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## METHODS

# Engaging the “Othered”: Using Zines to Support Student Identities

CHELSEA LONSDALE

A few years ago, I met with a friend for coffee who was pregnant at the time. When we sat down, she reached across the table and handed me a black and white, thin booklet titled *Tiny Secret*. Inside, the photocopied pages were filled with collages, handwritten notes, and letters she had written to the baby growing inside her body. As a mother myself, I was intrigued: much of the existing literature on what to expect when one is expecting a child is either bland or hyperbolic, and it portrays a very narrow image of who a mother is, or can be, and what her interests and relationship(s) might be like. My friend’s zine, however, was honest. She spoke openly and freely about her changing body, her frustrations with maternity clothes, and her hopes for her child’s life and her own future. She thoughtfully illustrated each page with borrowed images pieced together to create a backdrop for her words.

Both my friend and I identify as queer, despite being in partnerships with individuals of the opposite sex that mirror a heterosexual family structure. We do not typically see ourselves, or our stories, represented in mainstream media. My friend decided to take this issue into her own hands and create the media she wished to see. She shared it with me, knowing that I felt similarly.

As a composition instructor, I couldn’t help but wonder what might happen if I introduced this type of writing to my students. I began collecting zines of my own by purchasing online or attending local zine fests. Soon, I had my own library of small, independently published magazines that covered topics ranging from feminism to cats, working in a cadaver lab to *Doctor Who*, mini-comics to personal stories to women’s health. As I built my zine library, I shared openly with fellow teachers through a National Writing Project summer program, presenting a genre study on zines and inviting teacher consultants to make zines of their own that told a story about their teaching lives. One teacher wrote about being a long-term substitute. Another wrote about an

embarrassing experience as a student teacher. Yet another wrote about her summer vacation. As we explored zines together, one important question was raised: the zines I had collected weren’t necessarily school appropriate. As I teach college writing, this was less of an issue to me; however, making sure that the classroom is a safe place for all students (and teachers) is of utmost importance, and so I began to rethink my interest in using this type of media as it is inherently uncensored. Placing restrictions on content was exactly what I wanted to avoid. I wanted to use zines to provide an outlet for students, especially students who feel “othered” for a multitude of reasons—namely those who identify as LGBTQ and do not see themselves represented in textbooks, mainstream media, or class novels—to explore their interests and identities through writing.

Zines, by definition, are self-published, self-circulated underground magazines made by piecing together multimedia (drawings, text, images, comics, etc.), creating photocopies, and delivering the publication to a set of readers. Zines can be made in a variety of formats: half-sheet and quarter-sheet zines are popular, as are mini-zines that can be made from a single, one-sided sheet of paper. They are typically bound with staples or sometimes thread, and the aesthetic is decidedly amateur though this can vary depending on the resources and artistic abilities of the author. These noncommercial, do-it-yourself (DIY) publications are born out of a writer’s passion and desire to connect with an audience. Zines invite writers to speak freely, often on issues that may not be represented by popular or professional media. As a teaching tool, zines can be used to support critical media literacy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000) and can be paired alongside “high-brow” literature, teaching students that writing and reading take place in multiple contexts with myriad purposes, using an assortment of materials and technologies.

Likewise, zines provide an opportunity for those who feel invisible—those who exist on the margins—to speak out about their lives and interests. For students who occupy

peripheral spaces because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, social class, (dis)ability, interests, or any other marker of individuality, zines are an inviting format for communication, an alternative to the traditionally valued forms of media and expression where they do not see themselves represented.

Zines are no stranger to the classroom. Dan Fraizer's 1998 *TETYC* article, "Zines in the Composition Classroom," argues that using zines in the composition curriculum can shed light on nonacademic sites of reading and writing, a gesture that recognizes the personal writing lives of our students already in existence. Others have written about teaching with zines as well: Varty (2009) used zines to promote rhetorical awareness with a pre-freshman, accelerated college writing class. Jacobi (2007) writes about The Zine Project, an extracurricular, community-based writing project designed to promote civic engagement. Wan (1999) describes zines as a "valuable source of left-of-center information, as well as a stunning example of what can be created by anyone with an idea and the desire to do a little writing and designing" (p. 15), which educators can use in the classroom as a means of encouraging students to challenge corporate publication models and the "monotone drone of mainstream media" (p. 17).

While zines may pose some challenges as a nontraditional form of media that invites a broader spectrum of experiences to be shared, they offer a number of benefits that can enrich and encourage self-expression, rhetorical prowess, and the opportunity to connect with others.

## The History of Zines

Zines got their start around the 1920s and 1930s, as a way for sci-fi fans to share commentary, fanfiction, and critiques directly with one another without the use of sci-fi magazines as a middle-man (Perkins, n.d.). In the 1980s, thanks to the riot grrrl movement and the thriving punk scene, zines flourished by way of hand-to-hand exchange at shows put on by local bands and mail-order delivery supported by Riot Grrrl Press. Interestingly, Riot Grrrl Press was inspired by a class project; it was designed to be an intentional, underground distribution service for feminist zines, as the Riot Grrrl movement itself was drawing the attention of mainstream media, much to the members' dismay (Marcus, 2010, p. 231). Included below is an excerpt from the Riot Grrrl Manifesto that addresses the Riot Grrrl's values, in terms of publication and information exchange:

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings ("Riot Grrrl Manifesto," 1991).

In recent years, zines appear to have been adopted the DIY movement, with an influx of publications on topics like making your own ink, canning and preserving, and self-care. There are many types of zines, though some of the most popular are perzines (personal zines), fanzines, art/music zines, compilation zines, and even mama-zines, queer zines, and sports zines (Barnard Zine Library, 2014). There is a strong LGBTQ zine community, supported by organizations like the Queer Zine Archive Project (n.d.), whose mission statement is included below:

The mission of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) is to establish a "living history" archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and emerging zine publishers to continue to create. In curating such a unique aspect of culture, we value a collectivist approach that respects the diversity of experiences that fall under the heading "queer."

The primary function of QZAP is to provide a free online searchable database of the collection with links allowing users to download electronic copies of zines. By providing access to the historical canon of queer zines we hope to make them more accessible to diverse communities and reach wider audiences.

The archive relies on donations from writers and hosts several hundred scans of zines that include topics such as gendered restrooms and transgender health care information, a guide for "guys who like guys," Emily Dickinson, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and a queer spin-off of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. QZAP's website also features an events calendar and a blog.

Zines are a unique type of media, though they are not a stand-alone genre. Zines are part of a complex web of underground publications and grassroots organization (including satire, underground newspapers, and slam poetry); they are anti-establishment by nature (zines are made from repurposing, borrowing, and stealing rather than buying new materials, and intentionally avoid the corporate publishing

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industry), and placing them in the context of an institution (professional or academic) poses challenges: for example, zines do not require students to cite sources in the same way that academic essays do, nor do zines receive a grade from an instructor in their “natural” environment, though they are certainly evaluated and reviewed by readers (often publicly, on blog platforms like Tumblr).

Perhaps the most significant challenge brought about by introducing zines to the classroom is that zines are born from a genuine desire to connect with others—an organic response to a need to find and commune with like-minded readers, which is difficult to fabricate through a classroom assignment. Motivation to create a zine regularly stems from the writer’s experience as an “other,” which Weis (1995) defines as, “that process which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself” (p. 18). In other words, zinesters are reacting to the status quo, a heteronormative and hierarchical box that renders certain identities as less valuable than those which fit nicely into the space provided. For those who feel “othered,” zines can be an appealing means of disseminating information meant to circulate among selected readers as a means of organizing and establishing community; however, it may be difficult to replicate such an environment within an institution (as opposed to outside of the institution).

Zines as reading material provide myriad perspectives; as teachers tout the importance of diverse literature (Blackburn & Clark, 2010), zines occupy a unique place alongside the novels, comics, blogs, and YouTube channels we look to for themes that represent the lives of our students. In turning toward literature that more accurately reflects the experiences of young people, we must also consider who is publishing (or who is able to publish) their ideas. As we see characters and worlds that mirror a greater variety of life experiences, we must also see writers who mirror the bodies, backgrounds, and interests of their readers. Young people have been treated as passive consumers of information (as opposed to critics or creators), but zines prove otherwise: zines reveal adolescents to be “actors and shapers” and “astute critics” of the media that saturates their lives (Chu, 1997). What follows is an explanation of how I have used zines in my courses, with a focus on fanzines as one type of zine that can support student interests and identities within the context of a classroom. I also provide an overview of what zines can offer for educators as a teaching tool, and how they might be evaluated and assessed.

I have used zines in the classroom to various ends: one semester, I had my research writing students create collaborative zines as an extension of their individual, semester-long research projects, where students formed their own groups based on friendships that developed in class or by connecting related projects that seemed to fit a particular theme. Not only did these students need to consider how they might transform their research paper into a few zine pages, they also had to cooperate with their group members to determine how their content might fit side-by-side in a single publication. This work was presented at the Celebration of Student Writing, a biannual event at the large, suburban midwest university where I teach, that presents the work of First Year writing students to the campus community.

I have also had students create survival-guide mini-zines as an extra credit assignment: this is a simple way to introduce zines, as there are few materials required, little to no technological expertise needed, and minimal pressure applied in terms of evaluation. These zines were created using a single sheet of paper folded into eight sections with a cut in the middle, requiring only a single side of the page to be photocopied.

Students shared advice and lessons they learned throughout the course, and these zines can serve as a pocket guide for students completing the course as well as a potential introduction to students taking the course the following semester. I have created mini-zines with writing advice as takeaways for my students as well (see Fig. 2). This semester, my research writing students created fanzines to fulfill the multi-genre transformation requirement for the course using their fandom-based research papers. Like last year’s collaborative zines, these zines were also presented at the Celebration of Student Writing at the end of the semester. I selected fandom and fan culture as a theme for research in this course because it not only recognizes and incorporates student interests, but also models for students how their interests can be studied using inquiry-based academic research methods. In this course, students conduct primary and secondary research in support of a research question relating to their selected fandom, and produce a substantial research project supported by guided instruction. This research project is then transformed into a creative, public document—in this case, fanzines.

Fanzines are zines produced by fans, for an audience of fans (or curious non-fans) of a particular form of entertainment or interest. Fanzines can be used to support a variety of lessons: zines could be made about a particular author’s life and/or works (a Sylvia Plath reader), or could instead

reflect individual student interests (sports, music, television, etc.). The projects that my students completed address topics that range from cosplay to *Lord of the Rings*, Disney World to Sneakerheads, John Green's novels to Detroit sports.

Fanzines can incorporate a number of genres, including excerpts from their research projects, interview transcripts, photographs, images taken from the Internet, drawings, book/film reviews, recipes, coloring pages, song lyrics or guitar chords, tables or graphs, and letters; likewise, fanzines can be created by a single person, or they can be a collaborative effort led by an editor who requests submissions and then creates the publication. Collaborative zines typically include a Table of Contents and contributor biographies, and may have a framing piece written by the editor addressing the audience and sharing the purpose of the zine.

To illustrate what the fanzine assignment looked like in the context of my course, I present four samples of student work. Aaron's research paper explored the "singular perception" of book characters when novels become films, using John Green's novels as an example. He created two mini-zines: one titled *The World of John Green Fan Art* and another titled *John Green's Main Men and Women*. Aaron's zines are almost entirely hand-drawn, as this student is quite artistic and was excited to have the opportunity to use his drawing abilities in a composition class, though the zines do include photographs and typed text as well. Diana examined J.R. Tolkien through a feminist lens and ultimately decided that the jury was out: some fans view Tolkien as a feminist, and others criticize his work for its lack of attention to women as substantial characters.

Like Aaron's zines, Diana created a mini-zine as well, titled *You Shall Not Pass in Life Until You've Seen This Zine*. The tagline on the second page is written: "Random relatable things about LOTR and why it's fuckin' amazing." The zine includes maps, character profiles (using photographs and fan

art), memes, and the lyrics to "The Song of the Lonely Mountains." The remaining students, Kathleen and Erica, had similar projects: Kathleen investigated the myths and stereotypes associated with Otaku culture. Otaku is a Japanese term that describes a fan obsessed with anime and manga. Kathleen's zine is a half-page zine that reads back to front and right to left, as manga does, and is titled *How to Otaku*. Her zine features handwritten and typed text, photo and text collages, images of popular anime and manga series, definitions of key terms, and information about a serial killer whom she believes gave Otaku a bad name.

Kathleen's zine is copied in full color, as is Erica's zine, which is titled, *All Things Fandom: Cosplay*. Erica's project examined cosplay as a rich and complex hobby, highlighting the elements of craft and material knowledge, as well as the life skills involved in cosplaying. Erica's is a half-page zine as well, and features a collage of various cosplayers for the cover. Most of the content inside is handwritten and her work is image-driven; it includes instructions for cosplaying Sherlock from the BBC series *Sherlock*, Aragorn from *Lord of the Rings*, and Dean from *Supernatural*. She also includes information on conventions where one is likely to see cosplay competitions, statements from cosplayers about their experiences, and offers advice on cosplay etiquette.

Each student was required to submit with their zine a State-

ment of Goals and Choices essay, which asked them to account for the composing decisions they made while making their zines. In these essays, students expressed interest in the authenticity of the assignment, and noted the freedom they had to make their own decisions when working with this type of media. Kathleen compared zines to the magazines she subscribed to in high school, like *Seventeen*, and how she only read certain parts of the magazine that were of interest to her, skimming over the longer articles. She explained her choice "have as little words as possible" because as a reader,



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she is drawn to images and lists as opposed to blocks of text.

Diana acknowledged the amateur appearance of her work: “I do not mind if the tape shows up in the photocopies because I think it will add character and remind people that ‘someone made this.’ I think it’s authentic.” Erica described her decision to leave out specific content, concerned about her audience’s level of understanding, and opted to “show other people what cosplay is and how they can participate.” Aaron made the following observation about the assignment itself:

...[w]hen projects have less strict guidelines, the final product ends up being well done in many cases. Maybe it’s because a student feels comfortable just writing and deciding what they want to include, rather than worrying about following a certain criteria. I enjoy writing, especially about my opinion... but when art and language can mix in one project it turns out pretty cool.

Their essays provided me with much-needed insight into their composing processes. Without these essays, the choices they make as writers remain invisible to me. As with any type of writing, decisions are made about what to include and what to leave out in terms of content, as well as myriad design options that are evaluated and then eliminated which are not reflected in the final product. When students share their composing choices with me, I am able to engage with their work more effectively.

While a creative, low-tech project like zines might seem easy to pull off, there are logistical concerns that will need to be addressed: zines are a time-consuming project, and students will need access to a photocopier as well as money to make copies. Most zines made today use a word processing program like Microsoft Word or Google Drive, an internet search engine for images or information, and a printer, though there are many handwritten and hand-drawn zines as well. When I first introduced the assignment, many of my students were overwhelmed (at first) by the photocopying process, especially when it came to copying double-sided pages.

Some students struggled to come up with content and relied on uncaptioned images to fill their pages, which made it difficult to identify a clear purpose for their work. However, the majority of my students reported positive feelings toward working with zines, and several discussed in their essays a desire to make more zines on their own time, which was ultimately my goal. In the future, I will include more information on the values and ethics of zine culture in my

lectures, and will support the assignment by offering in-class workshops using print and web-based resources on zine production (see Esther Todd and Mark Watson’s *Whatcha’ Mean, What’s a Zine?* and the Barnard Zine Library’s “Teaching with Zines” webpage), inviting speakers to come talk about zines and zine-making, and will require students to circulate their zines publicly, moving beyond a temporary display at a school-sponsored event.

### Zines in Classroom

Whether you choose to incorporate fanzines, survival-guide mini-zines, perzines, or another approach (there are many!) into your classroom, there are a number of benefits and considerations to address. Zines can offer students a sense of ownership that other types of writing, especially classroom writing, do not provide. Zines also introduce students to multimodal, or multigenre composing, within a single document. Including zines as part of the curriculum also models for students a variety of vehicles for meaning-making, and can provide a more broad spectrum of identities and experiences with which students can relate. These benefits challenge the status quo in terms of authority, revealing the process by which a writer attains credibility on a particular topic. Zines also meet students where they are, serving as a bridge between the writing skills we emphasize in the classroom and the writing they do in their everyday lives. It is likely that few, if any, of your students are familiar with zines, and introducing the genre may inspire them to keep writing (and to keep making) on their own.

#### Autonomy

Zines promote ownership of ideas and autonomy in the writing process. Chu (1997) explains that zines, as a youth-driven phenomena, require adults (teachers!) to view young people as actual creators of content and media as opposed to passive consumers: “Zines provide one way of interacting with youths as initiators and producers of their own social agendas... and representations” (p. 83). Assigning zines and allowing their criteria to be set collaboratively (or to be fixed loosely) positions students in this way. The written account of the composing choices that the writer has made invites students to articulate their decisions as well; many of these choices, such as rejected page layouts or the removal of particular content, will not be reflected in the final product.

Chu also argues that zines “serve to illuminate young people’s own perceptions of what is wrong with their larger social environments” (p. 83). Zines introduce raw,

autonomous, peer-driven content into the classroom, a space typically dominated by adult voices and dominant narratives that may not represent the interests or concerns of all students. Students benefit when voices that resemble their own are seen, read, and valued in an educational setting. Imagine if classrooms created and curated their own zine libraries! As Alvermann and Hagood (2000) explain, adolescent culture belongs in the classroom, as exploring individual interests (and identities) with students “may bring about insights into how students construct meaning...and provide teachers with a window through which to view students’ constructed identities” (p. 437).

### **Multigenre/Multimodal Composing**

Students associate classroom writing (writing that is assigned, or writing that originates within the classroom) with traditional essays, and approach writing assignments that do not ask them to write strictly in paragraph form with uncertainty. When I teach with zines, as when I ask my students to try Peter Elbow’s (1998) crot-writing that asks them to compose in a series of brief vignettes as opposed to connected paragraphs, students express difficulty working outside of the prescribed confinements of the five-paragraph essay. One student compared her first experience with zines to going to the store for toothpaste and having to try a new brand because her favorite brand is out of stock.

She approached this unfamiliar writing task with hesitation, but ultimately decided that “the goal was something to simply move toward rather than something set in stone.” Though a zine was not what she expected to encounter in a college writing course, she embraced the process (messy as it was), and acknowledged that this first attempt wouldn’t be perfect. This student demonstrated the rhetorical flexibility that I feel is key to supporting personal and professional writing lives. While persuasive texts, like an inquiry-based research paper, typically take the form of paragraph-based prose, students benefit when they have the opportunity to question and challenge these structures through rhetorical framing. As Styslinger (2006) explains,

Multigenre research papers belong in classroom writing workshops. At the secondary level, too much emphasis on product (e.g., five-paragraph essays) and argument (e.g., persuasive rhetorical forms) has left many students feeling silenced. The multigenre research paper allows students equal access to voice(s), and its flexible structure permits them to utilize those genres most comfortable and suitable for representing independent ideas (p. 54).

I argue that this same act of “silencing” occurs in the college classroom as well. While zines are not a “multigenre research paper,” they are one of many genres that afford students the opportunity to explore comfortable and meaningful ways in which to convey information. Likewise, Shipka (2005) points out that the traditional, thesis-driven print essay is geared primarily toward the instructor, and maintains that with multimodal, or multigenre projects, the “rhetorical, material, methodological, and technological choices students made while engineering these complex rhetorical events merit serious and sustained attention” (p. 282).

While Shipka’s (2005) students make three-dimensional projects comprised of both text and object, zines and their varied means of presenting information also demand the same consideration. When student writers are called upon to make their own choices in terms of the content, arrangement, and delivery of information (including use of materials and how these materials are transformed to satisfy the writer’s purpose), they work in ways that more closely resemble the work of professionals in the field (Shipka, 2005). Whether students are reading zines or creating them, teachers can emphasize the rhetorical features of zines: the persuasive qualities of language (voice and style), document design (arrangement/organization as well as font type, photocopy quality, materials used), type(s) of media selected, the author’s credibility and ability to appeal to the values or needs of their audience, and the timeliness or relevance of the message, all of which determine the effectiveness of the text as it is delivered to a specific audience. Students then respond to these considerations in their written essays that are turned in alongside the zines they’ve created.

### **Authority and Credibility**

Zines as noncommercial, aesthetically amateur publications push the boundaries of “normal” in regard to how texts are valued within the institution. Wan (1999) states that in addition to promoting racial and ethnic visibility, “[z]ines can provide countless other examples where an often marginalized community, whether queer, fans of weird music, sci-fi freaks, or something else, provides the printed word for itself without the mess of corporate advertisers and investors” (p. 18). This invitation for marginalized groups to not only speak, but to create their own content, thus speaking

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for themselves, is both a welcome and necessary action that can clue teachers into the lives of their students while also validating the life experiences and interests of the individual writers. Moreover, including zines as reading material or as a text worth experimenting with for publication models for students an alternative form of writing beyond the type of texts (and their respective content restrictions) that we compose in academic settings.

Each of my students demonstrated awareness of and sensitivity to their potential audiences when creating their zines; while many of their fandoms were mainstream, they were able to write from a position of authority in relation to their topic based on their individual experiences and acquired knowledge. Many identified zines as a more appealing form of writing for their intended audiences than their research papers would be. One student imagined that her audience would actually read her zine, but they would “skim” a long paper. Another student hoped that “These zines...will be interesting and cool to look at, whereas my paper was just a lot of words.”

With zines, a writer’s ethos is dependent upon their ability to connect directly with their reader, typically through shared experiences that are presented in whatever form the writer finds most appropriate. With textbooks, students assume the writer (or editor) is a recognized authority on the subjects included because textbooks are produced by a publishing company and used consistently as a teaching tool. With zines, there is no editor or corporation to vet the material included; instead, the writer must convince the reader to accept their thoughts and opinions using other means, such as self-disclosure, or aesthetic design. Pairing trusted sources of information, like textbooks, with zines that lack a so-called “seal of approval” (like an ISBN or copyright date) can encourage students to think critically about how authority is established and when, for example, a zine might be a more reliable source of information.

In some cases, content produced directly by someone living through a particular experience that a writer seeks to explore would serve as stronger evidence. While I do not intend to undermine the authority ascribed to textbooks, I echo Frazier’s desire to place a specific value on self-published media that include life experiences, ideas, and reflections belonging to their respective writers. Such media can be read alongside texts with assumed authority to provide a more diverse and representative picture of the interests and curiosities of our students.

### Support for Students

While fanzines invite students to celebrate their individual interests as readers or writers, they also allow students to explore issues like stereotypes, identity conflicts, relationships, and other emotionally charged issues within the context of a specific fandom, which may feel safer than addressing those issues outright. Teachers have used literature to guide students through such issues (such as LGBTQ topics) within the framework of a novel and the fictional context it provides (Blackburn & Clark, 2010). My students began their research projects by selecting a particular fandom, but the issues raised by their projects could be easily applied to any number of contexts: misconceptions and stereotypes (cosplay, Otaku culture, hipsters, and Middle Eastern ethnicities in video games), feminism (Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings*), sexism (hunting and lacrosse), and fan-based contributions to the local economy (Detroit sports).

While the projects that my students completed this semester do not address LGBTQ-specific issues, the research I have done alongside my students does: each semester, I complete a mock project so that my students can see how I break down the research writing process, and this semester I researched how roller derby, a amateur but competitive full-contact sport, promotes acceptance and empowerment for all women regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. As a queer person, this mock project helped me to identify the qualities of a safe space and consider how they might be applied to other contexts, even though my research was focused on a particular sport.

As with any type of public writing, zines pose challenges, especially when these zines contain information that may challenge social norms. When a writer creates and maintains a public presence, whether through social media, blogs, or creative writing, they have to consider the implications for their professional reputations, no matter how young (or old!) the writer is. Will the writer be criticized for associating herself with a particular religion, interest, or hobby? Will speaking openly about a relationship, or sharing an experience coming out to his family as a queer person make a writer’s peers (or colleagues) uncomfortable? As teachers, we must also honor the privacy of our students in regard to sharing and discussing their work. We need to engage in dialogue with our students the short and long-term impacts of public writing, which can be both positive and negative. For example, my zine about roller derby might inspire other women to join a league, but a zine about same-sex marriage may



(unfortunately) jeopardize my position as a teacher should I have students who disagree. This is not to say I shouldn't make zines, but that I need to consider a) whether or not to identify myself as the author, b) who might read these zines as both the intended and unintended audiences, and c) how I might present my views in such a way that honors my own experiences without alienating or criticizing the experiences of others. In other words, writing about ethical, political, or personal interests must be paired with a conversation about the personal and professional consequences that the writing could bring about, no matter what type of media is used. Fortunately, this is a lesson that both students and teachers can discuss together.

## Assessment

Zines create an interesting situation in terms of evaluation and assessment. In nearly all conversations about using zines in the classroom, the inevitable question of how to assess such nontraditional forms of writing emerges. How can zines be evaluated without appropriating them into the conventions of academic writing? Some zinesters caution against using zines in the classroom for this reason (Mayorga, 2013). While this concern has strong merit, there are several ways that educators can respond. Teachers can choose not to use zines as a required assignment that will receive a grade, and can instead offer zines as a) a voluntary option (of several) for the extension of a particular lesson or unit, or b) an extra credit assignment. Teachers can also support zine-making as an extracurricular activity through a club or writing group that meets outside of classroom hours. Zines can also be used strictly as reading material in the classroom, supported by a classroom collection of zines that is teacher-curated (or curated collaboratively with students). In any of these situations, zine-reading and zine-making should be supported through an in-depth genre study (see Fleischer & Andrew-Vaughan, 2011) so that students (and teachers) understand the history, purpose, and potential of zines as they are created and circulated in their natural environment.

If you do choose to have your students make zines as an assignment, assessment protocols should be adjusted to support both the genre conventions of zines and the autonomy of the student who is making deliberate rhetorical choices that will inevitably differ from their peers. Grading multimodal projects can be challenging, and when those projects are produced in an academic setting where the creator is evaluated on their performance, ability, or interpretation of

the genre, special care needs to be taken to allow the student to explain their rhetorical decision-making. Shipka's (2005) Statement of Goals and Choices essay offers an approach to assessment that requires students to submit, alongside the creative component, a written assignment that asks students to evaluate the rhetorical qualities of their work. This written assignment is worth equally as much as the multimodal piece itself, providing students the opportunity to reflect upon and articulate their choices as writers, and offering insight for the instructor into the less-visible choices the student made. I have used this assignment in my courses successfully, and while students have had some difficulty identifying and articulating their choices, this is likely because they are not typically afforded the opportunity to account for their choices, and they may need support in finding the language to do so. Shipka (2005) offers specific prompts to aid in this process.

In many ways, zines are no different than underground, student-sponsored newspapers: created by the people for the people, publications like these are driven by a longing to be recognized by a desired audience, and the need to advocate for real-life concerns that may not be reflected in mainstream media, the classroom curriculum, or institutional policies. As an LGBTQ-identified person, I am excited about new opportunities for composing that push the boundaries of what is expected. For students who may not see themselves and their experiences reflected in the textbooks they are assigned or the traditional literature found in an academic setting, zines can be a powerful resource for validation and inspiration. Likewise, students benefit from being introduced to alternative publication options that are accessible and meaningful. While not every student will (or can be expected to) find zines appealing, those who do will find a welcoming platform—one that can awaken and support students' public consciousness.

## Engaging the “Othered”: Using Zines to Support Student Identities

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# Literacy Teaching and Learning in Rural Communities

## Problematizing Stereotypes, Challenging Myths

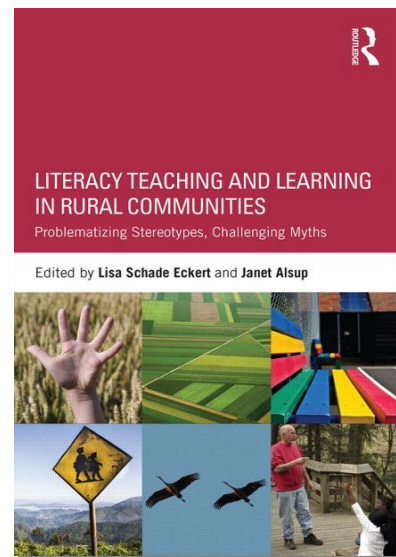
Edited by **Lisa Schade Eckert** and **Janet Alsup**

"This book provides a clear and compelling window into the realities of rural teaching. The writers make it possible to imagine rural teaching as a rewarding professional career. I wish I'd had this book when I was a young teacher!"  
—Robert Brooke, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

This definitive look at teaching English in rural secondary schools contests current definitions and discussions of rural education, examines their ideological and cultural foundations, and presents an alternative perspective that conceptualizes rural communities as diverse, unique, and conducive to pedagogical and personal growth in teaching and learning. Authentic narratives document individual teachers' moments of struggle and success in learning to understand, value, and incorporate rural literacies and sensibilities into their curricula. The teachers' stories and the scholarly analysis of issues raised through them illuminate the unique challenges and rewards of teaching English in a rural school and offer helpful insights and knowledge for navigating the pedagogical landscape.

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