

# Linguistic Diversity as Resource—A Multi-Level Approach to Building Awareness in First-Year Writing Programs (and Beyond)

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## Abstract

Drawing on research in systems theory and their own programmatic efforts to recognize, value, and integrate language differences in first-year composition, the authors argue for a multi-level approach for sustainable and systemic change to occur. Multi-level work functions to identify points of leverage for enacting language rights in institutional settings.

**Keywords:** language/linguistic diversity, language awareness, teacher training, first-year writing, language policy, writing program administration.

The field of rhetoric and composition has been on the forefront in its theorizing about cultural and linguistic change in American universities for over half a century. As composition teachers, we have seen waves of new students—rural and working-class students, students of color, multilingual students—all students who, according to Geneva Smitherman (1999: 354), “[speak] a language which not only reflect[s] a different class but also a different race, culture, and historical experience.” As advocates for students and student agency, according to Andrea A. Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane (2004: 2), composition scholars “developed robust theories of writing that went beyond traditional formalism, created curricula based on Freirean principles, and built programs devoted to student writers and their goals.” Moreover, Smitherman, a veteran in the fight for language rights and social inequities, describes the Conference on College Composition and Communication as “the site of dialogues about language controversies” since its beginning in 1952 (1999: 349). In trying to put theories about linguistic diversity and writing into action, CCCC adopted two progressive, some would even say radical, documents: the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” in 1974 and the multilingual CCCC “Guideline on the National Language Policy” in 1988. These guiding historical works continue to attract the

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research interests of composition scholars in the field, as the recently published *Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook* attests (Perryman-Clark et al. 2015).

Despite our discipline's long history in theorizing composition for diverse learners and our professional statements, composition leaders have not succeeded in bringing these theories and guiding practices to bear, in any systematic way, on the teaching of writing at the program level. Notwithstanding the growth in tenure-line faculty in composition/rhetoric in the past forty years, the majority of composition classes are taught by adjunct faculty, full-time non-tenure-track faculty, teaching assistants, and tenure-line faculty whose graduate training was not exclusively in composition/rhetoric. Many of these composition teachers may not have the background or experience to act fully on the language theories and policies that have been enacted by professional organizations. While the pedagogical path forward may seem daunting given the heated debates in the language wars (see, e.g., Macneil and Cran 2005), a multi-level approach to systematic change in the way our institutions view language is a path forward that is practical and doable. With our discipline's theories firmly in place, it is time to move forward in building a sustainable pedagogy for linguistically diverse students.

In the present article, we begin by describing our theoretical context and the demographics that will only become more pronounced in the years ahead. We assert the need for localized language policies and practices within writing programs, ones that put into effect the language policies adopted by national professional organizations (e.g., "CCCC Statement on Ebonics," "Students' Right to Their Own Language," "CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy"). To work systematically and strategically in building awareness of language differences in writing programs, we argue for a multi-level approach to understanding linguistic

difference as a resource—an approach that entails not only classroom-tested ideas but also a sustained focus on the professional development of composition teachers, the exchange of innovative teaching practices, new course development in undergraduate and graduate writing programs, discussion of local language policies, and university-wide events that feature an evolving understanding of language change. For change to take root in first-year composition programs and be accepted by stakeholders beyond the programs (via the rhetorical and strategic methods discussed in Porter et al. 2000 and Melzer 2013), this kind of multi-level approach is needed to nurture and sustain growth in our thinking and learning about language difference.

We teach in a large-scale writing program at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), and we've taken deliberate steps in our teaching and collaboration to focus on language difference as a resource in students' writing. In our strategic planning for how we might influence and engage teachers, we have purposefully avoided top-down, prescriptive approaches in favor of collaboration and dialogue as we strive to develop a more informed, sustainable language pedagogy. Our argument to our faculty is that increasing students' knowledge of language differences will produce more informed students and better writers as a result. As we have argued elsewhere, writing instructors must first examine their own language experiences, whether of privilege or prejudice (Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 2009). These reflective practices often lead to new classroom activities to engage student learners, increase their understanding of linguistic difference, and enable them to acquire written language abilities.

Putting language theory into widespread practice also requires a better understanding of how large-scale change occurs in writing programs. Doing our disciplinary work as administrators, researchers, and teachers by laying the groundwork in praxis will better prepare us to take our disciplinary concerns to our stakeholders, where we can engage in reshaping or

challenging ideologies “that become normalized and go unchallenged as the system grows more and more rigid” (Melzer 2013: 92). By drawing on critical systems theory, including James E. Porter et al.’s “Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change” (2000), as well as on Linda Adler-Kassner’s *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories About Writing and Writers* (2008), we believe that “disciplinary critique,” to use Porter et al.’s words, “[is] important to institutional change, perhaps even necessary for it” (620). For Porter et al., “The classroom is certainly one significant site of change,” but to achieve “far-reaching social and institutional change,” we need to work toward “theorizing the institution” (632). Critical systems theory encourages administrators to see the big picture as a means of enacting change, but such work, in our view, is predicated on the kinds of change that disciplinary leaders have nurtured, tested, and internalized as best practice. Knowing *what* we want to change in our writing programs and enacting multi-level innovations can help WPAs and faculty identify the gaps that systems theory highlights as ways to secure the support and vertical expansion of our practices within the institution.

### **Theoretical Context for Multi-Level Work**

To frame our discussion of multi-level work, we draw on research in the field that focuses on the process of enacting change within programs and institutions. In his contribution to the Symposium on Diversity in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, Paul Kei Matsuda (2009) shares an experience at a board meeting of the journal when he and others were asked to choose from a list of topic categories for review assignments. He states that “the categories did not include anything specifically related to issues of linguistic diversity. . . ,” yet he says, “issues surrounding linguistic diversity in the writing program permeates all of these categories” (169). As a board member of *WPA*, he suggests that the journal “shape the discourse by changing the

rhetorical context,” and he cites two examples: his guest-edited volume on second language acquisition, and the Symposium on Diversity (171). Our multi-level approach is an attempt to do just that: to change the rhetorical context by highlighting language and difference at various levels in our work as teachers and administrators. Asao B. Inoue (2010: 138) argues that “we need to talk about changing writing programs and their relations to the Englishes already being used successfully in the world by many people.” He continues: “Perhaps it is our writing programs and their discourses that need to be prepared for the future” (138). As we argue in this paper, for WPAs to transform pedagogy and institutional perceptions of cultural and linguistic literacies, we need to start by building awareness within the writing program and our department through the multi-level work that we propose.

Analyzing the path to systemic change in institutions, Porter et al. (2000: 614) distinguish institutional critique from “other forms of institutional action that are currently practiced (administrative, classroom, disciplinary critique)” with the aim of creating “a space for enacting more substantive and far-reaching institutional change.” In their discussion of classroom critique, they write: “The power of classroom and curricular agency . . . is an unspoken assumption in much of our field’s scholarship aimed at transforming (or reinventing) the university” (616). This classroom work “locates agency within the classroom and enables teachers and students to envision local changes and micro-political action...” (616). While the authors argue that classroom critique is limited by its disconnect with institutional structures, they point out that such work is an important part of institutional change (620), and we concur. The multi-level approach we propose for enacting changes in the way we talk about language and difference in our writing program is an integral part of further efforts to influence institutional structures and ideologies.

Building on the work of Porter et al. and other researchers in systems theory, Melzer uses Critical Systems Theory (CST) as a methodology to reform the campus writing program and its deficit theory of literacy at his university. He aims to change “the entire bureaucratic system [and] the model of literacy that both shaped the system and that the system reinforced” (2013: 76). CST rewrites traditional systems theory by including the “historical/social conditions that have given rise to the system” and by articulating the “ideologies of the stakeholders” (80). Although Melzer demonstrates how CST can be an effective methodology for change in the campus writing program, we find his first recommendation to WPAs fraught with unexamined assumptions regarding particular institutions and programs; he writes: “*Work for change at the systems level rather than tinkering with an isolated course, program, or department by finding points of leverage within the system*” (90) [italics used in original]. Of course, this makes good sense if the entity you wish to change already operates at a high level within the system. In our view, capitalizing on the role of classroom and curricular critique is paramount. With respect to enacting change in the way a writing program views language, we need the multi-level work in classrooms, curriculum and dialogue in order to identify “the gaps and fissures, places where resistance and change are possible” (Porter et al. 2008: 631) and to engage our theories and practices at the systems level. A multi-level approach can expose fissures where change can occur and where the work of systems change can begin, as we illustrate later in our discussion. Our work on integrating language differences into the program is an effective means of identifying structures and ideologies needing attention. By focusing on language, we are mapping “the conflicted frameworks in heterogeneous and contested spaces, articulating the hidden and seemingly silent voices of those marginalized by the powerful, and observing how power operates within institutional space—in order to expose and interrogate possibilities for

institutional change through the practice of rhetoric” (Porter et al. 2008: 631). This mapping is a by-product of multi-level work grounded in disciplinary and curricular reform.

Addressing language issues and best practices through multi-level work provides a means of sustaining what we value in education. We have no systematic model to sustain new developments in our learning about language literacies. As Smitherman points out, we take in this new information about linguistic differences, but it doesn’t compel us to change our behaviors:

People listen to the information about the competence of language, they take it in and then—like cognitive dissonance—they exhibit language behaviors that are totally contrary to the information. There has to be something going on in the deep recesses of the minds of individuals such that the information that they have gained has no access to, or effect on, their behaviors. People have been given the information—the facts—but they still behave in the same old ways. (qtd. in Ball and Lardner 2005: 147)

Catalyzing change about something as fundamental as language requires bold, effective leadership. We can take some instruction from Adler-Kassner on this viewpoint. She writes about leaders who are guided by their personal principles—what angers them, what they’re emotionally attached to, what they’re passionate about—because these are the prerequisites of change (2008: 22). If WPAs believe that language difference matters, their training as program leaders and their ability to collaborate and build a support base can lead teachers to think in new ways about their teaching. We can see *how* in the example of Susanmarie Harrington, Director of Writing in the Disciplines at the University of Vermont, and her colleague Susan Dinitz in the Writing Center, who co-presented at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication on key approaches used by tutors in the Writing Center for responding to

writing by linguistically diverse students. Their presentation identified new principles and practices that reflect recent scholarship in language and identity. This models the kind of collaborations that WPAs can be nurturing with their teachers. “Program policies and learning objectives,” as Malea Powell reminds us, “must reflect an activist agenda to see diversity as more than a ‘topic,’ but a part of every scholarly audience, community, and university” (qtd. in Craig and Perryman-Clark 2011: 53).

This activist agenda led Adler-Kassner to consult with community organizations and media leaders to better understand their methods of organizing for systemic change, methods that often involve activity on multiple fronts. She asserts that effecting change “starts at the local level with a commitment to working from principles..., developing a broad base of support, cultivating leadership, and developing and acting on collaboratively developed messages” (184). WPAs are trained to work at multiple levels, and they oversee and negotiate in multiple areas of their programs. As we argue in this paper, for WPAs to effect change in institutional perceptions of cultural and linguistic literacies, building awareness within the writing program and the department through multi-level work is not only necessary but long overdue.

### **Changing Demographics**

A focus on language and learning is particularly important because of recent events and trends in our society. One of the most momentous was the election of President Barack Obama. His election in 2008 was a watershed, most observers agree. Not only had the country elected its first black president, but it had elected a multi-ethnic president, reflecting a trend occurring in American life: more and more Americans do not look like the stereotyped image of the traditional American. A recent U. S. Census Bureau report illustrates. In their March 2015 report, “Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060,” Sandra



L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman (2015: 9) indicate that in 2014, the U. S. population had reached almost 319 million people (9). Within this total, 62.2 % were non-Hispanic white, 13.2% were African-American, 5.4% were Asians, 1.2% were American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% were Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2.5% were people of two races. Also within this total, 17.4% of the population identified itself as Hispanic. By 2060, the authors predict that the non-Hispanic white population will be 43.6% of the total population, the total African-American population will be 14.3%, the total Asian population will be 9.3%, the total American Indian or Alaska Native will be 1.3%, the total Hawaiian or Pacific Islander will be 0.3%, the total of those with two or more races will be 6.2%, and within that total population, those claiming to be Hispanic will reach 28.6%. As one can see, between now and then, the U. S. population is predicted to diversify significantly, with non-Hispanic whites no longer being more than a 50% share of the population by 2044 (13). In fact, among the young, this “majority-minority crossover” is projected to occur by 2020 (13), and it has already occurred in some areas of the United States. As Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops (2002: 71) reveal in an earlier yet related U. S. Census Bureau report, in the year 2000 “three states—California, Hawaii, and New Mexico—and the District of Columbia had more than 50 percent Minority populations (including Hispanics)” (71). The watershed election of a multi-ethnic President was perhaps a forerunner of a more dramatic watershed: a demographic shift comparable to the major immigration of non-western-European peoples in the late 19th and early 20th century.

As in prior eras, this diversification of race and ethnicity is also bringing with it language diversity. The most comprehensive data from the United States Census Bureau for 2009-2013 show at least 350 languages in the United States spoken in the home by 60.4 million residents over age five, or roughly one in five. Educators are already becoming aware of the need to adapt

to this changing reality (Banks 2015), but this need to adapt occurs within an historical context in the United States of unease with how to approach differences in language background. The fate of Arizona's Mexican American Studies Program is one telling example. As John Trimbur points out in "Linguistic Memory and the Uneasy Settlement of U. S. English" (2010: 22-26), the founding of the United States occurred within the context of language differences among not only the inhabitants of the original colonies, but the inhabitants of those lands that were later acquired, including those of French and German background and the many who spoke Native American languages in lands that were acquired and taken over. In the U.S., Trimbur continues, "English Only" as a policy and political impetus developed as an expedient solution to establishing economic viability for the colonists in the face of competition from other quarters (34). Yet U. S. history shows that language variety is a common feature of life, one that is at points accepted but more often is resisted in an attempt to rein in differences among people in the society. Peter Elbow (2012: 3171) refers to this historical phenomenon as a "tug of war between divergence and convergence . . . ." Horner et al. (2011), recognizing that traditional approaches are no longer adequate in dealing with the realities of the classroom, are calling for a new translingual approach in the teaching of writing, a development that stems from earlier calls for engaging with language diversity in the CCCC Guideline on National Language Policy authored by Geneva Smitherman and the CCCC Language Policy Committee.

### **Why We Should Promote Language Diversity in FYC Programs**

In light of these demographic changes that are already apparent in many classrooms, Arnetha E. Ball and Ted Lardner (2005) are right in their assessment of large-scale writing programs. They write in the preface to *African American Literacies Unleashed* that teachers teach to the mainstream writers, the middle of the class, and those students in the margins

disappear. Ball and Lardner refer specifically to the African American students whose “underachievement” goes “unnoted”:

. . . we experience writing programs such as one at a modestly sized Midwestern urban university, where fifty-five to sixty sections of first-year writing courses will be offered each semester. Almost all sections will be staffed by part-time or adjunct faculty, most of whom work hard in contrast to the poor rate of compensation they receive. Little incentive is afforded them by their institution to pursue professional development opportunities. Program review in their home institution is a maintenance task routinely deferred. On average, in the sections of first-year writing offered each term, 12 percent of the students will be African Americans. For many of these students, their stances and primary discourses position them at difficult angles with the presumptions of the teachers charged with the task of initiating them into the academic discourse community. In general, the underachievement of many of these African American students will remain unnoted by a critical mass of teachers or writing program directors. The majority of students do all right, so why should teachers change—for to reach these students changes in teachers’ lives and teaching practices (and in writing programs, as well) would have to be significantly noted, sufficiently prioritized (xix-xx).

And what happens when we add the 12 percent (currently 13 percent) African American population to the growing Latino/a students, the Native Americans, the white rural and working-class students, and the growing numbers of international students? As many of us are already experiencing, the importance of addressing linguistic differences cannot be any clearer, and the importance of educating traditional mainstream students about a very different world they will be entering is equally compelling. Ball and Lardner call on writing program administrators (WPAs)

to be leaders in their programs and agents of change—for change in working conditions as well as in pedagogy.

We're reminded of Donald Wolff's (2005) reflection on the progress his non-standard speaking student had made in academic discourse. Wolff tells how he kept this student's nose to the grindstone and, in the end, produced an academic writer. A successful writer. He felt that he had succeeded—that is, until he saw the student some time later and she said she appreciated the grade but hoped she didn't have to write ever again.

On the one hand I felt that I had succeeded because she not only produced good work but had a clear understanding of what she had to do to produce it. On the other hand, I felt that I had failed, for my emphasis on academic prose had killed whatever joy she might have had in writing by making it grunt work. I take this as an emblem for a very real danger in stressing academic writing and its concomitant correctness. (97-98)

It is time to change this classroom dynamic which is so common in today's college writing classroom and to address the needs of diverse students by ensuring that our pedagogy is not only successful in inspiring lifelong writers but also robust and challenging.

Clearly, because our classroom population is changing, our pedagogy should also change to reflect the needs *and the competencies* of our students. The underlying values of policies such as *Students' Right* include the understanding that the diverse linguistic experiences and abilities students bring with them to writing courses represent a strength, a resource, not a deficit or a barrier. Teachers and researchers in our field have been working to demonstrate this truth, showing that we can build on student awareness of language varieties in their homes and communities to become part of rhetorical decision-making and competence.

So we can ask (as others will ask of us), what evidence supports pedagogies that build on students' diverse language experiences and help all students understand the nature and value of multilingualism? At the more general level of multicultural pedagogy, a classic set of research from the 1990s and early 2000s, research that is still being cited by contemporary authors, suggests that experiences with others of diverse backgrounds does have a positive effect on how college students perceive those who are different from them. For example, Donna Henderson-King and Audra Kaleta's (2000: 151) analysis of student experiences in race and ethnicity courses at the University of Michigan showed that students who took courses with content focused on race and ethnicity concerns increased their favorable responses to diverse others more so than those who did not take the courses (151). They also found that failing to be part of a campus group that included diverse others tended as well to lead to an erosion of positive feeling toward diverse others (153). Mitchell Chang (2002) reports a similar result in a study of student response to curricula focusing on race and ethnicity at colleges in the Northeast. Once again, he found that students showed gains in favorable attitudes towards others of diverse background because of experiences in courses focusing on diversity and how to interact with diverse others. Of particular interest is his conclusion that learning about one form of difference in society can extend to other differences: "Learning to think more broadly about human differences through diversity-related courses . . . may thus broaden students' understanding in ways that extend beyond the particular focus of the course" (36). While it is clear that involving students in discussions of difference sensitizes them to diversity and the value of tolerance, differences in language are often excluded in diversity training and in multicultural education, to the detriment of our students.

An understanding of language difference—of home and community languages—is intimately connected to writing development for non-mainstream and mainstream students alike. The ability to access the language varieties that students know and use every day is a resource they have been conditioned to forget when they enter the classroom, for “the long-standing aim of traditional writing instruction has been to reduce ‘interference,’ excising what appears to show difference” (Horner et al. 2011: 303). This perceived interference is in fact the student’s linguistic competence, the bedrock of new learning and development, that research has continually supported as critical to new learning. James Britton et al. (1975) made the language of expressive writing—“the way we relate to each other in speech and the way we frame the first drafts of new ideas”—the core of their theory of writing development; they knew, from their extensive studies of writing in British schools, that students’ ability to draw on their own language resources is critical to their development: “...it must be true that until a [student] does write expressively he is failing to feed into the writing process the fullness of his linguistic resources—the knowledge of words and structures he has built up in speech—and that it will take him longer to arrive at the point where writing can serve a range of his purposes as broad and diverse as the purposes for which he uses speech” (82). The research, theory, and practice of our field in recent decades suggests strongly that when students are taught to value and access the resources of their language, they are better prepared to extend their abilities as writers and to think rhetorically about their choices.

A compelling historical case is the Language Curriculum Project at SUNY during the time that “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” was being discussed in committee in the early 70s. This curriculum project, supported by a Ford Foundation Grant, reported significant gains in student learning and writing growth, leading team leaders to expand the program, train

new teachers, and even produce a textbook that was under review by publishers. This large-scale curriculum project was on the verge of a major breakthrough in pedagogy, at a time when teachers were calling for practical applications of sociolinguistic research. But a shift toward political conservatism eventually took its toll on the program, causing the Ford Foundation to pull its funding and publishers to redirect their attention to more favorable prospects (Wible 2006). This damaging conflict between composition praxis and larger institutional and political contexts needs to be kept in mind and will be addressed further below; such potential for resistance by stakeholders is one reason we argue for a multi-level approach.

Reports of similar teaching approaches in the decades since the SUNY project also demonstrate their positive impact on student learning. Maria Reyes de la Luz and John J. Halcon (2000) offer unique insiders' perspectives on the cultural and linguistic strengths of Latino/a students, providing rich ethnographic data to show that nurturing ethnic and cultural identities is the most effective pedagogy for critical literacy and success in educational settings. Elaine Richardson (2003) reports on the effects of an African American composition curriculum on the student-participants' writing development, showing how knowledge about the language and literacy of African Americans in the teaching of academic writing improves the literacy experiences of college students. Still another example is Min-Zhan Lu's (1994) approach of having first-semester composition students look at various examples of attempts by fellow students to write with academic authority, but in unconventional ways (at least from the standpoint of edited American English). Lu argues that the value of the pedagogy is its ability to highlight the linguistic choices students make, even if those choices involve using edited American English (455). In other words, she sees the benefit in raising consciousness among her students as they make choices as language users. Finally, Ryuko Kubota and Lori Ward (2000:

83-85) describe a curriculum in which student awareness of World English (WE) is raised over a seven-class sequence during which the students hear audio tapes, watch video tapes, interact with WE speakers, learn the history of English spread around the world, and reflect upon the value of learning about the different ways people use English.

These approaches represent varieties of English in the classroom “not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner et al. 2011: 299). A significant body of research on language varieties and culturally relevant pedagogy has moved the field of rhetoric and composition to the verge of a paradigm shift in its thinking about language and instruction, and the challenge for writing professionals and administrators is to educate and create the culture for sustainable change in writing programs.

### **Creating Awareness of Language Diversity in the FYC Program and Beyond**

The culture that we are creating within our writing program involves work at multiple levels, and we believe this approach is effective in preparing our faculty to teach in language-rich environments. Following a brief description of our institutional context, we present our multi-level work and the progress we are making in identifying fissures and gaps that may lead to further changes at the systems level.

#### ***Our Institutional Context***

IUPUI is a comprehensive urban university offering degrees from multiple departments in twenty-one schools (Hansen 2017). It has an undergraduate student population of 20, 273 and serves a broad range of central Indiana students. In general, we cater to a mobile, commuter population. More recently, we have been developing a residential experience for a significant number of students, but most students reside off-campus and join the campus community



primarily to attend classes. Fifty-six percent of the student body is female, and 22 percent can be classified as part of an underrepresented minority. This means that 78 percent of our students are white, a ratio of white to minority students being roughly the same as it is for the rest of the state (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011: 18). Given the general trend in the U.S. population discussed earlier, our experience with difference on the IUPUI campus, as with the state generally, is atypical of what is being experienced elsewhere in the country; however, Indiana is experiencing an influx of new residents who bring diverse backgrounds with them. A sign of this coming change can be seen in the increase at IUPUI of Latinx students, up from 3.6% in 2010 to 7% in 2016, and multi-racial students, up from 1.6% in 2010 to 4.2% in 2016 (Hansen 2017).

Statistics are not available on the linguistic diversity of IUPUI students. Anecdotally, our Writing Program instructors report such diversity. For example, one semester Fox asked his first-semester students to write language experience narratives; he was surprised by the linguistic diversity revealed in these narratives. Students wrote about growing up with one or more parents or grandparents whose first language was not English. One student's mother and maternal relatives were Polish. Another student's maternal grandparents spoke German. One student's father was Puerto Rican, and she wrote eloquently about her history with both Spanish and English. Although we have separate sections of first-year writing for international students, increasing numbers of students in our regular sections grew up in families where English was not the home language.

### ***Using Language Varieties to Deepen First-Year Writing***

One important avenue for bringing change to a first-year writing program is through curricular revision and innovation. All three of us teach regularly in the program; in addition, Fox directs that program, and Weeden has been coordinator of the first-semester course and

more recently of the stretch version. We have brought language variety into our individual curricula and shared these ideas with each other and with colleagues, both informally and also at program workshops and in undergraduate and graduate pedagogy courses. We have used these pedagogical approaches within the existing course guidelines and outcomes. We can thus credibly present these ideas to other faculty without advocating a radical overhaul of first-year writing. Our approaches have ranged from bringing language difference into the classroom as a theme for discussion to incorporating “self-directed” writing to inviting students to try on home and academic voices in writing. Like Lu, our practices involve helping students to recognize the rhetorical choices available to them as language users.

When first incorporating language diversity into first-year writing, one time-honored approach is to have students read, discuss, and write about language topics (see Anson 2014). At one point, many faculty at our urban university had students read Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* (1982). Although Rodriguez is celebrated by some conservatives for opposing bilingual education, his arguments and reflection in the book are more nuanced than simple opposition. By telling his story of growing up in a bilingual household and describing with painful honesty the way monolingual English education upset his family and silenced his parents, Rodriguez opens the door to deeper conversations about language and education. Offering other perspectives by writers such as June Jordan (1988), Keith Gilyard (1991), Geneva Smitherman (1991; 2001 [1974]), Lee Tounouchi (2001), Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy (2002), Gloria Anzaldúa (2007), Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010), and Amy Tan (2013 [1990]) introduces students to a lively debate in our society about the role of languages and cultures and what people can do to resist language totalitarianism. With language as the course theme, students are reading and writing about language differences, language attitudes, and language and identity. Students

encounter writers whose published writing is powerful and effective but doesn't conform to edited American English. Such exposure to language difference gives our students a new perspective on what it means to read for meaning on the page, as Horner et al. (2011) identify as critical in this new age of expanding literacies and language varieties. It creates avenues for discussion of "standard English," its meaning, history, and politics, and provides our students opportunities to learn "from the gifts of 'the other'" (Wynne 2002: 207). Seeing writers employ a range of dialects and languages in highly sophisticated texts offers students diverse models that may differ from the official monolingual canon they have been exposed to.

The next and more challenging step is to invite students to do writing activities that raise their awareness of language diversity as they explore the various languages, registers, and voices they have access to as rhetoricians. Much of the early work Lovejoy (2003) described in "Practical Pedagogy for Composition"—the classroom activities, the writing exercises, the formal papers, all designed to create more awareness of language difference—evolved into a new practice he calls self-directed writing: students writing short pieces on their own topics in first-year writing and accessing the language varieties they know but rarely, if ever, use in writing. These self-directed pieces counterbalance the teacher-directed assignments while at the same time giving students greater access to their language choices in the more formal assignments (see Lovejoy 2009 for a full account of this practice). Inspired by Lovejoy's work on self-directed writing, Weeden developed a project for his first-year writing course that asks students to read an assigned course text and respond to it in two voices: one a traditional academic voice and one a more familiar "home" voice. For the home voice, students are asked to think of a relative who to them represents how people in their family talk, and write a response to the text using this voice. So that they articulate what they learn from working on this assignment, the students are also

asked to write a reflective piece focused on what it was like to write in the two voices and what they learned about language while working on the assignment.

When the students write in the voice of the academy, at least as they think of it, aspects of informality enter the essays, as when one student writes in the midst of his academic voice essay, “I have to tell you . . . .” This use of informal direct address can be seen as transferring from the writer's work with the home voice. This sort of influence also occurs in the other direction, as when a few students use the in-text citations of MLA documentation in their home-voice pieces. Many students report that writing in the academic voice took more time because they were choosing their words carefully, whereas with the home voice they could merely let their ideas “flow” (suggesting the degree to which the stream-of-consciousness organizational pattern was in fact being employed). Overall, the assignment helps the students to see the degree to which language shapes who we are, as one student said in her reflective statement—though it might be more accurate to say language shapes how others perceive us—and it also helps students begin to understand how they can control their use of language depending upon context.

These practices show ways the authors and some of our colleagues have asked students to draw upon their experiences with language to engage with readers and ideas, while still completing the "academic" requirements of first-year composition. Such curricular change by influential instructors is an important first level of change, but it must be extended to other writing program faculty through faculty development.

### ***Faculty Development, Relevant Courses, and Language Policy***

For several years now, the authors and at times some of our colleagues and graduate students have worked to integrate a greater awareness of language diversity in our writing classrooms—at first quietly behind the scenes but gradually in more visible settings with more

explicitly declared intentions. We have given conference presentations together, in various combinations, and we have authored and co-authored published articles. We have shared teaching ideas, resources, and research with each other and with program faculty attending workshops.

In our writing program, we ask faculty to attend three workshops a year. At one of those workshops, Lovejoy and Fox presented on language diversity and teaching applications. At another workshop, Fox talked about multi-genre and multi-dialectal writing, another way to invite alternate discourses into academic writing. At a recent August workshop, Tere Molinder Hogue, a senior lecturer who has been a program leader for over 25 years, presented a *pecha kucha* on language that highlighted the diverse languages our students bring with them and the tensions we face between our supposed defense of “standard English” and our deeper theoretical understanding of language diversity and change. The curriculum guidelines for our writing program, especially first-semester composition, and the new faculty orientation that Weeden has done are other ways to introduce faculty to teaching strategies that invite a variety of languages and language reflection into the course work.

Our faculty are eager to talk about new approaches to teaching writing, though some of them may initially resist the idea that home or community language has a place in an academic curriculum. Opening the curriculum in this way may not seem natural or appropriate for instructors, for many may feel that they are abdicating a responsibility to prepare students for writing in the academy and beyond. Yet the demographic information we have discussed here tells us that making this move is important because our students are bringing rich language backgrounds with them and, upon leaving college, they will be entering a linguistically diverse society that will increasingly offer more language choices and require an ability to work with

people of not only diverse *cultures* but also diverse means of expression. The dynamism developing in our culture suggests that we could do more for our students and ourselves by welcoming the range of experiences our students are going to bring with them and encounter in the classroom, the workplace, and the public sphere. To develop rhetorically adept and flexible writers requires first-year writing instructors to see their curricula as doing more than reinforcing monolingual standards of correctness. Such a change makes not lower but higher demands on students and faculty. Just as we must respect students' attitudes toward their own languages, we must respect teachers' pedagogical principles. We can, however, ask them to examine those principles and practices in light of what our profession knows about language, writing, rhetorical situations, and choices. Indeed, while some faculty may express ideologies that are counter to the values we want to see reflected in the writing curriculum, they no doubt mirror ideologies of faculty outside our program and thus enable us to plan a rhetorical agenda as we work across levels.

We do not have a Ph.D. program; our program faculty include tenure-line faculty, full-time lecturers with a range of degrees and backgrounds, adjunct faculty who range from twenty-five-year veterans to recent hires, and a few of our MA students. Workshops have been the most visible way we have shared ideas about language diversity, but we have also disseminated ideas about language and difference in other ways. For example, we teach writing pedagogy and theory courses in our M.A. program, which now includes a Certificate in Teaching Writing component (see Fox and Lovejoy 2016). Some of our part-time faculty are current or former M.A. students, and most have taken one or more courses with us; several have asked us to direct a thesis for them. In the courses we teach, language diversity always comes up, either as part of a specific reading and discussion topic, or as part of a related topic, such as teaching grammar in

context, or responding to student writing. In Lovejoy's W500 Teaching Writing: Issues and Approaches course, he assigns a book that relates to linguistic diversity, such as Ball and Lardner's *African American Englishes Unleashed* or Delpit and Dowdy's *The Skin That We Speak*. All three of us have taught the core theory and research course, which includes thinking through issues of language use and diversity through such texts as Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own" (1990) and Suresh A. Canagarajah's "The Place of World Englishes" (2006), and Fox has taught a theory and applications course, where students explore critical pedagogy and discuss their own experiences teaching in diverse urban schools. In a recent semester, two students in that course led a discussion of scholarly articles about language diversity, code switching, and code meshing and engaged the class in activities that highlighted these issues. Three students from that class began teaching in our writing program in the very next semester, so we had an opportunity to guide them into deeper exploration of language variety in the writing classroom. In a new course, *Written Englishes: Living Cultural Realities*, taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, Lovejoy invites students to interrogate the place of "standard English" in a multicultural, multilingual nation where "other" voices are now being heard in a variety of published fiction and nonfiction work. Such circulation of ideas, ideologies, and people happens often in our program and leads to awareness and new pedagogy.

While such professional collaboration in workshops, orientations, and courses continues, a major goal we have undertaken is the development of a language policy for our writing program, perhaps akin to the "Students' Right" resolution, reinforcing principles that many teachers share with pragmatic yet visionary guidelines and useful resources to encourage them in best teaching practices for a linguistically diverse society. Developing a policy is not the same

as imposing a mandate. We are developing that policy in conversation with our faculty, building on prior efforts as described above. To cite a recent example, Lovejoy guided several of his graduate students in designing a language diversity website that he and those students introduced to writing program faculty at a program-wide workshop, following up with a focused, voluntary workshop where participants could see the website explained in detail (see <http://w600writtenenglishes.wix.com/written-englishes>). Participants were invited to use the website and its varied contents in planning activities and assignments in their composition courses. The website is one way we are “changing the rhetorical context” in order to stimulate discussion and pedagogy centered on the diversity in our classrooms. The burgeoning interest within our program has led us to begin formulating a local language policy, crafted by the faculty as a professional statement informed by research and the policies within our professional organizations.

Creating a language policy for our program that honors the various policies within our professional organizations is an important step toward influencing teaching in a large-scale program. Matsuda’s (2012) recommendation that WPAs create policies on grammar teaching and grading for grammar, and his perspective on grammar proficiency as an outcome in teaching writing are relevant and useful resources for our faculty to digest. Asking teachers to consider these policies and professional perspectives in light of our first-year writing program and the changes we are seeing demographically makes teachers responsible for rethinking their own pedagogy. The language policies are broadly conceived and together raise many provocative questions for discussion: What does language difference mean? Should we encourage students to access their own language only in low-risk writing, such as prewriting and early drafts, to get their ideas on paper in the least restrictive way? How do we advise students who bring their own



language into their academic writing? How can we help them to negotiate their language choices with their readers? How do we allow the students' own language while also teaching them the language of wider communication—edited American English? What will teachers need to know about language and difference in order to teach responsibly and effectively? When teachers work through such questions and collaborate in writing a local language policy, one that we would expect our pedagogy to reflect, all of us as program faculty will take ownership of the ideas and begin to think critically about needed change.

Christine M. Tardy (2011: 652) states that an explicit language policy at the program level can “directly influence instructional practices.” Her survey of faculty about their language beliefs and values, including their awareness of language policies, is a clear indication of the urgent need to focus greater attention on preparing faculty for the language challenges that a new student population brings. When she asked her faculty how many were aware of “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” only five of fifty-nine respondents knew of the policy, and none of the five could briefly summarize the statement (650). Yet these teachers were intelligent, dedicated, effective practitioners who could speak to the language realities they were observing in the classroom and who expressed a strong interest in learning how to address language differences in their classrooms. When we surveyed our own writing program faculty some years ago, the results were similar. We suspect many writing program faculty are in this situation, knowing a fair amount about descriptive linguistics and wanting to respect their students' home languages but lacking awareness of professional policies, recent theoretical conversations, and radical yet theoretically sound teaching practices such as we discuss above. Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs have argued for a “writing about writing” pedagogy in first-year composition that requires instructors to bring or develop knowledge about the field (Downs and Wardle 2007;

Wardle and Downs 2013), and a pedagogy that respects and uses linguistic diversity is no different. While we do not have space here to address working conditions, our multi-level approach must include addressing those conditions and working for a professional, knowledgeable writing program faculty who earn and receive respect from the institution.

### ***Taking Language Difference Outside the First-Year Writing Program***

As mentioned earlier in this article, writing programs have learned how to work across their campuses so that student learning in writing courses is complemented in other courses and in student support programs such as writing centers and first-year experience programs. On our campus, the first-year experience program emphasizes themed learning communities and first-year success seminars, and our writing program instructors are deeply involved in both efforts. Lovejoy has taught in a themed learning community, using his knowledge of language and difference to engage students in critical discussions of language in school and society. Working with other team teachers, he has engaged them in discussions of language and learning, resulting in new levels of awareness and understanding on both sides. His experience of encountering resistance from other faculty is documented in Young et al. 2014. To bring more attention to language differences, he serves on a Multicultural and Inclusive Teaching Committee with other teachers in University College, and at the orientation for teachers of first-year students, he and Fox presented a session on African American language and ways to respond to students' writing. This outreach and collaboration with teachers of different disciplines, sharing ideas and knowledge, is critical to transforming teacher attitudes and opening spaces for new ideas and approaches. It is also critical to identifying points of tension and opportunities, the "fissures and gaps" that Porter alludes to, that can give our ideas more exposure and stability within the university system. Our presentations in University College have been well received and have

opened new avenues for change to take root. In a revision of the course evaluation form in University College, for example, Lovejoy is engaged in committee discussion about adding a statement concerning the degree to which the student believes his or her language is valued in the classroom.

As our writing program develops its language policy and practices, we have engaged in conversation with other key programs in our own department, including the University Writing Center, the English for Academic Purposes Program (EAPP, which works with international students), and English faculty outside writing, in literature, linguistics, creative writing, and film studies. Both the Writing Center and the EAP Program have a representative on our Writing Coordinating Committee, and Fox has been working in the Writing Center some semesters, so we have ready venues for such conversations. Many of our graduate students do a TESOL Certificate and a Certificate in Teaching Writing, and several of these students have shown great interest in our language diversity initiatives and the published literature on the subject. The Director of our EAP Program has shared articles about translingualism with Lovejoy. Here again, the multi-level approach pays off in ground-up, steady change.

Universities sponsor events that involve the community and can sometimes therefore be sites for taking the language diversity conversation beyond the classroom. A few years ago, such an event at our university offered the perfect opportunity for such wider conversation. Our English department was responsible for the annual Joseph Taylor Symposium, named after our first School of Liberal Arts dean, an African American sociologist; this event highlights urban issues with faculty, community, and national speakers. Fox was a co-convener of the department committee that planned the symposium, and drawing on a graduate student's suggestion, the work of our department's diversity committee, the pedagogy and research done throughout the

English department, and the work done in the writing program by us and our colleagues, we came up with the theme *Voices in the City: Language, Literacy, and Urban Life*. We began the morning with a panel of young community-based poets who read their performance-oriented works and thrilled the audience with their linguistic bravado and their challenges to the educational establishment. Our second session involved a panel of area teachers who incorporate linguistic diversity in their teaching of writing and language. Three of the four panelists were teacher-consultants with the Hoosier Writing Project that Fox directs, and the fourth was a recent graduate of our MA program, a young man who grew up in San Francisco speaking several varieties of English and Spanish, an experience that formed the basis of his thesis. His remarks came from that thesis, and focused on his adoption of the urban African-American dialect that he learned from his public school classmates. His integration of a personal story with linguistic theory and research provided a profound conceptual basis for the whole symposium, in a way.

The third teacher panelist is an African-American English teacher already celebrated for her student poetry readings held at an inner-city school more notorious for gang problems, failure to meet AYP, and threatened state takeover than for student accomplishment. But every spring, Nikki's students dressed up, and before their schoolmates and community members, recited their own poetry, which was then published in a booklet.

The symposium was capped off with a diversity luncheon where the keynote speaker was poet Patricia Smith. She dazzled the audience, and for those who had attended the morning sessions as well, this served as a remarkable, intensive seminar in the power of language and language varieties and the way an enlightened, informed and humane pedagogy can unleash that power in young people.

Sometimes these university events happen without our knowledge or participation. One year, along the second story connector between two of our major campus buildings, signs appeared that read “Stay in Europe,” “Spanish Only,” “English Only on Sundays and Holidays.” These signs, conceived by master’s art and design student Rogelio Gutierrez and constructed by the Latino Student Association, confronted passers-by with the attitudes that are commonly heard when Americans complain about “outsiders” who speak differently than we. The signs effectively put the shoe on the other foot, forcing students, faculty, staff, and visitors to experience discomfort, and then, we hope, begin to think about the complex issues surrounding language differences. This sort of extra-curricular experience can reinforce the curricular experiences that are needed to address a future that may echo what has been true in the past, but in even more profound ways. Writing program faculty can be alert to such potential allies across campus and in the community. Adler-Kassner (2008: 184) advocates “developing and acting on collaboratively developed messages” in her study of change strategies used by corporations and media leaders. Such collaborations are purposeful and effective in bringing about systemic change.

### **Conclusion—Realizing the Vision**

Our national population is headed toward an increasingly multi-ethnic future, one where language differences are also going to be increasingly evident. The language varieties the country has experienced over time are not disappearing; rather, they are being heightened further as changes in technology and tolerance for the differences within us grow. As these changes occur, writing programs are faced with deciding how to respond to this future. We have tried to show why a multi-level approach—involving the articulation of a language policy, support for faculty working on assignments that explore language difference, professional development

within the writing program that highlights linguistic variety, collaboration with faculty across the campus to enhance the value of helping students work with language difference, taking advantage of campus events that demonstrate the value of being citizens who explore and investigate their own language differences and the differences of others—is crucial for establishing the benefits of linguistic diversity in its many forms.

Engaging in our own programmatic efforts to recognize, value, and integrate language difference at an urban Midwestern university has solidified for us the important role composition leaders play in addressing the language needs of today's new students. For pedagogical change to take root in writing programs, writing program directors and faculty must lay the groundwork for multi-level discussions about language difference. This multi-level approach is needed to nurture and sustain growth in thinking and learning about language difference. Our small but significant steps are leading teachers and their students to explore language differences as a resource around and within them and to realize how they can use these resources to strengthen their capabilities as language users and citizens of our diverse society. We are using the potential in our writing program, in our major, and through our campus contacts to become agents for change. That change will be known by the way we lead our students to be expert in the use of language in all its varieties, and to gain the skills to make them informed and sophisticated leaders in their chosen careers, leaders who understand the choices language users make and how to work with people whose language backgrounds differ from their own. We are recognizing the ways our campus community can be a place to foster our efforts to promote awareness of language differences and the way people communicate with one another using the resources of their communities to make a difference in their lives and in the life of the society as a whole. We also recognize the need to do more. Tardy's most important contribution, in our view, is the

demonstration of how readily a faculty can reflect on their language values and how far a faculty can move when the stage is set. She found that teachers who had adopted multilingual practices did not need additional classroom time or specialized knowledge, and they were able to convey to students that “their multiple languages *are* resources that can contribute to their writing development, including their development of academic English” (2011: 656). We believe a multi-level awareness of language differences, as we propose, is essential for this sort of sustainable change.

The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” may prove an empty promise, much as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were for African-Americans, American Indians, and women in the first century of our history, if we do not take seriously the need to make on-the-ground changes to support our values. It took years of education, opposition, and advocacy before promises were realized and principles began to be articulated for the field that pointed toward the need to better address student needs. These efforts are what lead scholars such as Roemer, Shultz and Durst (1999) to see first-year writing teachers as those who continually learn about “individualizing instruction for diverse populations; negotiating difference in ‘contact zones; exploring the full range of language use for formal purposes and informal ones, workplace settings and home settings” (391). However, we have to continue with our efforts to realize the vision of our ideas. In our classrooms and in our local communities we need to utilize the principles and practices that honor language diversity and the universal literacy that we espouse. We have come to a point in our country’s history where heterogeneity in language is the new, remembered reality, not the new imposed norm. In classrooms, as well as our writing programs and college campus environments, the call for leadership has never been stronger. We have always been forward-thinking in our response to sociocultural issues that

impact our students and their learning, and we are positioned to break new ground in our understanding of language difference in the teaching of writing. This new ground means that not only can our students write and revise and become aware of rhetorical and stylistic choices, but they can enact through the available linguistic and rhetorical resources the sorts of sophisticated language moves that show them to be fully active in our complex, widely diverse society. Our guiding thought, if not our rallying cry, should be, to borrow the title from a session at the above-described Taylor Symposium, “Holla! We Hear You.”

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