

## Decolonizing the Classroom with the UnEssay

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When it comes to meeting EDI goals in a college writing classroom, the most common approach is to focus on the content: diversify the reading list with authors from historically excluded groups. While I know students enjoy working on texts that address inequities of race, gender, sexuality, etc., their learning experience is roadblocked whenever they are tasked to communicate their analysis through a formulaic approach to essay structure. In this seminar-style presentation, I want to workshop another strategy that I have been experimenting with over the past year, one that addresses issues of form (and formula) in addition to content. For my teaching practice, it has become apparent that writing formulas are oppressive because they are indicative of a larger imperial project, a one-size-fits-all approach to writing and critical thinking. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) might concur, they represent a form of “mental colonialism.” While there is no easy fix to a problem so deeply historical and systemic, I have seen students succeed and their enthusiasm grow when encouraged to take what Peter Sullivan (2015) coined as an “UnEssay” approach, developing “habits of mind” which empower students to develop their own structures for writing essays – and hopefully not just essays. For me, an UnEssay-based pedagogy also challenges students to extend their critical thinking skills by decolonizing their learning-through-unlearning. Most importantly, it engages their creativity as they experiment with form and therefore demonstrate their own agency for tackling an invisible structure of oppression within their educational experience.

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