

Educate, Agitate, Organize

Taking Writing Center Activism Beyond 1:1 Tutoring and into Direct Engagement

Slide 1

Emily: Welcome to “Educate, Agitate, Organize: Taking Writing Center Activism Beyond 1:1 Tutoring and into Direct Engagement.” My name is Emily Bouza, and [insert brief introduction here].

Jasson: My name is Jasson Perez, and I am the greatest person ever.

Gabbi: And my name is Gabbi Kelenyi, and I’m a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where I work at the Writing Center and study writing groups and writerly self-efficacy. We want you to use this space as you need to for your own access. That could mean movement, technology, or attention. We also want to make sure that everyone can engage, so do not hesitate to let us know if we need to repeat something or speak more slowly. Is there anything we should adjust before we start?

Slide 2

Emily: We’ve conceptualized this workshop to help everyone here identify and develop ways that writing centers can be spaces where administrators, tutors, and students directly engage with social justice issues. We have a bitly link and a QR code displayed on the screen to access the slides and the worksheet for this workshop. We also have a few hard copies available if that’s preferable. You can scan the QR code on the screen or visit B-I-T-dot-L-Y-backslash-capital E-A-O-A-lowercase c-c-e-s-s. That’s bit-dot.L-Y-backslash-E-A-O-Access. Once you access the worksheet, you’ll see that it’s set to view only. That’s because we’d like you to make a copy for your own notes and ideas. To do this, please go to File > Make a Copy > and save this document to your Google Drive to make this editable. You can also click File > Download > and choose Microsoft Word or another editable format to save to your device. If you’re having trouble making this happen, please simply raise your hand and Gabbi can come help troubleshoot.

We’ve divided this workshop into four parts. We’ll begin by talking about the activism/organizing framework Educate, Agitate, Organize, and then talk a bit about its connection to activism work already taking place in writing centers. The bulk of our time will be spent applying the framework to an aspect of our own writing center practice before we share and engage in some question, answer, and discussion.

Slide 3

Jasson:

Overall

- The folks who participate in organizing
 - Workers, students, working or middle class, poor, face oppression due to race, gender, sexual id, immigration, criminal record
 - People who have to work to earn an income to meet their basic and living needs
 - The world is not a great place, especially for working class folks, poor folks, BIPOC folks, women, femmes, LGBTQI folks and immigrants
 - The job of the organizing is creating the methods, practices, strategies and tactics to make the world a better place for all
 - Getting to that moment making the world a better place is through “making the road by walking” as popular educators Myles Horton and Paolo Friere said
 - This process involves a lot reading, writing, discussing and debating
 - And the axioms we use is educate, agitate and organize
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Educate: Experience + Analysis = New understandings of

- Why there is Inequality, lack of freedom, lack of democracy
- How to bring about equality, freedom, democracy
- how power in the world works: conflict between top down decision making bodies vs those who must carry out those decisions largely with no say: un-democratic
 - Education on how to make institutions (school, work, corporations, health system) more democratic: through unions, student government, egalitarian distribution of income, goods (housing, broadband), services (Public transportation, healthcare, wifi)
- Values, Vision and perspective for how one wants society organized at the level of government, economy, socially, ecologically and culturally. People would call this politics and ideology
- Educating co-constitutive: participants and creators are those who are usually the recipient of education in a top down decision making institutions learn how to create education experiences and institutions that are bottom up, middle out in addition to top down
- Example Story: School closings

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Jasson:

Agitate: Implementing what is learned in education around the relationship that we have in our workplace, school, family, neighborhood and other shared communal and social spaces.

- There is an organizing axiom “you can't agitate if you don't relate.” Agitating is the accountability mechanism where we check in with one another on the values we say we have and the world we say we want and make sure our actions and practices reflect that. The conundrum is people usually only respond to that when they are in some kind of

consistent community and relationship with a person. It also has to do with doing some kind of activity that combines personal and collective risk and sacrifice - ex..going out on strike, speaking at a public meeting, writing a mass email.

- Agitation seeks to work through in a healthy way the very real conflict around the time it takes to commit to organizing for social justice while living in a capitalist world that requires us to work a lot to get an income and meet our needs as well as general needs around friends, family and fun.
- Agitation also seeks to work though the real fear we all experience becoming the person and doing the things we feel we are incapable of doing or do not feel competent enough to do. And that doing those things we are afraid of will allow for us and the world to become a better place.
- Example Story: Senn Highschool

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Jasson:

- Organize: how we move from the individual, interpersonal to collective action within an institutional and/or organizational boundary. It is the doing and sustaining of the commitments, ideas and values we had educated and agitated on. When we look at organizational, associational or institutional life, most of the time involves the habit, and creation of written word and reading; but in this context writing and reading are connected to the stakes of directly changing the material and social conditions of one's life.
 - Nisa writing defund email
 - DSA talking ish online
 - Public testimony for Obama Library

Slide 6

Jasson: Education, agitation, and organizing are three interlinked and simultaneous approaches to building community around campaigns, strategy and tactics to bring about policy change. One important way that activists educate, agitate, and organize simultaneously is through publication. Publication is a tool through which organizers and members of social justice organization write, read, communicate and debate issues and ideas that impact their lives.

Slide 7

Jasson: So we want to pause here for a brainstorming moment. Consider the questions on the screen and on your workshop worksheet.

Have you ever been a part of activism efforts and/or have used similar strategies as we have discussed so far?

Do any of these strategies and tactics remind you of things you are already doing in your Writing Center work?

Can you already think of how you might use some of these strategies in a Writing Center space?

Take about 3 minutes to think about your responses and/or jot down some notes on your worksheet.

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Emily: So now we're going to talk about how this connects to Writing Center Activism already happening.

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Emily: Much of writing center scholarship focuses on social justice in the form of antiracist and inclusive training for one-to-one tutoring.

In *Peripheral Visions*, McKinney (2013) exposes writing centers' under-discussed and under-researched non-tutoring endeavors such as workshops, outreach, committee work, partnerships, etc. as needing greater exploration.

In her book, *Radical Writing Center Praxis*, Greenfield envisions a radically new writing center where all staff members are agentive in social justice work, not only within the walls of the writing center but also beyond its boundaries.

Zimmerli (2015) argues that "writing centers occupy a powerful institutional location, one simultaneously central and peripheral to other university policies and programs" (p.64). - Too often we see our limits - but what if we imagine our greater potential?

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Emily: Our work in many ways is already leading us towards activism

García (2017) calls for a need to listen "well and deepy" to how others have pursued issues of race in WCs and listen to the needs of Mexican Americans in particular.

Adler-Kassner (2008) calls for doing activist work in Writing Program Administration and pulling from activist frameworks for conversation, listening carefully, finding allies and understanding opposition, and making our own stories rather than trying to refute frames imposed by those who would cut our resources and diminish our influence.

Naydan (2017) discusses potential for labor activism and the WC and discusses how the rhetoric of listening in WCs is analogous to activist work.

Denny (2010) has done activist work for gay rights groups and learned through the process both the need to work across identity markers and that there is a potential for doing local, sustainable activist work through WCs.

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Emily: People from minoritized backgrounds often do extra labor through daily conversations and interactions, both with others of their identity and with those outside of those identities.

Writing Across Communities, as developed by Michelle Hall Kells, foregrounds language diversity and includes students, faculty, and community members into the work of writing program design on campus. This has resulted in many programs including a community writing center, writing and language center, celebration of writing event, and additional support for first year writing courses.

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Emily: As we were developing this presentation, we were inspired by the current scholarship, but also were looking for what bigger role WCs can play in doing activist work.

We started asking ourselves about how to go beyond our work with more typical WC work to actually work with activists and support the groups who are enacting many of our ideals through their work.

We thought about who we are already partnering with and who we might like to partner with on campus and in the community and what resources, be it writing support, physical space, institutional leverage, printing budget, etc., we could offer

How could we really become a welcoming, supportive space for student activists - not just in theory but in practice?

Slide 13

Emily: So we want to pause here for another brainstorming moment. Consider the questions on the screen and on your workshop worksheet.

What is the larger institutional change that you hope your Writing Center can be an active participant in?

What groups can you collaborate with on your campus that are already doing some of this work? (consider multicultural student groups, multicultural/ identity centers, etc.)

What administrative structures exist on your campus where you can potentially take a more active role to work towards these goals? (think about committee work and units such as Teaching and Learning Centers)

Take about 3 minutes to think about your responses and/or jot down some notes on your worksheet.

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Gabbi: And now for the crux of our workshop— this activism framework’s application to writing center practice.

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Gabbi: We’d like to direct you back to the workshop worksheet if you don’t already have it open for the application part of our workshop. You can scan the QR code on screen or visit the following bitly link: B-I-T-dot-L-Y-backslash-capital E-A-O-A-lowercase c-c-e-s-s. That’s bit-dot.L-Y-backslash-E-A-O-Access.

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Gabbi: So for the application part of our workshop, we're going to invite you to choose an aspect of your writing center practice. You might consider 1:1 consultations, workshops, writing groups, outreach/ tabling, co-teaches, resources, research, etc. Another way to come at this is to choose an issue-based campaign that your Writing Center can support. You might consider student debt relief, gender neutral facilities, safe sex education, antiracism on campus, etc.

Then, we're going to ask you to think about how the Educate, Agitate, Organize framework could be applied to this aspect of your practice to help forward social justice on your campus or in your community? If you started with an issue-based campaign, we'll ask you to think about how the Writing Center could use the Educate, Agitate, Organize framework to support that campaign. We have some guiding questions up on the screen and on your workshop worksheet to help you think through these ideas. But first, we'd like to share a few examples to help get you thinking.

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Emily: If you are choosing an aspect of your writing center practice, you could think about genre workshops that your center offers. Seen through the Educate Agitate Organize lens, I might ask myself what do my staff, students, collaborators, and/or other stakeholders need to know about writing genres and how can the Writing Center contribute to the distribution of accurate information on my campus? They likely need to know that there are multiple genres that can support (student) activism and issue-based campaigns on campus. Students need to know that the Writing Center can support their organizing efforts through participation in our workshops and bringing these genres to 1:1 consultations.

I'd also need to ask myself, what might that new knowledge/ information help these stakeholders do and why is this issue important to the Writing Center and your campus at large? And this makes me think about how the Writing Center must establish itself as open to and prepared for student activists to bring these materials to the Writing Center and come to workshops with writing for issue-based campaigns in mind.

Finally, with regard to organizing, I could ask myself how the Writing Center can support students, stakeholders, staff, and collaborators to take collective action. And my answer would be that Writing Center staff can collectively engage in research about issue-based writing genres, such as informative pamphlets, open letters, etc, and the Writing Center can add these genre workshops to their offerings and publicize them with student organizations and campus partners.

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Jasson: Or perhaps you chose an issue for your Writing Center to support instead. An example comes from Travis Webster's book, *Queerly Centered: LGBTQA Writing Center Directors*

Navigate the Workplace. One of his participants has a bowl of free condoms in their Writing Center. Through the lens of the educate, agitate, organize framework, we can see that what writing center stakeholders needed to know was that there is no sexual education resource center on campus nor another location where free condoms are available and the Writing Center and its director wanted to showcase its support of students' holistic wellbeing and safety. This participant wanted to establish their writing center as a holistic resource for students, as a safe and brave space for students to show up as themselves. Resources that go beyond writing, like the bowl of condoms, can help clarify this identity. Thus, the director organized their resources to subsidize free condoms for students on campus. The very fact of the bowl establishes the Writing Center as a safe and brave space for students' whole selves.

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Gabbi: This final example again goes with an aspect of writing center practice: assessment and evaluation of the writing center as a whole. Student evaluation surveys can help educate students about the writing center's broader values and goals. Questions and examples that are explicitly antiracist, inclusive, and accessible could help give students different ways to think about good writing center sessions and what works for them. To organize for action, the writing center staff can collectively analyze and act on the data gathered from students about the center's accessibility, antiracism, and inclusion efforts. Such data can guide new policies, procedures, and practices as well as indicate what's already working for students and tutors.

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Gabbi: So, with those examples in mind, we're hopeful that you have some ideas of where you'd like to start. Please take ten minutes or so to choose an aspect of your writing center practice AND/OR an issue-based campaign that your Writing Center can support. If you're having trouble deciding, discuss your options with the folks near you. Once you've made your decision, feel free to share what you chose with the people nearest you if you'd like.

Again, some examples to consider might be 1:1 consultations, workshops, writing groups, outreach or tabling, co-teaches, resources your center offers, student debt relief, gender neutral facilities, campus inclusion, etc.

The workshop worksheet has a space for ideas and notes if that's helpful to you.

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Emily: Now, we invite you to take 20 minutes or so to apply the Educate, Agitate, Organize framework to the aspect of your practice or issue-based campaign that you chose. Consider the following guiding questions that are also projected on the next slide:

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Emily:

Educate: What do your staff, students, collaborators, and/or other stakeholders need to know?

How can the Writing Center contribute to the distribution of accurate information on your campus?

Agitate: What might that new knowledge/ information help them do? Why is this issue important to the Writing Center and your campus at large?

Organize: How can the Writing Center support students, stakeholders, staff, and collaborators to take collective action? Who can the Writing Center partner with to make this happen?

We encourage you to engage with the people near you as you work, if you get stuck, and/or after you finish.

Again, the workshop worksheet has a space for ideas and notes if that's helpful to you.

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Gabbi: Thanks so much for engaging in that exercise. It sounds and looks like there are some great ideas percolating in the room, and we'd love to have the chance for the whole group to engage in some sharing and discussion. So, what ideas did you come up with? Does anyone want to share your practice and/or issue-based campaign with the group?

...

Emily: These all sound really cool! Thanks so much for sharing. What questions do you have about Educate, Agitate, Organize and/or its applications to Writing Center practice?

Jasson: Another thing you might want to share with the group is something you learned or something that surprised you from today's session?

...

Gabbi: Well thank you so much for being with us today to thinking about how writing centers can be spaces for activism— spaces that are safe and welcoming for activists. Is there anything else would anyone would like to share with the group?

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Emily: Thank you again for your engagement during our workshop today. Again, our names are Jasson, Emily, and Gabbi, and our contact information is available on the screen. We'll leave that up as our time together comes to a close. Please feel free to reach out to us via the Whova App or email!

Slide 25

CITATIONS [will not be read aloud]

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