"What's In a Name?" Developing Skills to Pronounce Student Names in the Classroom"

Amanda Stubley (Fanshawe)

Our names neatly compact information about us, and can be core to our identity. Therefore, pronouncing names accurately is a simple way to respect our students, and to model that respect in the classroom (and beyond). Mispronounced names in the classroom are microaggressions that can "have severe detrimental effects on a student's mental health and academic success" (Sanders, Umbal and Konnelly, 2). Bucholtz describes mispronouncing names as "indexical bleaching," a process of taking away meaning from a name (275).

As professors, we are positioned to interrupt this "bleaching" process, by making an effort at accurate pronunciation, and by modeling name learning. I will use my background in linguistics and college teaching to led in practicing pronouncing names that might be perceived as "difficult" to pronounce.

The workshop has two goals:

1. Educators will learn skills to help them pronounce unfamiliar names.

2. Educators will practice pronouncing names while not centring their experience and marginalizing students (as happens with comments like "I'm terrible with names").

We will review the International Phonetic Alphabet as a pronunciation tool, and practice pronouncing the names of international political leaders in groups. Then we will then take turns introducing these names to the room. We will practice not knowing how to pronounce and trying again.

Amanda Lynn Stubley is a folklorist and professor of writing and communications at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. Her undergraduate is in Linguistics and Women's Studies. In addition to teaching, she is a musician performing with The Heartaches Stringband.