

Pedagogue Bonus: DBLAC (w/Khirsten L. Scott)

Pedagogue podcast

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue Bonus, a short episode that covers a single topic or question. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this bonus episode, I talk with Khirsten L. Scott about Digital Black Lit and Composition (DBLAC), an online and in-person network of Black-identified graduate students and advanced undergraduate students in fields related to the study of language.

Before we get started, we have some big news. Pedagogue and DBLAC are actually collaborating on a project, a forthcoming podcast miniseries that amplifies the lived experiences of Black-identified graduate students. Our goal here is to produce 10 episodes, around 15 minutes each, that feature perspectives on life in academia as graduate students and teachers. And we're hoping that each episode is going to feature new insights and pedagogical innovations that will encourage the field to reconceptualize programs and classroom practices. Stay tuned for more information about this miniseries.

Khirsten L. Scott is co-founder of DBLAC, Digital Black Lit and Composition, a virtual and in-person community offering writing support for Black scholars. She teaches at the University of Pittsburgh, where she was awarded the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences award for excellence in graduate mentoring.

Khirsten, thanks so much for joining us.

SW: Can you talk about the mission of DBLAC? Can you talk about the type of collaborations that exist through this virtual and in-person community? And can you talk a little bit about its origins, or its foundations, and what you see DBLAC contributing to rhetoric and composition?

KLS: DBLAC, very succinctly, it's really a learning community for academic professionals, networking, and resource-pooling. We really think about the ways that we can support emerging scholars connected to fields around language and composition, and I think this is where Lou Maraj and I came together around the idea of starting something like DBLAC. This journey began while we were in graduate school. We were at DMAC, the Digital Media and Composition Institute at Ohio State. We were just working together through the projects. We were brought together there for very particular reasons from our home institutions, and we found that, in the sharing of some of our shared pain and traumas from graduate school, that we wanted to create the space that we imagined would have helped us, and so we did, just very plainly.

I think as the time has passed, and we're now nearing five years from that time of just first imagining DBLAC, I stand behind the thing that brings academic folks together no matter what discipline, and I would even say communities, because DBLAC is not limited to academic spaces, communities, people, is writing. That we're writing or telling or sharing stories and

experiences, and specifically in the academic context, we're often writing our way all around the things that we're navigating. So we're writing our way into graduate school, through graduate school, out of graduate school, into a career, through a career, out of a career.

These transient moments of transition, of mobility, of progression, really center, for us, this idea of composing and language. So at the core of DBLAC's mission is this idea of supporting writing, and supporting the work that comes out of that. I think we mean writing very fluidly. So writing for you could be a podcast, writing for you could be coding, it could be actually writing essays, or poetry, writing films, organizing even, writing futures, and writing spaces. That really has moved and sustained the work that DBLAC has done, and is evidenced through our signature programs.

We have a virtual writing group, we have writing retreats, and then we have our reading series. One thing that we focus on very clearly is this distinction between open and closed spaces, and really emphasizing the importance of Black graduate students and Black scholars having reserved spaces, not as an exclusionary moment, but rather one that celebrates and acknowledges the need for shared, safely co-constructed spaces. One frequent question that comes up about DBLAC is, "Is it okay for me to come to this?" I know that Black is in the title, and this is something that we've seen historically happen to Black spaces, whether that be the NAACP, whether that be even organizations like Black Lives Matter: Who can align? Who's invited to support? So we really outlined in our family line of scholars the ways that folks can contribute, and so that can look like supporting faculty, and supporting faculty have no racial requirement or expectation, that could be supporting graduate students. Again, no expectations there. But then also understanding the importance of Black graduate students having a space that's not connected to their institutional homes, it's not connected to societies like MLA, or ACLS, to say that now I must be doing this disciplinary thing, but instead to say, here's the community for you, that we're going to rally in support around you. We are going to respond to the things that you identify as needing.

I share that distinction between "open" and "closed" because within those signature programs, our retreat, for instance, is closed to Black scholars. This is important because there aren't many places that exist free of charge for graduate students to move, regardless of their institutional affiliation. But then we have spaces like our virtual writing group that are open, where we believe that we can model through our Black feminist practice of community gathering within the legacy of Black writing groups that we've seen in geographic spaces like Chicago and Harlem across time, that we can model a future of understanding, what we gain from being in community with one another.

And then our reading series is another open space where we're thinking through what it means for folks to engage Black scholarship. How much more benefit your work, and your life, and your imagination will have if you took the time to sit with Black scholarship. And so altogether these things really produce this communal understanding of what it means to support intellectual community and it's not limited to only the writing and the production, that you need spaces to

laugh, and to eat, and to mourn, and to grieve. But you also need spaces to just write and be held accountable, that you also need spaces to explore intellectual possibility, and perhaps be introduced to ideas that you would not know otherwise.

I encourage anyone who's listening, or is interested in learning more about DBLAC to visit our website, it's www.dblac.org, and fill out the contact form. There are so many ways to stay connected with us, there's an email list that allows you to see some opportunities that you can share with other folks, be that students, scholars, community, educators or organizers. Be sure to connect with us on social media, on Twitter we can be found using the handle [@DBLACorg](https://twitter.com/DBLACorg), on Facebook we're searchable using [DBLACorg](https://www.facebook.com/DBLACorg), and on Instagram we're searchable using the handle [DBLAC_org](https://www.instagram.com/DBLAC_org). Ultimately our goal is to have a thriving sustained community centered around Black intellectual thought and possibility.