of class, the students had clearly amassed not just a list of cinematic techniques that directors use to create meaning but also an understanding of how to deploy those techniques in different ways to achieve different effects, relative to the specific conventions of each genre.

Rachel spent the last part of class introducing the idea of using a "source as a lens" to view or analyze another cultural object. She asked students to name a few key ideas from previous essayists they had read: Anzaldua and Baldwin. Then she showed them two different film clips and asked the students—in small groups—to discuss how Anzaldua or Baldwin might respond to these scenes (and to find a quotation from the source texts that supports their position). The groups then shared their responses with the class. In one important moment, Rachel highlighted how one group noticed a detail in the scene from *Stand and Deliver* that complicated Anzaldua's ideas about language and identity. She emphasized that these are the productive moments of analysis: when a lens doesn't fit perfectly over the test object and you are tasked with understanding and explaining that gap.

Often it can be a challenge to encourage international students to engage in an analytical conversation, and, frankly, on a Friday morning at 9am, that's an

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upward battle for any group. Yet these students volunteered responses consistently, and nearly every student spoke. Rachel had clearly cultivated an environment where students were comfortable taking the risk of contributing to class discussion. Much of the community, camaraderie, and enthusiasm in her class is fostered by her playful yet authoritative ethos. The students clearly saw her as their leader as much as their teacher.