

The Anti-Racist Writing Classroom

Teaching Translingual:

Lesson plans and suggested writing assignments for exploring code meshing and linguistic difference

PART I: What is translingual instruction?

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What is translingual instruction?

Translingualism is a writing instruction framework that has been gaining scholarly traction for the past decade, though (as we will see!) its origins predate our current composition moment. Essentially, translingualism questions the idea that only one type of English is acceptable in academic writing. A translingual teacher affirms linguistic diversity and understands student multilingualism as a resource enabling creative, multi-faceted communication.

What's so different about translingual instruction?

Traditional instruction:

- Linguistic diversity is a barrier to “correct” writing
- Encourage students to practice code switching
- Reinforce hierarchy of Englishes with SAE at pinnacle
- Risk re-enacting cultural (linguistic) dominance

Translingual instruction:

- Linguistic diversity is a resource, a reservoir of creativity and new thinking
- Encourage students to practice code meshing
- Acknowledge validity of multiple modes of self-expression
- Empower students to use their own linguistic identity to drive decision-making about genre, audience, and modality.

Students' Right to Their Own Language

Though the bulk of translingual scholarship has been produced in the past 25 years, the core concept of valuing linguistic diversity is certainly not new! The following statement was ratified in 1974 at the **Conference for College Composition and Communication**:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

This statement also appeared in a Special Issue of CCCC, Fall, 1974, Vol. XXV.

Questions for reflection:

A translingual framework invites instructors to evaluate seriously and compassionately the way different Englishes are valued in their courses. The following questions may help instructors to engage with some of translingualism's core concerns:

- If there are students in your class who do not write in SAE, are they penalized? If so, what structures of dominance does that penalization reproduce?
- If you require all of your students to express themselves in a standardized way, what parts of their identities are you asking them to ignore or foreclose?
- Is meaning culturally inscribed? Is it linguistically produced?
- In your life, how have you changed your writing in order to conform to SAE? What did you lose?

Do you have more questions about translingual instruction? Stay tuned!

Starting next week, we will explore different lesson plans and assignments that utilize translingual principles of .