

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: David Low

Department: Literacy, Early, Bilingual, & Special Education

College: Kremen School of Education & Human Development

Leave taken:  Sabbatical  Difference in Pay  Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period:  Fall

Spring 2023

Academic Year

Other

Your report will be sent to your Dean for your PAF and to the Library Archives.



California  
State  
University,  
Fresno

DATE: August 18, 2023  
TO: Randy Yerrick, Dean, Kremen School of Education & Human Development  
Xuanning Fu, Provost, Fresno State University  
Jim Schmidtke, Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs  
FROM: David Low, Department of Literacy, Early, Bilingual & Special Education  
RE: Post-Sabbatical Report

### ***Section 1. Reporting on the Success of the Leave***

#### **(a) Analysis of the accomplishments of the leave in relation to the objectives and goals of the original proposal**

In my original proposal, I wrote that “During the sabbatical semester (Spring 2023), I will spend time engaging in collaborative data analysis with my teacher participants. I will apply multiple rounds of inductive coding across the dataset to generate themes, surface connections, and identify counter-patterns. The majority of my sabbatical time will be used to write up the results in monograph form and moving through the book publication process.”

During Spring 2023, I achieved each of the goals I set out to accomplish. I continued meeting regularly with teacher participants, analyzed my dataset, submitted conference proposals, and wrote an entire seven-chapter monograph of 65,000 words. My book (under contract with Routledge) is currently moving through the editing/production process. Its working title is *Transgressive Humor as Meaning-Making Practice: Punching Up, Punching Down, and Critical Literacy in the Classroom*.

#### **(b) Description of the modifications, if any, of the original proposal and the circumstances with which necessitated these modifications**

No modifications were deemed necessary and none were taken. I was able to follow the plan I laid out for myself in my proposal.

#### **(c) Goals of the original proposal that were not accomplished**

None of my goals went unaccomplished. I analyzed data and wrote up my findings in the form of a scholarly monograph to be published by Routledge.

### ***Section 2. Benefits to you as a faculty member***

#### **(a) Explain how the leave has led to a greater command of subject matter.**

Conducting research and writing a book during my sabbatical period allowed me to advance my expertise in critical pedagogy and critical literacy. I developed a deeper understanding of critical theories, which will impact how I approach subjects including service-learning, YPAR, and PBI.

#### **(b) Explain how this leave may have accomplished a shift in areas of academic emphasis of the**

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**faculty member.**

My areas of academic emphasis have not shifted, so much as intensified and deepened.

**Explain how the leave might lead to improved organization of curricula.**

I will apply what I have learned to my teaching of Single Subject credential students. My pedagogy will focus on cutting edge work in critical pedagogy.

**(d) Explain how the leave has led to a command of advanced methods of teaching.**

Insights and knowledge generated by my research study assist in helping students (in the Reading/Language Arts Master's Program and Single Subject Credential Program) to better understand critical teaching practices and student behaviors often labeled as problematic.

**(e) Explain how the leave might lead to creative activities in one's field or in a closely related field.**

After my book is published, I may be invited to give lectures on it at conferences and within various communities of practice.

***Section 3. Benefit to the university***

**Briefly describe how the leave will be of benefit to the department, college/school and university.**

As an educator who trains future teachers and school leaders in the Central Valley, advancing my own knowledge of critical pedagogy will have a ripple effect. The work I pursued during my sabbatical has provided me with a wealth of transmissible knowledge about the latest turns in critical pedagogy. This knowledge, which interrogates status quo, is invaluable to KSOEHD students as they graduate from our programs and go forth into the community to teach their own students.

Publications generated from my sabbatical research will bear our university's name. Insofar as Fresno State and KSOEHD are committed to increasing our visibility in the area of research (following our move to R2 status), my work contributes to that overarching goal. Routledge is a highly prestigious global academic publisher in the humanities and social sciences.

In addition to the book, I have had one presentation accepted (for NCTE 2023) that features my sabbatical research, and two presentations currently under review (for AERA 2024).

***Section 4. Original Proposal***

See attached

***Section 5. Seminar***

The chair of the Department of Literacy, Early, Bilingual, and Special Education is in the process of scheduling an event where I (along with two colleagues) will give a presentation on our accomplishments during sabbatical. The date and time have yet to be determined.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. David E. Low

## SABBATICAL PROPOSAL

**Name** David E. Low, Ph.D.

**Department** Literacy, Early, Bilingual, and Special Education (LEBSE)

**School** Kremen School of Education and Human Development (KSOEHD)

**Sabbatical Term** Spring 2023 (proposed)

**Date Submitted** September 8, 2021

My time at Fresno State has been characterized by sustained excellence in the areas of teaching, research, and service. I was appointed as faculty at Fresno State in August 2015 and awarded Early Tenure and Promotion to Associate Professor in Fall 2020. During my time at Fresno State (2015-21), I have received exemplary teaching evaluations from students and peers. I have published 18 scholarly works (13 articles and 5 book chapters) and presented my work frequently at the national, state, and local level. I have chaired a number of dissertations and graduate projects, and contributed leadership and service as a member of 24 committees at the university, school, and department levels (chairing the University Personnel Committee, the KSOEHD Research Committee and the Dandoy Committee, serving as President of the KSOEHD Faculty Assembly, and sitting on four search committees). Outside of the university, I have taken on a number of leadership roles, including journal editor, special interest group chair, and editorial review board member, in addition to peer reviewing dozens of journal and conference submissions. In summary, I am a highly active and engaged member of numerous professional communities, within which I fulfill a number of roles and responsibilities. In order to continue my trajectory of conducting top-tier literacy research and applying cutting-edge critical pedagogies with students at Fresno State – as a way of fulfilling requirements for promotion to the rank of Full Professor – I submit this proposal to spend Spring 2023 on sabbatical, exclusively focused on conducting research and writing a scholarly monograph.

### Section 1: The Proposal

My research agenda for the next several years (2021-24) is to investigate and write about critical literacy practices in high school classrooms. I was awarded an RSCA/Dandoy single-course buyout for Spring 2022 to pursue this inquiry. Being granted a sabbatical the following year will provide time to collect supplementary data, analyze the entire dataset, and most importantly, write up my findings in the form of a scholarly monograph. (A book proposal with Routledge is underway.) In the next section, I will provide a summary of the work on which I will be embarking.

### Background and Purpose of the Research to be Conducted During Sabbatical

There is a disconnect between school-based critical literacy pedagogies and students' deployments of transgressive humor, although both are used to interrogate power. In her seminal work *Literacy and Power*, Janks (2010) examines various ways in which meaning-making is informed by power and authority, as well as how critical literacy can be used to dismantle status quo. Toward the end of the book, Janks poses a series of questions: "In what ways might humor and play be productive literacies in classrooms? How can we keep the space for powerful, critical, satisfying and socially responsible literate practices and at the same time have fun? Is it possible, allowable?" (p. 220). These questions form the basis of my inquiry and book proposal.

In high schools that have followed the move into critical literacy, class discussions and projects are often powerful and timely, but they tend not to be playful or humorous. There is good reason for that— injustice isn't funny. Critical literacy projects (including Service-Learning, Project-Based Inquiry, and

YPAR) typically possess the gravity one would expect when the topic is food insecurity, racist policing practices, or the humanitarian crisis at our border. For many adolescents, however, transgressive humor is the mechanism through which to make sense of and respond to weighty issues. Irreverent reframing can make social issues visible, and for some youths, is the preferred tool with which to name inequity and advocate for change.

There are times when student-initiated humor causes the direction of a teacher's lesson, and by extension, a teacher's authority, to be challenged. This inquiry is meant to examine the repercussions of framing humor as a defiant or disobedient behavior (e.g., Radigan, 2002), rather than as a form of social critique. How do teachers and students understand humor and curricular noncompliance in schooling environments where students are expected to be subservient to the norms of traditional classroom behavior? How might such environments actually preclude critical literacy practices from taking root? And how do teachers' and students' identities as raced, gendered, and aged beings shape their understandings of these phenomena? While critical literacy and humor are both used to interrogate power, they are not necessarily compatible within a teacher-driven curricular context.

Using ethnographic methods in a phenomenological paradigm, I will spend the year prior to my proposed sabbatical semester (2021-22) engaged in classroom research, examining how adolescent students and their teachers negotiate power dynamics around using humor for social critique. Classrooms that provide space for critical literacy within the curriculum (including Service-Learning, PBI, and YPAR projects) will be the primary setting of the study. The study will be rooted in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007) and designed to prioritize the perspectives and experiences of both adolescent students and their educators. I plan to utilize data collection methods drawn from classroom ethnography (i.e., observational fieldnotes, artifacts, and in-depth interviews) as well as interpretive phenomenology. Through the use of ethnographic tools, my aim is to produce a thick description of the interactional practices of youth and educators around transgressive humor, constructing a dataset from the position of a participant-observer (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Phenomenological scholarship will inform my approach to choosing participants, designing interview protocols, generating data, and interpreting the words, artifacts, and deeds of others (e.g., Low & Pandya, 2019). Preliminary arrangements and contacts have already been made with teachers in a local school district. The study has been submitted for approval with both my department CPHS committee and with the district's IRB.

During the sabbatical semester (Spring 2023), I will spend additional time engaging in collaborative data analysis with my teacher participants. I will apply multiple rounds of inductive coding across the dataset to generate themes, surface connections, and identify counter-patterns (Charmaz, 2005; Saldaña, 2013). The majority of my sabbatical time will be used to write up the results in monograph form and moving through the book publication process. My anticipated schedule of research activities is represented in the Table below. The proposed activities cannot be accomplished in less than the leave time, but they can be completed sufficiently in the time period requested.

Task	Fall 2021	Spring 2022 (Dandoy course release)	Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023 (Proposed Sabbatical)
Secure prospective teacher participants	X				
IRB Approval	X				
Review of Literature	X	X			X
Initial Data Collection (classroom research)		X			
Submit Book Proposal		X			
Initial Data Analysis/ Coding		X	X	X	
Supplementary Data Collection				X	X
Secondary Data Analysis and Member Checks					X
Write book and submit to publisher					X
Write and submit articles and conference proposals					X

resources, beyond school-allotted research funds, that are needed to support this line of research.

## Section 2. Benefits to the faculty member

The proposed sabbatical leave will benefit me professionally in immense and innumerable ways. The leave time will enable me to further develop my scholarly agenda, advance my expertise in critical pedagogy (an area which directly impacts my teaching of future teachers at Fresno State), and elevate my participation in the field of literacy education. The research described in this proposal is the earliest phase of an inchoate book project that examines linkages among transgressive humor and critical literacy. My plan is for the book to be under contract prior to the beginning of the proposed sabbatical.

I include in the list below several specific ways that a sabbatical will benefit me vis-à-vis this work:

- During my sabbatical, I will be able to focus on my specific research agenda without teaching and service responsibilities.
- As a faculty member who deeply values research, it is imperative that I stay at the forefront of the field. The experiences I have outlined above will deepen my expertise regarding critical pedagogies and literacies.
- Being released from teaching and service will allow me to strengthen relationships with local school districts and practicing teachers with Fresno public high schools.

- Insights and knowledge gained from my research will assist in helping students (in the Reading Master's Program and Single Subject Credential Program) to better understand critical teaching practices and student behaviors.
- Lastly, following the sabbatical, I will be better equipped to design and execute future research and grant proposals. I would also be able to leverage this enhanced knowledge base across other professional assignments.

Beyond the benefits to me as an individual, this line of inquiry will positively affect my field of literacy education. In developing a multifaceted understanding of transgressive humor and critical pedagogy, the field (including researchers and practitioners) may develop more nuanced practices around Service-Learning, YPAR, PBI, and classroom discussions of current events and historical inequities. Issues of power and identity, which often stymy participatory research that involves differently situated actors, will be made central to every aspect of the study, and modeled for other literacy scholar-educators. Understanding the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers is deeply significant to co-constructing visions of critical pedagogy and its possibilities for precipitating change within and beyond classroom walls. This is a topic about which I am passionate.

### **Section 3. Benefits to the university**

The proposed leave will benefit the university in various ways and at multiple levels. Foremost, as an educator who trains future teachers and school leaders in the Central Valley, advancing my own knowledge critical pedagogy will have a ripple effect. The students I currently work with (Liberal Studies majors, Single Subject credential students, Reading/ Literacy Masters students, and Ed.D. dissertation writers) are all already exposed to critical theories in my courses. But critical theory is not an entity frozen in time; it is multiply faceted and constantly evolving. The work I am proposing to pursue during my sabbatical will provide me with a wealth of transmissible knowledge about the latest turns in critical pedagogy, and about rethinking students' transgressive classroom humor. This knowledge will be invaluable to our students as they graduate from our programs and go forth to teach their own students. Rethinking how they assign labels like class clown, insubordinate, disruptive, oppositional, and defiant (and considering the ways these labels intersect with other identity markers, such as race, gender, and class) is very much a social justice issue.

Beyond the tangible and sustained need for secondary educators to reflect on their teaching practices, the work I do while on sabbatical will produce other, less immediate but still vital, benefits to the university. Most visibly, conference proposals and publications generated from this research will make contributions to the field of education and will bear our university's imprimatur. Insofar as Fresno State and KSOEHD are committed to increasing our visibility in the area of research, my work contributes to that overarching goal. Further, KSOEHD's local school district partners and the broader education community will be aware of the emphasis Fresno State faculty is placing on conducting and promoting classroom-based research with/in our partner schools. This serves as a form of university-district bridgebuilding and strengthens those partnerships. The findings generated from the proposed research will be shared with schools, and my teacher participants – all of whom will be alumni of Fresno State's teacher credentialing programs – will be invited to co-author and co-present with me in various milieus.

In summary, I plan to continue my career with Fresno State, which includes being promoted to Full Professor. It is thus necessary that I continue to advance my knowledge, demonstrating sustained progress in my area of research. Based on prior experiences of colleagues who have been awarded sabbaticals, many have highlighted the professional benefits related to engaging in scholarly work

without distraction. My increased scholarly output and innovative teaching will reflect positively on the LEBSE Department, KSOEHD, and Fresno State as a whole.

#### **Section 4. Previous Leaves**

No previous sabbatical leaves have been requested or awarded. I was granted partial parental leave (6-WTU course load reduction) during the Fall 2017 and Spring 2021 semesters.

#### **References**

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