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Re-Storying the Archive: Embodied Standpoint Literacy (EmSL) and the Transnational Reimagining of Narrative Pedagogy

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Introduction

After engaging the scholarly and socially oriented conversations featured in *Xchanges*, this article revisits "Stories We Hear, Stories We Tell, and Stories We Live: Teaching Narrative in the Technical Communication Classroom" by Angelyn Sommers (2022). Published in Volume 17, Issue 1, Sommers builds on the three-part narrative framework developed by M. Carolyn Clark and Marsha Rossiter (2008) to examine how "storying" – the use of storytelling as a meaning-making and communicative practice – operates within the teaching and practice of Technical and Professional Communication (TPC). By drawing on the interrelated narrative actions of hearing, telling, and living stories, Sommers positions narrative as both an epistemological and pedagogical resource for preparing students to become ethical and socially responsive technical communicators. This framework foregrounds how stories function as bridges between prior knowledge and new concepts, cultivate practices of deep listening, support the development of user-centered documentation, and enable students to situate themselves within the broader narratives shaping their professional and personal identities.

In this revisitation, I engage Sommers' narrative argument from a transnational standpoint; one informed by my own research on how Anglophone African Graduate Students (AAGS) navigate institutional landscapes at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). While Sommers articulates narrative as a dynamic and relational means of bridging knowledge and fostering ethical responsiveness, I extend this conversation by introducing a transnational framework, Embodied Standpoint Literacy (EmSL), to show how narrative practices are negotiated through layers of lived experience, linguistic histories, and positionality.

In her argument, Sommers posits that "one of the most prevalent ways of sharing these conviction-shaping stories with our students is through case studies, which present problems in the field and challenge students to think through various solutions" (p. 6). My research builds on this argument by creating a space of storytelling for a marginalized and often overlooked group – African students in PWIs. My research extends Sommers' framing by foregrounding the lived realities of AAGS as an embodied case that reveals the systemic gaps, erasures, and rhetorical negotiations embedded within the fields of Writing Studies and TPC. Moreover, while Sommers primarily writes for technical communication instructors, my research broadens the addressed audience to include those who operate across the technical communication ecosystem, both within academic and professional workplaces. This expansion highlights that the ethical

implications of narrative and representation extend beyond classroom pedagogy to the institutional structures and professional practices that shape how stories are produced, circulated, and legitimized.

Storying the struggles of 10 African students (approved Virginia Tech IRB Protocol #25-017) in selected PWIs across the U.S., I use the EmSL framework to explore how their lived experiences expose the structural inequities, narrative silences, and institutional constraints that shape their academic journeys.

Embodied Standpoint Literacy as a Transnational Narrative Framework

Narrative scholarship in Writing Studies and TPC has increasingly emphasized storying as a way of making meaning, shaping ethical awareness, and connecting prior experience to professional practice (Schmertz, 2018; Canagarajah, 2020; Sullivan, 2020; Yang, 2022). Within this scholarship, narrative is understood not simply as a representational account of experience but as an epistemological practice through which writers construct knowledge, negotiate identities, and make sense of their relationships to broader social and institutional contexts (Bleich, 2003; hooks, 2014). This body of work has been particularly important in challenging autonomous models of literacy by demonstrating that literacy is socially situated and enacted through lived experience rather than acquired as a neutral set of technical skills (Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 2012). Consequently, narratives are understood not merely as reflections of literacy but as rhetorical acts that reveal how writers navigate relationships among language, identity, institutions, and power (Alexander, 2015; Canagarajah, 2020).

Despite these important contributions, narrative scholarship also reveals a conceptual tension. Although scholars have demonstrated that literacy narratives are socially situated and shaped by relations of power, much of the literature continues to privilege narrative as a retrospective account of experience. Consequently, analytical attention often centers on interpreting what writers say about their literacy histories rather than examining how those histories become embodied resources for rhetorical action. In other words, narrative is frequently treated as the object of analysis instead of as evidence of the ongoing negotiations through which writers respond to institutional expectations, disciplinary conventions, and broader sociopolitical conditions.

This tendency becomes particularly significant in studies of transnational and diasporic writers. While scholarship has increasingly recognized multilingualism, mobility, and cultural difference as important dimensions of literacy (Canagarajah, 2020; Schmertz, 2018; Yang, 2022), these experiences are often discussed through broad categories of diversity or inclusion. Such approaches risk overlooking how specific geopolitical histories, colonial legacies, migration trajectories, and institutional positioning shape not only the stories writers tell but also the rhetorical decisions they make while composing those stories. As a result, narrative can become detached from the embodied and institutional conditions that both constrain and enable rhetorical action.

One genre that exemplifies both the possibilities and limitations of narrative scholarship is the Literacy Autobiography (LA), also referred to as the literacy narrative (Yang, 2022). As a longstanding pedagogical practice in Writing Studies, LA invites writers to examine how literacy develops through family, schooling, language, migration, and other sociocultural experiences (Brandt, 2001; Soliday, 1994). Influenced by ideological models of literacy, LA reframes literacy not as an autonomous skill but as a socially situated practice shaped by institutional, cultural, and historical contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Street, 1984). In doing so, it has been instrumental in legitimizing lived experience as a source of literacy knowledge and critical reflection (Canagarajah, 2020; Schmertz, 2018). At the same time, its emphasis on narrating literacy experiences foregrounds representation, raising questions about whether narrative alone sufficiently accounts for the embodied and rhetorical negotiations through which writers respond to institutional expectations.

Although LA legitimizes lived experience as a source of literacy knowledge, scholars caution that the genre can inadvertently reproduce the institutional norms it seeks to challenge. Soliday (1994) argues that literacy narratives often become institutional "passages between language worlds" (p. 511), encouraging writers to produce recognizable stories of literacy development. Similarly, Yancey (2009) notes that literacy narratives are often evaluated according to institutional expectations of growth and success. For multilingual and transnational writers, these expectations may reinforce deficit perspectives by interpreting linguistic and cultural difference as remediation rather than as rhetorical resource (Canagarajah, 2012). This gap, therefore, points to the need for a framework that moves beyond narrative as representation to examine writing as an embodied and situated rhetorical practice. Building on Canagarajah's (2020) characterization of LA as a "liminal genre" that can be adapted to more expansive contexts (p. 4), I propose EmSL as a framework that shifts attention from what writers narrate about their literacy experiences to how their embodied, transnational, and institutional positionalities shape rhetorical decision-making across writing contexts.

Drawing on Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography, EmSL understands everyday experiences as organized through institutional relations that are often mediated by texts (Smith, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006; LaFrance, 2019). These "boss texts," such as syllabi, rubrics, assignment prompts, reviewers' feedback, and other institutional documents, function as coordinating mechanisms that regulate how individuals act and interpret expectations. They do not merely communicate guidelines; they shape the conditions under which meaning is produced and how participants' agency is negotiated within institutional contexts. At the same time, EmSL draws on feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2004), to foreground how knowledge is situated and shaped by social position. From this perspective, the experiences of those navigating marginalized and transnational positions are not peripheral but provide critical insight into how institutional structures operate. Extending these frameworks, EmSL further incorporates a chronotopic understanding of literate activity, recognizing that individuals' engagements with texts and narratives are shaped by layered temporal, spatial, and cultural

experiences (Prior & Shipka, 2003). These laminations inform how writers as narrators interpret, respond to, and reposition themselves within institutional contexts.

Taken together, EmSL conceptualizes literacy as an embodied and situated practice through which individuals draw on lived experience, positionality, and institutional knowledge to navigate, negotiate, and reconfigure the conditions that shape meaning-making. When brought into conversation with narrative, EmSL reframes storying as more than a reflective or pedagogical act. It positions narrative as a site of negotiation, where individuals engage the constraints and possibilities of institutional life through the stories they hear, tell, and live. Through this lens, the narratives of AAGS can be understood as situated responses to institutional conditions, revealing how storytelling becomes a means of navigating visibility, authority, and belonging within academic and professional spaces, while also functioning as a transnational case through which broader patterns across diasporic and international communities can be understood.

Transnational Positioning and AAGS as Analytic Case

Much of the narrative scholarship has productively advanced inclusive and transnational approaches to literacy by demonstrating that narratives are socially situated and shaped by relations of power. These contributions provide an important foundation for understanding literacy across diverse contexts. Building on this work, my analysis complements Sommers' conceptualization of narrative by emphasizing the importance of embodied specificity. Rather than approaching difference primarily through broad categories such as underrepresented, minoritized, or transnational, EmSL foregrounds the importance of naming the particular communities whose lived experiences are under examination and attending to the historical, cultural, and institutional conditions that shape their writing. Such specificity allows scholars to move beyond generalized accounts of difference toward a richer understanding of how embodied factors become resources for rhetorical action.

Accordingly, this study centers AAGS as a specific community and a situated case within diasporic African and broader transnational populations in the United States, whose experiences reveal the embodied, institutional, and rhetorical conditions through which narrative operates. In doing so, it moves away from treating difference as a generalized condition and instead demonstrates how literacy and narrative are shaped by distinct histories, constraints, and negotiations. Addressing such specificity not only deepens our understanding of transnational literacy practices but also invites a more iterative movement between broader publics and localized communities, where shared structural conditions remain visible even as the embodied complexities of particular groups come into focus. Focusing on AAGS, therefore, enables a more nuanced understanding of the broader diasporic African student experience, offering insight into how linguistic histories, transnational trajectories, and institutional structures shape participation in U.S. academic and professional spaces. This focus becomes especially important in the context of increasing global student mobility.

In recent decades, international student mobility has increased significantly, driven by globalization and the appeal of foreign education and career opportunities (Gargano, 2009; Duany, 2011). In 2020, over 5 million students worldwide pursued degrees abroad, promoting the growth of transnational communities and reshaping the landscape of higher education (UNESCO, 2022). The U.S. remains a prominent destination, with international students making up 5.5% of total enrollments and coming from over 200 countries (IIE, 2022). These students not only contribute $28.4 billion annually to the U.S. economy but also enrich the academic and social diversity of U.S. campuses (NAFSA, 2022). According to The Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange (2023), 50,199 international students from Sub-Saharan Africa studied in the U.S. during the 2022/23 academic year, reflecting an 18.1% increase from the previous year. Among this group, 21,237 were graduate students, a 26.6% increase from the prior year's total of 16,772 African graduate students. These figures underscore not only the scale of African student presence but also the urgency of examining how these students navigate and make meaning within U.S. academic and professional spaces.

In the twenty-first century, the field of technical and professional communication (TPC) continues to evolve in response to globalization, technological innovation, and an intensified commitment to more inclusive and socially responsive institutional practices. As Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2012) note, these shifts are not only methodological but epistemological, compelling scholars to reexamine whose knowledge systems, literacies, and communicative practices are recognized within the profession. More than focusing on who is doing the work, they further argue for recognizing the receptive value of the TPC work being done, especially for "lay audiences" (p. i). Miller (1979) argues that when we move beyond viewing language as merely a vehicle for transmitting information, technical writing becomes a "kind of enculturation" that helps individuals understand how to belong to a community (p. 617). Building on this perspective, Sullivan (2020) similarly argues that TPC, as a "descendant of rhetoric" (p. 223), must move beyond what John Mitchell describes as "indoctrinat[ing] our students in the forms appropriate to their employers" (as cited in Sullivan, 2020, p. 223) toward more reflective, ethical, and inclusive approaches that acknowledge the social and cultural dimensions of technical work. Likewise, Agboka (2013) and Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) call for a broader understanding of technical communication as a site of advocacy and justice, emphasizing that communicative practices are always embedded in power relations.

Within this evolving landscape, these arguments become especially relevant for understanding how African international graduate students navigate their institutional positionings and literate practices in U.S. higher education and technical communication contexts. Their experiences reveal how race, language, and nationality intersect in shaping participation in professional communication. As Jones et al. (2018) observe, the inclusion of culturally diverse communicators demands not only representational diversity but also structural transformation in how the field defines expertise, professionalism, and rhetorical competence. For AAGS, these expectations are navigated through transnational literacies informed by colonial histories of English,

culturally grounded epistemologies, and contemporary institutional demands. Their writing, ranging from class assignments and project deliverables to conference proposals and academic publications, serves as both a site of negotiation and a record of rhetorical agency.

In the technical communication workplace, writing operates as both a material and epistemic practice that bridges academic learning and professional application. These texts do not simply demonstrate disciplinary competence; they also perform institutional belonging. For AAGS, producing such texts often involves navigating racialized perceptions of credibility and linguistic legitimacy, revealing the implicit norms that govern whose rhetorical styles are recognized and valued. These dynamics underscore why studying AAGS' communicative practices is essential for understanding how TPC constructs and negotiates professional ethos across transnational contexts.

Building on this understanding, the communicative practices of AAGS can be read as narrative acts that extend beyond the production of texts to include the ongoing work of meaning-making within institutional contexts. The documents they produce, whether in classrooms or professional settings, are not only responses to assigned tasks but also sites where experiences, identities, and expectations are negotiated and articulated. From this perspective, narrative becomes central to how AAGS engage TPC, as they draw on their lived and embodied experiences to make sense of institutional demands and to position themselves within them. Through these narrative practices, they do not simply reproduce dominant conventions but actively interpret, adapt, and at times resist the norms that shape their participation.

Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews and writing samples from 10 AAGS selected to reflect a range of disciplinary backgrounds and experiences, this study examines how stories that are heard and lived are retold in interviews and, in turn, inform the literate productions through which academic success and professional positioning are negotiated. To examine these narrative processes, the study adopts a mixed-methods research design grounded in institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), where interviews serve as a mode of inquiry that begins from participants' lived experiences as entry points into understanding the broader social organization shaping their lives, alongside Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of writing samples (Huckin et al., 2012), which examines how textual features are connected to wider social and institutional contexts. Semi-structured interviews provide insight into how participants narrate and make sense of their experiences, while writing samples offer a complementary lens into how these narratives are taken up within academic and professional contexts. By bringing these data sources into conversation, the study traces the movement between lived experience, narrated accounts, and literate production, allowing for an analysis of how participants interpret, negotiate, and respond to the institutional conditions that shape their participation.

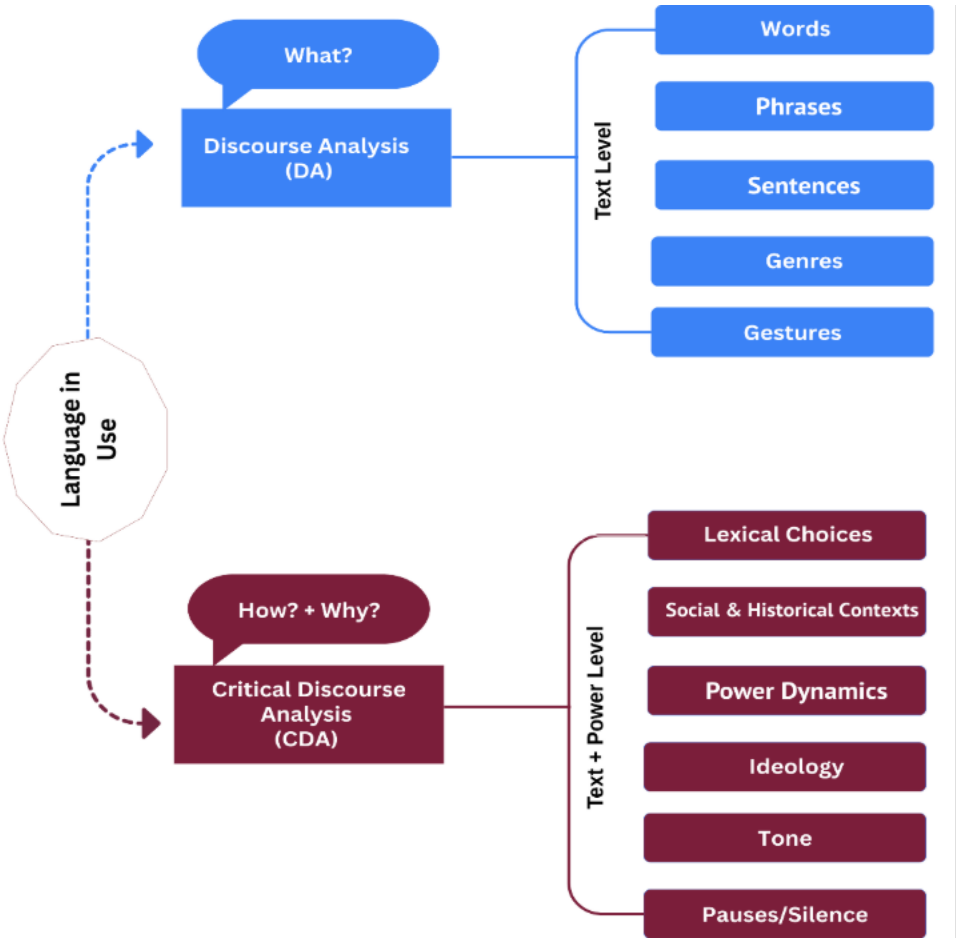


Figure 1: Author-designed figure illustrating the distinction between Discourse Analysis (DA), which focuses on what language is doing, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines how and why language constructs and reflects power. The analysis of writing samples focuses on how participants' language choices reflect and respond to institutional expectations.

Telling the Stories Heard and Lived: Interview Narratives as Sites of Embodied and Institutional Negotiation

As an institutional ethnographer, I draw on Smith's (2005) articulation of a "sociology for people." Smith emphasizes that research should begin from the standpoint of individuals who occupy subordinated or less institutionally privileged positions because their everyday realities make visible the social and textual relations that remain obscured from dominant perspectives. The experiences of AAGS offer precisely this kind of access. making visible the institutional expectations and constraints that often remain obscured within dominant academic and professional frameworks. In narrating their experiences, participants actively retell the stories they have heard and lived, as part of their ongoing efforts to interpret, navigate, and respond to institutional demands.

S/N	Interview Code / Pseudonym	Anglophone African Country	Program	Field of Study	Area(s) of Research	Years in the U.S.
1	Abena	Ghana	Master's	History	Ghanaian women in decolonial history	1
2	Adeniyi	Nigeria	PhD	Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education	Youth and organizational leadership	3
3	Ahmed	Gambia	PhD	Medical Entomology	Mosquito species diversity in Gambia and arbovirus prevalence	2
4	Balogun	Nigeria	PhD	Industrial and Systems Engineering	Ergonomic interventions for work-related musculoskeletal disorders	3
5	Barasa	Kenya	PhD	Media School	Political implications of social media and misinformation	4
6	Jamila	Nigeria	Master's	English	Social media communication and technical writing	2
7	JB	Ghana	Master's	History	19th/20th-century British colonial environmental policies in Ghana (Environmental History)	1
8	Kamau	Kenya	PhD	Media School	Mediation, reconciliation, and political communication	4
9	Kayjay	Kenya	PhD	Music	Choral Conducting	3
10	Kwesi	Ghana	PhD	Rhetoric and Writing	Translingual rhetoric and linguistic justice	4
11	Okoye	Nigeria	PhD	Industrial and Systems Engineering	Systems Engineering	4
12	Otieno	Kenya	PhD	Epidemiology and Biostatistics	Social and economic influences on population health outcomes	3
13	Papa	Kenya	PhD	Media School	Gender studies and misinformation	1
14	Rotimi	Nigeria	PhD	Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education	Agricultural leadership and social change	3
15	Sarki	Kenya	PhD	Music	Voice Performance (Singing)	4
16	Yamikani	Malawi	PhD	Nursing	Effects of contextual stress on postpartum sleep	2
17	Yaw	Ghana	Master's	History	Water supply in colonial Ghana	1

Table 1: Deidentified Participant Demographics and Academic Backgrounds

Rather than treating participants' experiences as isolated accounts, the discussion maps how individual narratives connect to shared transnational conditions. To account for these dynamics in the rest of this article, I use EmSL as a narrative framework for examining how embodied experience, institutional positioning, and rhetorical negotiation shape how stories are told, heard, and recognized. Hence stories are categorized thematically.

What Instructional Boss Texts Mean for Participants

In addressing how AAGS' layered standpoints shape their awareness and interpretation of instructional documents as boss texts in PWIs, and how this awareness triggers EmSL as a rhetorical strategy for navigating meaning, authority, and risk, it is important to examine how institutional writing expectations are experienced in participants' everyday academic lives. Across interviews, participants consistently framed boss texts as sites where academic writing expectations are produced and enforced. These expectations extended beyond coursework to include class participation, presentations, academic writing, and scholarly publication, indicating that institutional literate norms operate across multiple academic spaces.

As a result, instructional documents function as coordinating texts that shape not only classroom performance but also participants' broader academic trajectories. Participants' accounts further show that graduate writing and learning extend beyond individual assignments to encompass professionalization practices that carry significant evaluative weight. Performance across these spaces was understood to reflect directly on participants' academic legitimacy and identity within their programs.

Stories Heard About Institutional Boss Texts: Interpreting Expectations and Institutional Norms

In her article, Angelyn Sommers conceptualizes "stories heard" as those encountered through recommended texts, which, in her case, helped shape her understanding of the field (Sommers, 2022). These texts functioned as pathfinders, offering guidance on how to interpret and navigate technical communication practices. In this extension, however, "stories heard" are not limited to formal pedagogical encounters or instructional texts but also include the narratives participants encounter through interactions with peers, mentors, and others within their academic environments. Participants described hearing accounts from those who had previously navigated similar courses, assignments, and institutional expectations, often in community spaces such as student organizations, informal peer gatherings, and everyday conversations, as well as in more structured interactions with advanced students and advisors. These stories frequently centered on challenges, misalignments, and strategies for meeting expectations, shaping how participants approached instructional documents and interpreted what was required of them. In this way, "stories heard" function as interpretive guides through which participants anticipate what institutional boss texts entail, how to approach them, and how to recognize their expectations as they unfold in practice. They also serve as a critical resource for making informed decisions and, at times, validating participants' own experiences within broader patterns of academic life.

One recurrent theme across participants' accounts is adaptive linguistic and epistemic attunement. Participants described how navigating instructional boss texts required continual adjustment across language, accent, and epistemic orientation, involving an ongoing process of modifying language use, epistemic framing, and rhetorical choices

in response to dominant norms, disciplinary expectations, and evaluative pressures. This attunement includes recognizing American English as a governing institutional standard that often positions other English varieties shaped by British colonial education and ethnic orientation as deficient, while also managing how accents, writing conventions, and epistemic orientations are interpreted within academic interactions. Rather than a one-time shift, this process requires continuous recalibration.

Within this context, "stories heard" play a critical role in shaping how participants anticipate and respond to these demands. For instance, Barasa, a PhD student from Kenya in Media Studies explained that early misunderstandings, such as classmates not grasping intended meanings or repeatedly asking them to restate comments, required reliance on friends who had "been here for quite some time" to help interpret what kinds of English and interactional styles were more readily understood in classroom settings. These personal exchanges, corrections, and relearnings among fellow diasporic African students are often grounded in earlier encounters and errors, which become shared resources for anticipating and navigating linguistic expectations, while also challenging Anglicized assumptions that African students from English-speaking African countries may initially hold about U.S. academic and professional spaces.

Beyond linguistic struggles, participants also described hearing narratives that guided how to epistemically attune to standardized pedagogical practices. For instance, Jamila, a master's student in English from Nigeria, describes turning to classmates and independent research when confronted with unfamiliar cultural and academic references, explaining that "Sometimes I ask my classmates, and sometimes I read it up. Even in class, I'm on Google typing, 'What does this mean?'" In this case, "stories heard," as Angelyn Sommers suggests, are not limited to direct interpersonal encounters but also include accounts accessed through reading. These may come from people within one's immediate community or from broader networks of experience. In contexts where knowledge production is central, such text-mediated accounts offer access to wider, shared, and often intersecting struggles that extend beyond local interactions. Jamila's account therefore shows that "stories heard" emerge both through conversations and through reading, prompting participants to seek out explanations, interpret expectations, and align their responses with institutional norms. These practices show how EmSL requires continuous background labor to sustain participation while managing the risk of epistemic misalignment.

Stories Lived Through Institutional Boss Texts: Experiencing Constraint, Risk, and Accountability

In describing stories lived, Sommers echoes Clark and Rossiter (2008) by underscoring that positionalities, as structured by power, shape how students interpret and move through institutional contexts. She argues that students' views are "shaped by societal forces, structures of power, and cultural norms" (p. 9), which in turn position them within broader institutional arrangements. For AAGS, this positioning shapes not only how they participate but also how they continually negotiate expectations within institutional

life. The stories drawn from interviews and writing samples show instructional boss texts as symbolic structures that organize what counts as participation, while students' laminated histories shape how they engage, reinterpret, and strategically navigate these demands.

On positionality, participants' accounts consistently highlighted their laminated standpoints as the starting point for engaging academic writing and participation norms within PWIs in the U.S. Before encountering specific instructional boss texts, they situated their experiences within prior educational systems, pedagogical traditions, linguistic training, and cultural expectations shaped in their home countries. These standpoints operated as embodied resources that shaped how they interpreted classroom practices, writing expectations, and academic interactions in U.S. graduate programs.

While participants often described the quality of education in U.S. institutions in a positive light compared to their respective home countries, their responses revealed divided attitudes toward participatory classroom expectations. In comparing lecture-centered pedagogies in their home contexts with the participation-driven expectations they encountered in U.S. classrooms, some participants viewed active discussion and critique as intellectually engaging and beneficial, while others experienced discomfort with how these practices positioned them within predominantly white academic spaces.

For example, Abena, who completed her undergraduate education in Ghana and is currently enrolled in a master's program in the U.S., described how expectations for active participation heightened her sense of visibility in the classroom. Participation and critique required adjustment not only to academic norms but also to linguistic and racialized perceptions. She explained: At first I hesitated to contribute because I was still adjusting to the academic language and I was also worried about how my accent or ideas would be received by the whites.

Abena's account illustrates how classroom participation becomes an embodied negotiation shaped by accent, race, and perceived legitimacy, rather than simply a matter of willingness to speak. Similarly, Kayjay, a graduate student from Kenya, describes anxiety as emerging from the cognitive demands of translingual processing under time pressure. As an AAGS in a predominantly White classroom, participation becomes a form of laminated cognitive labor, requiring him to keep pace with class activities while simultaneously translating, monitoring, and evaluating speech before voicing it. As he explains, "Expressing yourself in class is usually difficult because you have to do a lot of translation and a lot of language switching, and the moment passes." He further notes that this anxiety is often compounded by misinterpretation from instructors: "Some professors see that you're not participating the way they expect, but it's something that you want to do. There's just a lot of things coming into consideration." To navigate this situation, some participants adopt strategic silence and restraint as embodied responses to performance anxiety shaped by linguistic and evaluative pressures.

Beyond classroom participation, Sarki, a PhD Music student from Kenya, notes that the pressure to approach academic work in ways that align with dominant conventions of academic writing requires ongoing stylistic restraint. Despite having a preferred way of writing, he describes having to narrow his expressive range in order to meet expectations of standard U.S. academic writing. This pressure does not stem from limited linguistic ability but from repeated feedback that positions complexity as excess and simplicity as legitimacy. Reflecting on these constraints, Sarki explains:

> "Sometimes I would write things, and the professors or the group would say, 'Hey, this is too difficult.' So sometimes, when I write my essays, I'm like, 'No, no – write simply.' I had to go to the writing services first to make sure I'm not using jargon and to make sure my writing aligns with standard U.S. academic style"

In this account, stylistic restraint emerges as an agentive EmSL response to performance anxiety, one shaped by institutional contexts in which restraint becomes a necessary strategy for maintaining legitimacy.

Further, participants described competence performance as a necessary response to racialized assumptions about intellectual ability, where credibility had to be earned through visible excellence and sustained overwork. Balogun, an Industrial and Systems Engineering PhD student from Nigeria, for instance, explained that classmates initially did not expect him "to be that outstanding," an assumption shaped by racialized media portrayals of Africa as sites of suffering and deficiency. He recalled entering classrooms where "nobody wants to sit with me," a pattern that persisted for months and discouraged him from asking questions because of how others looked at him. Recognition only shifted after repeated demonstrations of competence; through class contributions, group projects, and peer teaching. Acceptance, in this sense, followed proof, not presence.

Other participants described this pressure to prove competence as requiring sustained hard work and emotional restraint. KayJay framed this labor as "doing extra work… reading more… meeting up with the professors" in order to compensate for assumptions about misunderstanding or inadequacy. Kwesi, a PhD student in Rhetoric and Writing from Ghana, framed competence performance as a high-stakes requirement, explaining that failing to conform to U.S. academic expectations could put his assistantship and immigration status at risk.

All of these challenges, as AAGS navigate PWIs within and beyond their classrooms, point to how broader Global North-Global South relations and perceptions carry into their everyday academic lives, shaping how they perform, how they see themselves among peers, and the strategies they adopt to maintain academic and professional legitimacy. It becomes a lived reality that informs how they see themselves and navigate their roles as global citizens within constrained institutional environments.

Stories Told About Institutional Boss Texts: Cycles of What Is Heard and What Is Lived

In her article, Sommers argues that it is through stories lived that stories heard and stories told come into fuller view. While she presents these as "components" (p. 9), my analysis, drawing on the institutional navigation of AAGS, suggests that they are better understood as part of a continuous, recursive cycle rather than discrete elements. This cycle is not strictly linear. In many cases, stories are first encountered before they are lived. For example, newly admitted diasporic African students often hear accounts from peers and mentors during orientation about how to navigate academic and institutional expectations. These stories provide an initial frame of reference for anticipated experiences. However, while stories heard may precede stories lived, their meaning is not fully realized until they are embodied through lived experience. In other words, what is heard may prepare students for institutional encounters, but it is through lived experience that these narratives are validated. Also, as Jamila's account above shows, stories heard and stories lived may occur simultaneously. This process, in turn, shapes how students go on to tell their own stories.

Stories told can take different forms, such as complaints (Ahmed, 2021) or counterstories (Martínez, 2020). Another form of storytelling that also emerges is one that offers supportive accounts of institutional experience, shaped by the student's positionality and interaction. For example, Kayjay's account above, in which he describes the labor of translation and the ways rhetorical silence can be misread as incompetence, functions both as a complaint and a counterstory. It operates as a complaint by naming the pressures of participation in U.S. classrooms and the resulting hypervisibility, while also serving as a counterstory that challenges the assumption that silence signals incompetence, instead foregrounding the layered, embodied, and epistemic labor that shapes participation.

On the other hand, some participants offered alternative stories that frame institutional structures in more supportive terms. A clear example emerges in participants' responses to boss texts as institutional gatekeeping mechanisms. While many participants approached these texts from a position of constraint, a few described encounters with boss texts as necessary regulatory mechanisms grounded in safety and ethical responsibility. In these cases, institutional requirements functioned as coordinating texts that structured research practices across borders, particularly in STEM contexts where biosecurity concerns are paramount. Although these regulations shaped the scope and methodology of participants' research, they were often understood as protective rather than restrictive.

For example, Ahmed, a Medical Entomology PhD student from The Gambia, described the extensive approval process required to transport biological samples to the U.S., noting that "we needed a lot of approvals from the CDC and the USDA before we could send the samples here." Although the samples consisted of dead mosquitoes, strict protocols were still necessary to mitigate public health risks. While working with live specimens might have yielded more robust results, Ahmed emphasized the danger

involved: “If one infected mosquito escapes, it can cause a lot of outbreaks.” As a result, samples had to be immobilized, frozen, and transported under regulated conditions.

This account illustrates how safety-oriented boss texts shape research design and methodological choices, requiring researchers to balance epistemic goals with institutional and public health responsibilities. Although fewer transnational restrictions might have produced more robust outcomes, compliance was understood as part of responsible and ethical research practice.

From Classroom to Workplace: AAGS Writing as Storying in Technical and Professional Communication

Having examined these issues in relation to writing pedagogy, I now turn to their broader relevance for technical and professional communication, demonstrating how the rhetorical concerns discussed in educational settings also emerge in professional contexts, where institutional practices shape whose experiences are recognized, valued, and acted upon.

Drawing on participants’ writing samples, I examine how the rhetorical negotiations discussed above extend beyond the classroom into technical and professional communication. The samples include seminar essays written for coursework and published scholarly articles, allowing me to compare how participants negotiate different institutional contexts. Using CDA, I examine participants’ epistemological, interactional, and affective stances (Jaffe, 2009; Anderson, 2014). Epistemological stances communicate degrees of knowledge and authority, affective stances express evaluation and emotion, and interactional stances position writers in relation to their audiences. Together, these stances reveal how participants negotiate institutional expectations as they move from classroom writing to professional scholarly communication.

The comparison further suggests that institutional boss texts become more rhetorically consequential in published scholarship than in seminar writing. As writing moves beyond the classroom into professional publication, institutional expectations increasingly shape how writers establish credibility, position knowledge, and address disciplinary audiences. Seminar essays submitted by participants such as Abena, Jamila, and Kayjay exhibit an epistemological orientation that foregrounds home-based knowledge and lived experience. In these essays, participants exercise greater rhetorical flexibility to draw on local histories, cultural perspectives, and community-based ways of knowing from their respective home countries. By contrast, several published articles submitted by participants such as Balogun, Barasa, Kamau, and Okoye demonstrate how professional publication requires writers to negotiate additional institutional expectations. For example, participants such as Barasa and Kamau, whose research were not funded or led by U.S.-based research initiatives, retained greater flexibility to center locally grounded knowledge from Kenya. In contrast, the published work of Balogun and Okoye, conducted within U.S.-funded and internationally led research projects, foregrounds research priorities and knowledge claims aligned with those institutional contexts.

Beyond funding, the writing samples reveal that published academic writing is coordinated by multiple professional and institutional boss texts, including advisor research agendas, disciplinary expectations, journal requirements, collaborative research arrangements, research leadership, and data availability. For these graduate students, the implications extend beyond academic publishing. As they move into professional communication settings, they must continually negotiate organizational priorities alongside their embodied standpoints and transnational knowledge. This finding suggests that technical and professional communication is not simply a matter of developing disciplinary expertise; it also involves navigating the institutional structures that determine whose knowledge is recognized, whose experiences are treated as credible, and which perspectives shape organizational decision-making.

More importantly, these writing samples further support my earlier argument that EmSL extends narrative scholarship by shifting attention from stories about literacy to the process of storying literacy. They show literacy in action. Rather than simply reflecting on past literacy experiences, participants use writing to negotiate institutional expectations, position their knowledge, and engage different audiences. The seminar essays and published articles demonstrate that literacy is not just something students describe but something they actively perform. Through this process, EmSL reveals literacy as an embodied and ongoing negotiation shaped by institutional contexts.

Conclusion

This revisitation of Sommers' (2022) narrative framework, through the lens of EmSL and the lived experiences of AAGS, repositions storying as a deeply situated and negotiated practice rather than a primarily pedagogical tool. While Sommers' articulation of stories heard, told, and lived offers a valuable foundation for understanding how narrative functions in TPC, this study demonstrates that these narrative dimensions are not discrete components but part of a recursive and relational process shaped by institutional conditions, transnational histories, and embodied positionalities.

By centering AAGS, this study shows that narrative is a site where power, legitimacy, and belonging are continuously negotiated. Stories heard extend beyond formal texts to include peer and text-mediated encounters that shape expectations. Stories lived reveal how these expectations are experienced through linguistic, racial, and epistemic negotiations, often requiring strategies such as silence, restraint, and competence performance. Stories told function as both critique and resource, emerging as complaints, counterstories, and supportive accounts that challenge dominant assumptions while offering ways to navigate institutional life. Through this lens, instructional boss texts function as coordinating mechanisms that shape participation and meaning-making. At the same time, participants' responses reveal both constraint and alignment, as well as how they are positioned in relation to institutional power.

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