

Guest editorial: The role of English teaching and teachers in supporting youths' university futures and literacies

We came to know one another, over the years, through our shared scholarly interests, examining the opportunities and challenges youth encounter as they engage in college-going practices. From a distance, we recognized the commonalities across our work, specifically our shared focus on the strengths of youth of color and their families as they navigated persistent educational inequities limiting their college readiness and access (Carey, 2016, 2019; Gibbs Grey, 2022; Marciano, 2017). We understand a critical need exists for English teachers to contribute as members of a culturally relevant and sustaining school-wide college-going culture (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Knight and Marciano, 2013; Paris and Alim, 2017) that assists students in navigating the processes related to preparing for, applying to and enrolling in higher education. As former English teachers and curriculum developers for pre-college initiatives, we felt honored to support students' pathways to college, including first-generation students and students of color. It was often through the collective power among themselves, their families, community members and schools that they actualized their college dreams (Brooms and Davis, 2017; Holland, 2017; Martinez *et al.*, 2020).

While we find joy in remembering many success stories of students entering and graduating from college despite many odds, we also recognize the tremendous number of students who lacked and continue to lack access to both in and beyond school college-going support. While all stakeholders possess power and possibility in supporting students' college journeys, we focused on the tremendous potential teachers possess. We positioned classroom teachers as key stakeholders in ensuring postsecondary supports are tailored to individual student's needs, desires and even fears and trepidations about pursuing higher education. Through their daily engagement with students, teachers have the potential to tailor lessons and curricular experiences to help students develop college-going identities.

Yet it was not until we came together to guest co-edit this special issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* that we came to personally know one another as colleagues and friends. In this capacity, we gathered to generate new and deepened understandings of our personal lives, our work and of possibilities for English teaching, teacher education and education research to serve as a catalyst for disrupting inequities in youths' access to higher education. In hours-long Zoom meetings, we found joy in our conversations even as we navigated the heaviness and urgency of this special issue's focus on the role of English teaching and teachers in supporting youths' university [1] futures and literacies.

Our conversations included the firm advocacy we each have, situated within a larger commitment for supporting students' university-going futures, especially students of color (Carey, 2019; Turner, 2019; Gibbs Grey, 2022; Marciano *et al.*, 2020; Marciano and Watson, 2021; Tachine and Cabrera, 2021). We also discussed our frustrations with persistent barriers many marginalized students find difficult to surmount throughout the university-going and university completion process (Huerta *et al.*, 2018; Marciano, 2021). These include stories of Black and Brown students, from our research and research authored by additional scholars, questioning, delaying or even opting out of university pathways due, in part, to



school practices that overlook students' home lives, families and cultures (Acevedo-Gil, 2019; Carey, 2016, 2021; George Mwangi, 2020). Some students need help envisioning and planning their "postsecondary future selves" or rather aligning their college goals with career aims and other life condition ambitions (Carey, 2022). We also discussed how Black and Brown students miss out on university-going pathways due to the ever-increasing costs of tuition, or experienced educators telling them they were not university material, or who reported not being guided substantively through the university application process despite being in their senior year, or who enrolled in university but struggled their first year and decided to exit permanently (Brooms, 2021; Carey, 2019, 2022; Castro, 2021; Harper and Newman, 2016; Howard *et al.*, 2016; Marciano, 2017). These stories were heartbreaking to hear and reinforced that our "villages" need strengthening. We certainly do not wish to place blame in any one direction, as these narratives point to challenges at multiple levels. These include structural inequalities that can leave schools, particularly in urban and rural areas, under-resourced and unable to create rigorous university-going curricula (Knight-Manuel *et al.*, 2019; Means *et al.*, 2016) and deficit thinking that leads educators to discount students' academic abilities (Milner, 2021).

Yet, even as we discussed the realities encountered by youth as they seek to prepare for, apply to and enroll in university, we remained encouraged by the possibilities for English teachers, teacher educators and researchers to support students' development of mindsets, identities and literacy practices that promote their pursuit of postsecondary education across varied contexts. For example, even as educational inequities in the USA and globally continue to disproportionately impact students who seek to be the first in their families to enroll in and graduate from institutions of higher education, we wondered whether and how scholars across the USA and globally were connecting the work of English teachers to the college-going desires of youth and their families.

Now, in the publication of this special issue, we extend our ongoing conversations as guest editors to include a remarkably diverse group of authors who examine the varied ways English teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers may support youths' university-going futures, identities and literacies across multiple contexts. Through their work, these authors challenge normative assumptions of English teachers as positioned solely to assist students in writing university admissions essays to more broadly consider the role English teachers may play in supporting students' development of mindsets, identities and literacy practices that support students' pursuit of postsecondary education across global contexts.

Jennifer Danridge Turner, in her article "Celebrate with Me: A Black Adolescent Girl's Speculative Multimodal Design of Intersectional College and Career Futures," calls for the reimagining of school and societal narratives to center and honor Black girls' college-going worthiness. Turner spotlights 16-year-old Alayah's speculative designs through which she artistically details her college and career aspirations, generating new insights into Alayah's imagining of her future as she navigates today's social realities. Tracey Flores highlights the multimodal storytelling and writing of Latina girls in *Somos Escritoras*, a university-based writing community, in her article titled "Composing College Identities: Latina Girls Writing their Way to the Universidad." Flores examines how writing in community on the university campus supports participating girls in developing college-going literacies and identities. Both Flores and Turner further consider how English teachers may leverage writing instruction to support students' university-going identities and futures.

Tonya Perry and Teaira McMurty consider the role of writing in university entrance exams in their practitioner-oriented article "Writing Ain't My Thang': Creating High School Writers with Ongoing Support through an Urban School-Teacher Education Partnership".

Perry and McMurty reflect on their experiences as members of a team of university and school-based educators whose academic-year partnership sought to affirm and support the writing of Black high school students in the US South as they prepared to take the standardized ACT exam. The authors discuss how their writing instruction supported students in improving their writing scores while promoting their college-going literacies and identities.

Julia Duncheon, Dustin Hornbeck and Reid Sagara examine how educators use culturally relevant pedagogy to support the college readiness and access of underrepresented students enrolled in dual credit courses offered by their Texas high schools in their article, “Culturally Relevant Approaches to Fostering Postsecondary Readiness in the Dual Credit English Classroom.” The authors found that English instructors’ use of culturally relevant pedagogy supported students’ academic achievement while simultaneously expanding notions of college readiness.

In “‘Sigo en lo Mismo’: The Impact of Papeles on the Education of Undocumented Latinx Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers,” Lorena Gutierrez Romero highlights the experiences of six Latinx youth preparing to earn their GED certificate. She contributes new insights into how the educational pathways and college aspirations of undocumented Latinx migrant and seasonal farm workers are impacted by their documentation status, compelling educators at all levels to eradicate barriers preventing undocumented students from fulfilling their hopes of attending institutions of higher education.

Danielle Filipiak and Limarys Caraballo, in “Exploring (R)evolutionary College-going Literacies with Immigrant Youth in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Seminar,” center the literacies of immigrant youth within an intergenerational youth research collaborative. The authors examine the critical college-going literacies of participants in the Youth Power Collaborative, a dual enrollment credit-bearing course in New York City. They call for English teachers to support students’ college readiness and access by including student voice in curriculum and instruction.

Jennifer Mann and Allison Turner, in “Portraits of Young Refugee Women’s Identities, Experiences, and Beliefs in Relation to College-going,” demonstrate how humanizing and inclusive English classrooms can support the college-going futures of students who are refugees. The authors examine how high school English teachers may cultivate relationships with refugee students grounded in high expectations and critical pedagogy. They also acknowledge the important role students’ families and communities play in supporting college-going futures and identities.

In “Fostering College Aspirations: Engaging English Teachers in Students’ Future Pathways” we learn with current and former classroom teachers who provide suggestions for English teachers seeking to support the college readiness and access of their students across a variety of educational contexts. Dasmien Richards, Amber Lawson, Jamie Nichol, Benjamin Woodcock, Taria Pritchett and David Julien take us inside their classrooms to share promising strategies from their own teaching that support youths’ university futures and literacies. Their work constitutes a call to action for English teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers to enact and examine possibilities for demystifying college-going processes while contributing to a culturally relevant school-wide college-going culture (Knight and Marciano, 2013).

It is our hope each of the articles featured in this special issue will remind readers of the value and worthiness all students possess in actualizing university-going futures. We also hope that individually and collectively, we will continue to explore questions allowing us to break down more barriers to youths’ university-going futures. Some of these questions include: in what ways can educators, not just college counselors, better support university-

going pathways for their students? How can educators acknowledge and deconstruct barriers to envisioning and realizing university-going futures for many youth who are marginalized in school and society? How do we cast away narratives suggesting any student is incapable or deserving of future academic success including college?

As we end our editorial, we wish to express our sincere thanks to the editors of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, Vaughn W.M. Watson and Robert Petrone and Editorial Assistant Joel Berends, for supporting our vision and guiding us through the process. We are also grateful to reviewers for taking the time to provide thoughtful and thorough feedback to each of the authors. We appreciate the commitment of each author who graciously answered the call for this special issue and whose work authentically advocates for the lives and futures of worthy young people. We thank each of the young people featured in each article and those who have allowed us into their lives as advocates for their futures and in doing so, have taught us so much about our own and led us to this very space where we continue our advocacy.

Joanne E. Marciano

*Department of Teacher Education, College of Education, Michigan State University,
East Lansing, Michigan, USA*

Roderick L. Carey

*Department of Education and Human Development,
University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA, and*

Theda Gibbs Grey

Department of Teacher Education, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, USA

Note

1. While the term “college” is frequently used in US contexts to refer to students’ postsecondary options, it often refers to secondary or non-academic training in global contexts. We, therefore, use the term “university” throughout the remainder of this editorial and encouraged authors featured in this special issue to use the term that reflects the context where their work is situated.

References

- Acevedo-Gil, N. (2019), “College-going facultad: Latinx students anticipating postsecondary institutional obstacles”, *Journal of Latinos and Education*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 107-125, doi: [10.1080/15348431.2017.1371019](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1371019).
- Brooms, D.R. (2021), *Stakes is High: Trials, Lessons, and Triumphs in Young Black Men’s Educational Journeys*, SUNY Press.
- Carey, R.L. (2016), “‘Keep that in mind. . . you’re gonna go to college’: family influence on the college going processes of black and Latino high school boys”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 48 No. 5, pp. 718-742, doi: [10.1007/s11256-016-0375-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-016-0375-8).
- Carey, R.L. (2019), “Am I smart enough? Will I make friends? And can I even afford it? Exploring the college going dilemmas of black and Latino adolescent boys”, *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 125 No. 3, pp. 381-415, doi: [10.1086/702740](https://doi.org/10.1086/702740).
- Carey, R.L. (2021), “Foregrounding family: how Salvadoran American boys interpret and formulate college-going mindsets at the nexus of family, school, and the self”, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 294-314, doi: [10.1111/aeq.12372](https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12372).

- Carey, R.L. (2022), “‘Whatever you become, just be proud of it’. Uncovering the ways families influence black and Latino adolescent boys’ postsecondary future selves”, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 59-97, doi: [10.1177/07435584211018450](https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211018450).
- Castro, E.L. (2021), “‘They sellin’ us a dream they not preparin’ us for’: college readiness, dysconscious racism, and policy failure in one rural black high school”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 617-640, doi: [10.1007/s11256-020-00585-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-020-00585-9).
- George Mwangi, C.A., Malcolm, M. and Thelamour, B. (2020), “Our college degree: familial engagement in the lives of diverse black collegians”, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, pp. 1-20, doi: [10.1080/13613324.2020.1842347](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1842347).
- Gibbs Grey, T. (2022), “Reppin’ and Risin’ above: exploring communities of possibility that affirm the college-going aspirations of black youth”, *Urban Education*, Vol. 57 No. 7, pp. 1177-1206, doi: [10.1177/0042085918804020](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918804020).
- Harper, S.R. and Newman, C.B. (2016), “Surprise, sensemaking, and success in the first college year: black undergraduate men’s academic adjustment experiences”, *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, Vol. 118 No. 6, pp. 1-30, doi: [10.1177/016146811611800609](https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811611800609).
- Holland, N.E. (2017), “Beyond conventional wisdom: community cultural wealth and the college knowledge of African American youth in the United States”, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 20 No. 6, pp. 796-810.
- Howard, T.C., Flenbaugh, T. and Tunstall, J. (Eds) (2016), *Expanding College Access for Urban Youth: What Schools and Colleges Can Do*, Teachers College Press.
- Huerta, A.H., McDonough, P.M. and Allen, W.R. (2018), “‘You can go to college’: employing a developmental perspective to examine how young men of color construct a college-going identity”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 50 No. 5, pp. 713-734, doi: [10.1007/s11256-018-0466-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0466-9).
- Knight, M. and Marciano, J. (2013), *College Ready: Preparing Black and Latino/o Youth for Higher Education – a Culturally Relevant Approach*, Teachers College Press.
- Knight-Manuel, M.G., Marciano, J.E., Wilson, M., Jackson, I., Vernikoff, L., Zuckerman, K.G. and Watson, V.W. (2019), “‘It’s all possible’: urban educators’ perspectives on creating a culturally relevant, schoolwide, college-going culture for black and Latino male students”, *Urban Education*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 35-64, doi: [10.1177/0042085916651320](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916651320).
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021), “‘I’m here for the hard re-set: post-pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture’”, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 68-78, doi: [10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883](https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883).
- Marciano, J. (2017), “‘We’re friends, we have to be in this together’: examining the role of culturally relevant peer interactions in urban youth’s college readiness and access”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 169-187, doi: [10.1007/s11256-016-0387-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-016-0387-4).
- Marciano, J. (2021), “‘I think we’re all teachers even though we’re students: examining youth perspectives of peer support for college readiness in an urban public high school’”, *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 23-42, available at: www.files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1294399.pdf
- Marciano, J. and Watson, V. (2021), “‘This is America’: examining artifactual literacies as austere love across contexts of schools and everyday use”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 334-353, doi: [10.1007/s11256-020-00564-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-020-00564-0).
- Marciano, J., Watson, V., Beymer, A. and Deroo, M. (2020), “Examining moments of possibility toward college readiness in a literacy-and-songwriting initiative”, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 615-626, doi: [10.1002/jaal.1049](https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1049).
- Martinez, R.R., Jr, Akos, P. and Kurz, M. (2020), “Utilizing latinx cultural wealth to create a college-going culture in high school”, *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, Vol. 48 No. 4, pp. 210-230.

- Means, D.R., Clayton, A.B., Conzelmann, J.G., Baynes, P. and Umbach, P.D. (2016), "Bounded aspirations: rural, African American high school students and college access", *The Review of Higher Education*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 543-569, doi: [10.1353/rhe.2016.0035](https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2016.0035).
- Milner, H.R. (2021), *Start Where You Are, but Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms*, Harvard Education Press.
- Paris, D. and Alim, H.S. (Eds) (2017), *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, Teachers College Press.
- Tachine, A.R. and Cabrera, N.L. (2021), "'I'll be right behind you': native American families, land debt, and college affordability", *AERA Open*, Vol. 7, doi: [10.1177/23328584211025522](https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211025522).
- Turner, J.D. (2019), "Improving black students' college and career readiness through literacy instruction: a Freirean-inspired approach for K-8 classrooms", *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 88 No. 4, pp. 443-453.